

## Course Reflection and Personal Philosophy

By: Crystal Hooper

At the beginning of this course, I believed public libraries were where I'd have the most to contribute to the library information science field. I have worked for a county library system, as a front-line worker in circulation and in administration. As this professional path course winds down, I'm finding a continued interest to stay in public libraries but have a growing interest in special libraries.

The expectations I had coming into the MLIS program were to learn more about how librarians work with and support different subsectors of education, medicine, law, business, IT, and in community outreach. The wide swath of opportunities that exist in various job positions gives me hope that my education will support any pursuit of employment I aim to achieve.

Having worked in public libraries, getting the MLS degree is critical to moving forward into the positions I want to hold, especially in my state, New Jersey. I have set the goal of becoming a manager or director for a public library system. I believe my work in sales, management, and libraries, with my future coursework in this degree path, will set me up to get hired in that role.

My expectations have shifted over the course of the semester, too, by learning more about special libraries, in particular, legal, medical, prisons, and corporations. I entered the program with an aloof belief that a required prerequisite to work in those sectors was to hold two master's degrees. For example, having studied something medically or legal-related to work in a hospital or law libraries. The readings were hopeful to debunk that theory, although it's beneficial to have such knowledge to better serve that library-user population. Also, the employer could require other prerequisites. Still, it pleased me when we spent adequate time in our course discussion to

expand on what medical and law libraries offer to their industries, drawing lines where the education overlaps, but focusing on how getting the correct information and servicing that population affects the outcome of service to others positively. Hearing Andrea Wright share how she was open to any experience and how that led her to becoming a voice at the table for her employer is encouraging. I feel that I, too, can explore this previously unknown area of librarianship and test myself in a new environment. Jeanie Austin's interview was terrific at painting a picture of what it's like to work in a jail or prison. The reference-by-mail program Jeanie offers is such a humanistic way to bring value and connect to the incarcerated population.

The readings were very helpful in introducing various library settings. During our first super-meet up, we focused on reference librarianship, and that is meaningful work, but not the impactful role I see myself finding joy in pursuing. I understand that importance of reference and research roles, and know it is a critical skill to possess. Ray Pun answered so eloquently in Dr. Burgess's interview, but what he's doing is not where I see myself. On that same note, two areas of librarianship no longer interesting to me are academic and school libraries. Whether in a primary or higher education environment, the dual roles of educator and curator of the collection are not intriguing specialties. Taking part in our second super-meet up with Dr. Yates confirmed my hunch that this setting doesn't fit my personality. Students are not the primary community where I can do the most good. Partnering with the teachers to expand on their lesson plans sounds fun, but continually proving my worth and justifying why my job is crucial to the students' literacy development would be stressful, leading to experience burnout. That said, the same proof of worth is a shared concern across many sectors of librarianship.

Hearing from the panelists, the incoming ALA President, Lessa Pelayo-Lozada, was very inspirational through her dedication and outreach. I'd like to serve similarly within the field to

support my peers. I have served on the New Jersey Association of Library Assistants (NJALA) conference planning committee and executive team for two years, and enjoy that sort of library citizenship. Getting more involved at the state level with the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) is a goal of mine, and eventually, entering, maybe PLA, and other groups within ALA. After we heard from Dr. Colin Rhinesmith, his explanation, defining equitable access versus access to broadband, really connected with me as an area where I could get involved.

Course conversations were encouraging to hear what classmates found insightful about the various sectors of librarianship. I found the Random House publishing event during banned books week very enjoyable because we heard what makes authors tick, their inspiration, and a bit about how the publishers select their projects. Our class reviews, delving into all things digital, whether in collections, databases, IT management, and other areas are also intriguing because they're forever developing. I'm finding that these sorts of tasks are projects I'm assigned to collaborate on at work, and they are interesting, so I look forward to taking more coursework in these areas.

On the discussion boards, building that professional toolkit as a group was informative to supplement the readings and introduce lots of views around the various week's focuses. The issues where clarification got sought around indigenous populations, privacy, furthering education, and job board resources were wonderful continued learning opportunities.

Experiences in internships are not for me. I feel my work experience, on-the-job training, and exposure amongst professionals are an equivalent. Even the areas where an internship would be most useful, such as in archiving, museums, or curation, are no longer areas of information science that I feel would fulfil me career-wise. From our scholarly reflection and many of my course peers' shared observations, these areas are highly competitive. Plus, since many are

unpaid, that is unattractive as an experience when it would add stress to my already formed career and work-life balance.

The courses I believe will best prepare me for a career in public or special libraries are LS 505 Collection Development, LS 506 Cataloging and Classification, LS 507 User Centered Information Services, LS 508 Management Theory and Practice, LS 512 Information Sources Sciences, LS 515 Advanced Information Sources and Services, LS 515 Information Ethics, LS 527 User Instruction, LS 530 Public Libraries, LS 580 Outreach to Diverse Populations, LS 583 Social Aspects of Information, and LS 590 Special Topics: Critical Information Services.

Furthering my skill set through specialized coursework will make me more marketable to employers. The assignments we completed exploring job postings, then crafting a resume and cover letter that reflect those skills listed in the ad will be extremely useful to revisit in the future. I see how any skill or learning can get integrated into a library setting, whether through customer service standards, practical approaches to posing solutions, and by promoting good organizational citizenship. It all comes down to showing how the learned skill supports the mission and needs written in the posting.

I see myself comfortably contributing to library and information science by continuing to work with the public and my peers in many meaningful ways. Running programs regularly isn't the most appealing aspect to me, though, but presenting at conferences and to various library boards is of interest. Similarly, if I head into the route of special libraries, supporting colleagues by presenting solutions to their perceived obstacles is equally appealing.

The values that are important to me as I explore this work are promoting intellectual freedom, outreach to underserved communities, embracing innovative technology, instilling privacy, and promoting equity and inclusion. The place I think I'll do the best good to support

my values is as a library administrator, where I'll get to review the feedback of all staff and stakeholders to make better decisions on policy, purchasing, and mold the future of the organization. This role can come by any plethora of means, and by remaining an advocate for lifelong learning, I'll meet my personal aim and support my workplace mission and do right for the staff.

Regardless of role and environment, respectfully advocating for the library as an institution that preserves a safe place for thought and experimentation is vital to support the mission of libraries and their communities. I'll find it worthwhile to remind colleagues who they serve, to make the organization a steward to support their populations and peers.

In conclusion, my philosophy of practice statement to guide me in the future is to encourage everybody to explore and engage with information in new ways. All environments that promote learning will lead to stronger communities, and keeping the conversations open will build understanding and respect. Continued scholarship to stay current on the trends and tribulations within the field will help me contribute solutions that promote intellectual freedom and keep libraries relevant. I look forward to the continued work.