

## **Masters of Foreign Language Teaching Program: Reflective Essay**

My previous teaching experiences in a variety of local school districts have allowed me to gain valuable skills that have prepared me to be an effective educator. However, I found myself constantly looking for ways to improve my teaching skills and find innovative lessons to continually engage my students. I did not feel as though my learning was done so to speak. Coming to this realization, I began searching for programs to further my education and earn my master's degree.

I am very fortunate to have found the Masters of Foreign Language Teaching (MAFLT) Program at Michigan State University. Looking to pursue an advanced degree in teaching, I had an abundance of options open to me, yet none were as content specific as this one. After completing the program in sixteen months, I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing an institution. I have truly developed professionally and academically, as well as gained an immense amount of resources to apply every day in the classroom.

I will admit that I was apprehensive to completing a degree entirely online since I know myself to be a hands-on, visual and classroom learner. To my surprise, I think I actually thrived in this environment and I attribute it to not only my dedication to academics, but mostly to how the program is designed and implemented. All of the instructors that I worked with in the past year and a half have been extremely helpful and accommodating. Not to mention, we are fortunate enough to have such advanced technology in this day and age that I was able to meet virtually with professors and even collaborate with fellow students who lived across the country. I am impressed at how I was able to network professionally with so many other colleagues in the world language field. I have built relationships with some of my classmates and we are constantly in contact collaborating. I have added professional references to my resume, and I have made contacts in the Michigan World Language Association. I would have never expected this outcome from completing an online degree, and I am glad that the program has exceeded my expectations.

I thoroughly enjoyed the diverse types of classes offered through this program. When I first enrolled, I was a curious that some of the courses might be a repeat of my undergraduate degree. Thankfully, my worries quickly subsided. As I reflect on my undergraduate degree, I had very strong education professors and student teaching experiences. However what was so impressive about the MAFLT program is that they took topics that we may have only briefly explored and investigated in my undergraduate courses, expanded on them and devoted entire courses to them at the graduate level. For instance, in my undergraduate degree I was only briefly exposed to the topic of second language acquisition (SLA) and literacy in the target language. Now, after completing the MAFLT Program, I have co-written SLA research articles and created lesson plans focusing on building literacy skills in the target language. It is clear that these courses have taught me valuable new knowledge that I can use in my current teaching career.

I found it interesting how often throughout my career and education that my teaching philosophy has continued to evolve. Each time I have written the document, I have thought to myself that I am content with my beliefs as they are well researched, and I did not anticipate changing it again. While the modifications to my philosophy were by no means drastic, I am happy that all courses throughout the MAFLT Program have contributed to shaping and evolving my beliefs. For example, before I began my graduate studies, I had believed that culture and technology should be incorporated in the world language classroom. Now that I have taken the MAFLT courses on culture and technology, I was able to expand on those thoughts in order to explain why they should be integrated and exactly what kind of a role each of them have in the classroom.

My favorite course in the program was Administration and Program Development in which we learned how to pursue leadership roles in our district and how to create and manage Language Programs in public school districts. I enjoyed this course because I have aspirations of becoming a department chairperson and later taking on the role of curriculum director of world languages. This was a very practical class to take because it outlined the process for how I will advance my own career, and it also pushed me to put my own ideas about the future of world language programs on paper. All materials that I created in the class as well as the resources we studied will give me an edge when competing against other candidates for these types of leadership positions.

While I have gained an immense amount of knowledge on current pedagogy and educational theory in the field of world language, I am most pleased with how I have developed as a professional. Each course has provided me with tools and insights to share with my colleagues in my district, and I have even been asked to run professional development seminars training my fellow teachers. All of this is extremely valuable to me because while I love teaching Spanish in the classroom, I have ambitious plans to advance my career. By completing this program, I have opened the door to many other opportunities in the field of world language teaching.

Overall, I am very pleased with my experience in the MAFLT Program. Looking back I realize that I could have selected many other programs or institutions to earn my master's degree. I am thankful that I took the time to choose such a meticulously designed program to ensure that I was receiving the best education for the degree I chose to pursue. I would strongly advise any professional in the field who is looking to advance their career that they enroll in the MAFLT Program.