



## How People Learn Alumni Profiles **Matt Weber**

**MATT WEBER:** So my name is Matt Weber. I graduated from the Ed School in 2011. My current role is still at the Ed School.

I never left. I'm the Director of Digital Communications Strategy here, and I also serve as a preceptor on the academic side of the house where I run various storytelling and public narrative digital workshops throughout the year. And I am beyond happy to be talking to you all about the Ed School, a place that is near and dear to my heart, an intellectual home of sorts.

Do you know when I tell people I work in education, it's interesting, because I do. I work in higher education, but I do work that supports education, but it's very much in the communications marketing and digital side of things. So as someone who works in communications and marketing office, I spend my days thinking about best strategies of sharing all of the good work that happens at the Graduate School of Education through all the platforms that we own. So through our social media channels, email marketing, web sites, and then empowering other people across the school to get that information out there as well.

I'm also on the production side so I oversee the video production at the Ed School and making sure that the stories we're telling are compelling and in line with the investment that goes into making videos. I also host a podcast here where I essentially talk to people who come through the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I've interviewed everyone from Oprah to Elmo and just asked them all sorts of fun things about why they are here, what's important about education, and then I get to edit that and share that out through iTunes and all the podcast apps out there. That's been going on for about seven years.

I would say that like what drew me to the Ed School was this notion of wanting to be a good storyteller and wanting to have this story serve a greater purpose. When I was applying to the Ed School, I had only applied to the Ed School, because I had one goal, which was to go to the Ed School and to learn everything I could about Sesame Workshop, Sesame Street, and get a job after a year at the Ed School. I wanted, literally, someone at the Ed School to tell me how to get, how to get to Sesame Street, because I wanted a job there.

And the interesting thing was is I loved what Public Broadcasting with Sesame Workshop does, which is it takes this entertainment side of things, and it takes this creativity, and it merges it with this pedagogical framework. And I've always been impressed with their ability to do that, and do that so well for so many years. And when I found out that the Ed School had a strong partnership with Sesame Workshop, and Sesame Workshop was partially founded with Jerry Lesser, who many, many years ago was an Ed School professor here, this was the place I wanted



to go to.

And when I found out as I came to the school and realized that there are great stories to tell, told by Muppets in New York City. But there are fantastic stories also of the people I met at the Ed School, of my colleagues, of my cohort mates, of the faculty research. And I thought well, if there is a role here where I could tell the stories of the school that I was really, really starting to love as a student, I would happily do that.

And wonder of wonders, a job opportunity opened up, the first of its kind at Harvard, in 2010 called New Enhanced Social Media Officer. And it was essentially tasked to tell one video story a week and to figure out how to get that video story out to as many people. So the New Media Officer was the person who made it, the new media me. And the social media officer, again, in that same role, was the person who shared it through all of these sort of burgeoning social media channels. And my role in my career here has sort of blossomed from that main notion of telling good stories and trying to get them out to people.

You know, I think a lot of things are learned in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Outside of the classroom, certainly, how to work in teams. You sort of get to a certain point where maybe senior year of college you're doing a lot of individualized work.

You're writing your thesis, or you're writing things on yourself. And the project based learning at the Ed School was a huge part of it. I remember a lot of my classes, especially in the technology innovation education program, were project based. And you really learn how to work well with people and how to make sure everyone is sharing their gifts and everything can kind of be managed and put forward in a good way.

I also learned that there are broader lessons to be learned from just being a student at Harvard. And I think that there are moments during orientation where people will say, oh, you know, you're at Harvard. That comes with this big, big burden or this great responsibility, and this and that.

And I think some people, you know especially if they do the master's program in one year, they don't often take advantage of all of the Harvard resources, but also all the leverage that a Harvard email account or a Harvard status as a student can offer them. And I think it took me a while to learn that people would respond to my email, or an idea would get more consideration for funding, or something like that, because I was a Harvard student. And that was not something I earned.

I was accepted here for sure. But it was something that is sort of given to you, and I don't think a lot of people realize its impact and its power until possibly much later on when they maybe have their degree and their LinkedIn resume that says Harvard grad. But there's a lot that still can be done in the classroom, outside the classroom, just by harnessing the power of this brand that's over almost 400 years old.



Humility is a big piece of it. I learned a lot of people come into the Ed School, and a lot of them typically are at the top of their game or whatever. And you come into space and everyone is equally or far more impressive than you.

And they're all doing really cool stuff. There was a guy my cohort who was like the Bill Nye for history on a public television channel. And there were all these people who had done like major, major things. And people were coming from outside of the education space and wanting to transition into education.

Everyone was coming from different walks of life. And it kind of allowed this humility in terms of both what you thought of yourself and what you think of others. And it gives this good sense of hey, everyone here is looking to serve a mission and a purpose, and they're all doing good.

Most people don't come to the Ed School with this goal of going out and trying to make a ton of money. I will say this much to people watching this, you still can make some decent amount of money in education. It's not like it's this death sentence that you work in ed, and you're going to be poor the rest of your life.

I have many friends that do well in education. I think that's good to know. But I learned perspective thinking, humility, and probably this deep sense of cooperative learning. This sense that we are all in our cohort.

And even in the group of the 600-plus masters students each year, we're all doing good stuff. We're serving a broader mission. And that really enriches the work. It enriches the classwork.

It enriches the day to day going to a forum, listening to a speech, doing a study group, and making it all seem to connect and all really worthwhile to something bigger so that when you do go to bed at night you have this-- I've always had that sense of satisfaction that I'm helping the world or doing good.

The banners across campus say learn to change the world. That's actually true. I'm still learning to do that. And it's a good feeling way down deep.

My favorite course, I think was I took with Bob Kegan, Adult Development Theory. That really just transcended all of the things that I do. But just this notion of adult learning, and how we as adults don't stop learning once school stops, and how we can have different opportunities to grow individually and how that affects ourselves in society and in our workplace.

That was really mind boggling. It was a psychology course but connected to education. But it threaded through career development. And it made all of my other classes make a lot of sense.

And that's still something I use today when I am interacting with other adults who are coming



from different points of view and different understanding of things. That class was really wonderful. And it was a different type of class. It was a lecture based class with a section, of course.

But I enjoyed coming each week to listen to Bob Kegan perform. He gave a great lecture. And he was a master lecturer. And then we talked about it in our section, and that was 10 people around a seminar table, which was a different way to process those learnings.

But additionally, I took a good class with Chris Didi, which allowed us to look at how does video and how do emerging technologies teach better? So you can focus on smart boards. You can focus on coding. And for me, my background was in video.

And a group of four or five TIE students got together, and we made a video that was used as a pilot idea from the National Science Foundation Grant. And it was really neat, because it's video, which to me was like filmmaking, was equal placement like a paper. And all of a sudden, a 30-page paper, which to me is work, was no longer needed because I was making a 20-minute documentary, which was wonderful. And this class afforded me this creative way to share learning through a pretty research-heavy video that was a lot of fun to make, too.

So in my day to day work, everything that I'm sharing out is a form of micro-learning or small-dose kernel based learning. A tweet, in many ways, is a 140 to 280 character little mini lesson that comes with an accompanying link. A video in the same way.

And it's important for me as the server of the learning to know who the audience is and the different types of learning styles of the audience. So we try and meet as many people where they're at as possible. Some people are not visual learners. Some people want that deep dive. So we will provide small doses and more deeper dives of that learning.

It's also we have our learning evolved, and it's informed. When I started making videos almost 10 years ago, the expectation was that I would deliver a four to five minute video once a week, and that would be a form that people learned about the school. They would learn through that video.

And then if you actually dig into the YouTube data, and you see how often people are watching the four and five minute total video, you realize that only 10% of the people finished the video. And most stopped listening or watching at 45 to 50 seconds. So we're learning that people are learning from our video only in the first minute.

So we've adjusted and evolved our video to be more frequent but a lot shorter. So instead of one four-minute video a week, maybe we'll try and shoot for a couple one-minute videos a week, and then focusing on where the opportunities are. Like Facebook Live is really popular right now. So that doesn't involve a whole lot of production time, because it's live. You don't have to edit anything.

But those are more important and probable to be watched by people than putting in 30 hours in a video. So it's in that sense knowing where people are at and how they are being served the information. And it's up to us to make sure that we're adapting to them as a communications and marketing office, knowing that tastes always evolve. And we have so many different stakeholders.

We're looking for donors and alumni in their 70s and 80s to watch this. And we're looking for prospective students at age 22 to watch this. So how do you put stuff out there that serves a 22-year-old and a 75-year-old? There isn't this perfect form of communication, so you've got to just try a bunch of different types.

There are moments when you feel like you are-- Like in K-12 school, I didn't have much choice in what I learned and how I learned. There was a track that I was on that would get me to college. Then I got to college, and I didn't pick a major until my end of my sophomore year.

So I felt like I had this great buffet to choose. So I had a lot more choice. And I really enjoyed that choice. Then you graduate from college, and you can pick any graduate school you want in the entire world, and study whatever it is that you want.

Or don't even go to graduate school. Just do whatever you want to do. And in many ways, the freedom of how I learned has become so much more diverse and eclectic over the years that it has allowed me this evolving vision of how I learn and where I learn and when I learn.

And I always have to make sure that I know I am learning even if it isn't in that traditional sense of how I experienced learning in the past. And I think other people should know that learning can take place not just in professional development, not just in web videos or Khan Academy stuff, or Lynda.com, or whatever. Learning can happen even in this moment right now as I'm reflecting on learning.

And this is part of an evolving sense of who we are as adult learners, not in a classroom environment, not worrying about a grade. Naomi, I don't know. Do I get an A or B based on this answer? I don't care. Because I'm just focused on learning, and I'm just focused on what it is that we can do to improve the world and improve ourselves for the betterment of society, which I think is at the core of why learn.

I didn't have a strong curricular pedagogical education theory background. I was an American studies and film major. I didn't really touch on, like, I never was metacognitive in the sense that I was thinking about thinking or thinking about learning.

So that's what opened me up to that. I didn't take many courses. I did take intro to education policy just so that I knew what is this field, and what are people trying to do, learning about charters, and learning about the different forms of tech in the classroom. And obviously,



personalized learning is something that's coming up a lot, including our own conversation right now, which is embedded in that notion.

As a parent, too, I'm really hypersensitive to learning. The Montessori model, the Waldorf model, home schooling choices, good districts with better high schools than other districts, and therefore, do you have to move? So I wasn't thinking about any of this stuff until I came to the Ed School and until I had a child. And it just opened up my mind to this deeper notion that there's a lot there. And until it was exposed to me, I really didn't know how deep it went and also how much decision making is involved in your own learning, but also more importantly right now, in deciding the learning of the person who's most important to me in the world, which is my daughter.

Learning is at the heart of what I do because if I don't factor in learning to my work, then I am being tone deaf in the actual nature of my work. And I mentioned this in the sense of I need to learn to better serve the people that I'm sharing content with and creating content with. And if I am not learning to do that, then there's a good chance that there's a lot of good work that happens that is not served to the right people or served in the right way, and therefore, it's creating a bunch of stuff and not letting anyone get there.

The metaphor I always love to use is so much effort sometimes goes into the creation of the museum, and the sourcing of the artwork, and making sure that it's beautiful, but not always so much effort into how to get to the museum. The roads, the directions, the public transportation. So I'm very much focused on making sure that we're putting together really good art, but that we're also getting people to see it, too.

I would say that I hope that I am able to disrupt a norm for them. I'm hoping that it's not just a very status quo, pro forma way in which that we as an education school share our content or even me in the classroom as a preceptor talking to many of the students who I will coach or mentor, making sure that they don't think that what they're doing is just fine. And, awesome job. That there is this sense of constructivism and that there is this opportunity for growth through good feedback, feedback shared in a positive way.

That will allow people to grow and evolve. Sometimes the worst thing that can happen is you go into any feedback session, and that's either in a workplace for a review, or even getting a paper back, and just having it say A, good job. And then you go, OK. It seems like what I'm doing is perfect.

And I should just keep doing it. Or you get a 10 out of 10 on your review at work. Where do you go from there? Do you just plateau?

You just have to be intrinsically motivated. I think it's really important for my role at the Ed School as the Director of Digital Strategy and also as a preceptor to make sure that no one ever feels like they've reached the summit and that they just hang out there. I think we're not



helping learners unless we're telling them, well, you know what?

On that summit is a helicopter, and we're going to bring you to the higher summit. Or we're going to go off into space and figure out how to get to Mars. To me that keeps things moving, definitely from a core learning perspective.

Well, taking this course is a good start. I mean, I always love that summer learning and learning before, say like, September 1, or whatever, is really important for understanding the culture and understanding the work and the ideas of the Ed School, getting to know some of the people here. Studying through whatever platform is available. I would say most master's students would say, oh, time goes by so quickly.

First semester you have all of the energy. And you have all the idealism, and you're excited. Second semester, things get really real, because you're worried about jobs, and you're worried about benchmarking against people. And there's more pressure.

So I would say if there's a way to equalize those two years, those two semesters, so that first semester is fun and great, but it's also serious. But then second semester can be serious but also still fun and great. Not just talking on graduation day.

There's a way to make that work and to find all the cracks where all this fun stuff and all of this really deep opportunities happen. Like j-term and j-term at the Ed School. When I was here versus what it is now is unbelievable in terms of the richness of opportunities.

So j-term, spring break study trips. I went to Silicon Valley. I went to New York on those trips. So making sure that you do get rest, that self-care is important, but that there are chances during all these non quote unquote "fall semester, spring semester options" that are super amazing, that you just have to look out for.

And I'm not even talking at the Ed School. Harvard and beyond there are just all these opportunities. And guess what, if they don't exist, don't forget you can just create it. And there's a good chance that you'll have other like-minded people at the school, or not like-minded people who will want to collaborate with you and who will want to help put those ideas to the front and make them happen.