Original Doctoral Program Goals Statement – Trevor Owens

In 750 to 1,000 words, state your ***professional plans and career objectives****. Please include your* ***personal qualities and development*** *and how they have influenced your career choice; your reasons for this particular degree in relation to your academic background, professional work experience, and career goals; and your reason for selecting your program at George Mason University.*

I am applying for admission to the Ph.D. program in Education because I want to further my career developing and evaluating the value of various information technologies for learning environments. I am particularly interested in exploring the place for open source software and tools in educational institutions and the potential of video games, interactives, and simulations for learning. My ultimate career goal is to work as a faculty member in an educational technology department at a research university, or work directing development on instructional technology projects in industry or at a public institution. A Ph.D in Education from George Mason University will go far in helping me achieve these career goals. Over the last five years my professional experiences have helped me both develop and move toward this career goal.

For the last two years I have worked on education projects for the Center for History and New Media. My work promoting and building community around the free and open source Zotero research tool has helped the projects user community expand ten fold. As that community has grown, I have grown increasingly interested in understanding how this student research tool could better integrate and reinforce best practices for research. How we could help students learn to be better researchers through the tool. I refined some of these thoughts into a paper I presented at the Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning, Educause, and the New Media Consortium's annual meeting. I am excited at the prospect of better refining this work through training in research methodologies in the Education Program.

Before coming to the Center for History and New Media I worked with faculty in the University of Wisconsin Madison's Games Learning and Society (GLS) research group planning and organizing the GLS conference. Through that work I became both excited about and familiar with research on the possibilities for games and simulations in learning environments. I presented some of the work I developed at the International History, Philosophy, and Sociology in Science Teaching Conference, the National Association for Research in Science Teaching's annual meeting and the American Association for Educational Research's annual conference. Through each of these experiences I have become a better writer and researcher, by working through doctoral coursework I hope to refine and improve those writing and research skills.

Before working with the Games Learning and Society Group I spent a year volunteering with a after school literacy program through Teach For America. I found my work helping students learn to read both deeply rewarding and

intellectually fascinating. Through my work with those students I realized that whatever the specifics of my career it would inevitably be connected to education.

My academic development has also brought me toward my career goals. I am currently working on finishing an MA in History focusing on the potential for using digital technologies in history education and research at George Mason University. I have thoroughly enjoyed the program, but it is clear to me that at this point a Ph.D in Education is the next natural step in refining my work. Throughout my masters coursework I have worked on several digital projects and while the history department does have excellent resources for working with me on those projects the types of questions I am interested in are not historical, but instead are with in the domain of educational research.

My professional and academic development reflects and has refined several of my personal qualities which will be assets in the Ph.D program. I am passionate about educational technology, innately curious about new ways of thinking, and excited about getting involved with another community at George Mason University that shares my curiosity and passion. The Ph.D program in Education is a natural fit for my interests, and I am excited to cultivate an expertise in educational research and thinking that I can bring to my work at the Center for History and New Media. As the Center for History and New Media continues to develop and define the future of the digital humanities I am confident that that mission would be well served with stronger connections to work in the field of education.

I hope that the admissions committee finds my background and personal qualities to be commiserate with the requirements of George Mason Universities Ph.D. program in Education. I am very excited at the prospect of honing my educational research skills and learning from the faculty.

In addition to the goals statement above, the Admissions Committee is interested in which and research; how these interests have been influenced by your ***prior education, research, or work experience****;* ***why you are considering a career in an academic, research, or clinical setting;*** *and any information relevant for evaluating your motivation to study and conduct research at the doctoral level. Please limit your statement to between 750 and 1,000 words.*

I am currently finishing an MA in History at George Mason University. I have thoroughly enjoyed the program, but it is clear to me that the next natural step in my career is a PhD in Education. Throughout my master's coursework, I have worked on several digital projects, and while the history department does have excellent resources for working with me on those projects the types of questions I am interested in are not historical. The work I am most excited about requires additional training that the PhD in Education can provide.

My primary area of interest is Instructional Technology. Along with that primary focus, I am also potentially interested in the role educational psychology can play in

improving instructional technology as well as the work being done in instructional technology, leadership, and policy.

I am confident that my foundation in various aspects of education and educational technology has prepared me for the PhD program. As part of my work at the Center for History and New Media here at George Mason University, I have had many opportunities to present and attend a variety of education conferences. I have presented work on open source research tools for schools at the Digital Library Federation's annual meeting, Educause, the New Media Consortium's conference, and the American Association for History and Computing Conference. I have also presented historical work on gender roles in science text books at the American Educational Research Association's Conference, the History of Science Society's annual meeting, the National Association for Research in Science Teaching conference. My experiences surrounding each of these meetings; writing papers, reviewing other scholars' work, and listening to and presenting talks, have been rewarding and enjoyable.

George Mason University's School of Education offers a compelling set of faculty, coursework, students, and resources to help me further refine my interest and skills. Earlier this semester, I had the opportunity to discuss the program with professor Kevin Clark. I find his work in designing and developing online learning environments, exploring the role of gaming and media in learning, and studying the roles learning technologies can play with underserved populations to be both exciting and inspiring. I am excited to learn more about his research and approaches through his classes. I also find Professor Bannan-Ritland's work on design-based research intriguing and look forward to learning more about her approaches.

I am confident that these faculty members in particular, and the rest of the faculty more generally, will help me refine my own research interest. At this point I am interested in three broad topics: strategies for implementing open source tools for learning at educational institutions; approaches for fostering digital literacy; and roles for games and simulations in learning

My interest in open source instructional technologies is directly connected to my work at the Center for History and New Media. As the Center's technology evangelist and community lead, my primary task is promoting, presenting and supporting Zotero, a free and open source research management tool. I am currently working on developing a series of workshops to help better equip instructional technology specialists at colleges, high schools, and research institutions with the knowledge to implement Zotero at their institutions. I would be interested in further developing this line of work: Exploring strategies and best practices for deploying open source solutions for instructional technology platforms at the enterprise level in various educational organizations.

My interest in games and learning was developed through my work with the Games Learning and Society conference and has persisted in my current position at the

Center for History and New Media. I am the primary author of the Playing History project grant proposal, currently under consideration for funding from the MacArthur foundation. The project's goal is to develop a collaborative directory of historical games, simulations, and interactive. This directory would allow educators to find content specific, age appropriate, historical games while providing a space for teachers, students, and historians to review them, post relevant lesson plans, and link related historical documents.

My interest in digital literacy grows out of my own acquisition of digital skills. For all the talk of read/write culture and how digital media has blurred the lines between producer and consumer, most conversations about digital literacy do not seem to focus on learning to write code. In my experience these conversations happen, almost exclusively, about tools that use graphical interfaces for content creation. Through anecdotal personal experience it seems that many people don't think they have it in them to work with code. I have seen people who are masters at manipulating things in complicated programs with graphical interfaces, individuals that can do amazing things in Final Cut, and people who have no trouble troubleshooting issues that arise with their operating systems, but "power down" when anything from HTML to C++ is mentioned. I frequently hear, "I can't do that", "I'm not a coder" or similar statements rooted in identity, affinity, and self-efficacy. To really break down these barriers and get more people to a deeper level of digital literacy, I think we need to know more about where that fear comes from and start developing strategies for overcoming it.

My previous experiences and skills coupled with my interests make George Mason University's PhD program in Education a perfect fit. I hope that you agree.