

Introduction

Libraries have always been a safe haven for me. I received my first library card in 2003 and I've proudly kept that number, but it wasn't until I turned 18 that libraries truly became my escape.

In my undergraduate program, the University library extended their open hours to 3 am. Among the towering book stacks, I discovered a hidden gem: a long table with outlets. In this vast building, this quiet place felt like mine. Here, surrounded by books, I dove into research and truly fell in love with the process.

In 2019, I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English. Having taken a non-traditional route to graduation, I decided to become a college advisor through AmeriCorps, hoping to help students gain clarity in their college-going process. On the second-to-last month of the year-long service term, we did an Ikigai exercise: a Japanese concept that explores the intersection of passion, profession, vocation, and mission. Through the process, my Ikigai became clear: I wanted to become a Griot (a West African tradition of traveling storytellers and advisors). I loved stories, wanted to learn, and share the perspectives of those often overlooked, and I yearned to make a positive impact on the world. While the idea of being a Griot was inspiring, public performance wasn't my calling. So, I thought to myself, "okay, what does this look like for me?" I landed on librarianship. Librarians are keepers of information and access, there to help people, love stories, and libraries themselves were places I felt safe. So, I scoured the ALA website comparing MLIS programs, and I kept finding myself drawn to Dominican University.

While I didn't apply to library school until 2022, I began working at a public library beforehand. Believing that libraries are essential community centers offering exceptional service to everyone (regardless of their background), I thrived in this role. I eventually transitioned to full-time, loving the opportunity to help patrons, connect them with resources, and contribute to

collection maintenance. This experience solidified my confidence that librarianship was the right path for me.

Summer 2022 marked the exciting start of my MLIS program. It was fascinating to formally learn about the transformation of libraries from places for quiet reading to community and technology hubs, and I was extremely excited to dive deeper into librarianship and explore its many facets.

SOIS Goals and Experiences

The MLIS program offered many valuable insights, but the courses that focused on leadership, communication, and information storage and retrieval stand out as the most significant learning experiences for me.

LIS 707, a second-semester course on Leadership, Marketing, and Communication, proved to be a transformative experience for me. Dr. Dunbar's approach encouraged critical thinking and creative problem-solving; assignments were designed with "no guardrails," and this initially felt daunting, but pushed me beyond simple rubric following. This course developed my leadership skills, identified my leadership style; ignited a passion for digging deeper into issues of equity and access to information, and pushed me to be more active in my development. For example, the Individual Professional Development Plan had me assess my skills, leadership style, create a mission and vision statement, and look for opportunities for growth.

My initial goals were to grow in resource development, data assessment, and learn common technologies. This was my second semester but throughout the MLIS journey I have continued to see these themes, especially with wanting to go more into the technical/background side of librarianship now.

LIS 770, Management of Libraries and Information Centers, directly addressed my desire to advocate and market diverse library services. The course explored the complexities of library leadership,

particularly navigating situations with clashing opinions. We analyzed real-world examples of effective and ineffective leadership in these scenarios (focusing on character, practices, and approaches). This analysis not only set a standard for best practices as a community leader, but also emphasized that everyone desires quality service.

Learning to frame arguments through the lens of shared values, equipped me with a valuable tool for navigating complex library issues. For example, book bans: both sides, concerned about children and family values, see the issue differently (one as protection, the other as invasive). By focusing on a library's mission of access, I learned to frame ideas in a way that resonates with a wide range of values. This fosters empathy, builds collaboration, and ultimately allows for effective advocacy, regardless of the position.

LIS 791, Multicultural Communication, was an eye-opening exploration of communication across cultures. This theory-based course challenged me to examine my own cultural biases and understand the influence of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds on communication. We explored communication theories and cultural differences to analyze movies, cultural practices, and examine approaches for better understanding. The final project exemplified this perfectly. Initially planning to create a training tool for American librarians in Myanmar, learning of the travel advisories there forced me to pivot to safety protocols. This involved a deep dive into Myanmar's cultural practices, religious influences, and communication styles. This research experience underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and safety, as even within a single country or state, diverse backgrounds and norms exist. It's important to know who you are serving. Overall, LIS 791, with Dr. Salvatore, was a thought-provoking class that helped me improve intercultural communication and develop strategies for navigating diverse information environments.

LIS 707, 770, and 791 equipped me with invaluable communication and leadership skills that are essential to my growth as an information professional. However, it was LIS 703 (Introduction to Cataloging) and LIS 882 (Metadata for Digital Resources) that ignited a new passion: Cataloging. LIS 703 introduced me to the wonderful world of cataloging. Before this course, I had no idea about the intricate system behind organizing and retrieving information. It completely shifted my perspective, revealing cataloging as a critical skill (like applying Dublin Core standards) for ensuring information access, which directly aligns with MLIS Goal 2. Building on this foundation from LIS 703, LIS 882 provided valuable hands-on experience working with XML and data standards. Through course projects, I gained a strong understanding of how to create well-formed and structured metadata records. While I haven't had the chance to create metadata records for a digital library collection yet, my experience with XML and data standards in LIS 882 has ignited a passion for this field. It's given me a deeper understanding of information, policy, and accessibility (always keeping the end-user in mind). I'm eager to apply these newly acquired skills to contribute to building accessible and user-centered library systems and records. I already plan on creating a photo blog with its own MAP and cataloging system. This will allow me to experiment with user-friendly interfaces and metadata creation for visual information, further solidifying my understanding of user-centered accessibility in information retrieval.

LIS 750 (Information Storage and Retrieval) furthered my technical passions, introducing me to data manipulation, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and data analytics. One of my favorite projects involved using Microsoft Excel to create a university ranking system based on SEO factors, such as keyword optimization, website structure, and social media engagement. This project provided a practical example of how SEO can improve discoverability, and I was even able to use it to point a student at my current job towards undergraduate programs with the best online presence. This developing passion for data analysis aligns perfectly with my interest in back-end library operations, where I can use data to build user-friendly systems that anticipate needs and provide seamless information access.

Artifacts

The Artifact for Outcome 3a: System Analysis Design Final Report stands out as a strong artifact. This project challenged me with several new skills, particularly in process and analysis, and system design. The task of designing a complete room booking system, from concept to user interface, allowed me to develop a comprehensive understanding of the entire system lifecycle, creating contingencies for potential scenarios. Since it was a group project with someone in a different program, there was a lot of communication and effective collaboration. We both were new to the system analysis and design process as well, so the comprehensiveness of the report further proves our effort and critical thinking. This balance between technical expertise and collaborative teamwork is a key strength of the project and aligns perfectly with the demands of user-centered library system design, offering a very direct example to the outcome of "Designing a resource or tools that facilitate access to information."

Another strong artifact is the one for learning Outcome 3b: The Metadata Application Profile (MAP) and subsequent XML records for a fictitious architectural digital collection. This comprehensive project challenged me to develop a user-centric information categorization system, showcasing significant growth since I initially struggled with the MODS schema used for this project. Through effective collaboration with teammates, we were able to create a well-structured system adhering to metadata standards. This experience not only solidified my ability to collaborate effectively but also ignited a newfound passion for this meticulous process, making me interested in pursuing a career that involves similar tasks. While the MAP serves as a valuable information management tool for back-end users, every design choice prioritizes discoverability, accessibility for the end-user; it also displays my perseverance and attention to detail.

My final highlighted artifact is the social media announcement for Learning Outcome 1c. This simple social media announcement about my internship with the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) holds significant weight in demonstrating my professional growth. It signifies the

culmination of various experiences within the MLIS program, showcasing the practical application of my acquired knowledge.

The announcement not only expresses my initial interest in the library technical world but also highlights the crucial role OPLIN plays in supporting library functionality through vital behind-the-scenes work. Through this internship, I've gained valuable insights into library network infrastructure, digital resources, website management, funding landscapes, and grant processes. This comprehensive experience solidified my desire for a career focused on ensuring equitable access to information by strengthening library operations through these essential behind-the-scenes tasks. This internship truly exemplifies the application of everything I've learned in the MLIS program and serves as a marker of my professional development.

Perspective and Direction

My coursework has completely reshaped how I view libraries and information centers. While I initially recognized them as hubs for learning and community engagement, I truly underestimated the profound impact they have on ensuring equitable access to information and the level of trust people place in them. This commitment requires special dedication from library professionals.

Libraries are also at the forefront of technological advancements. They leverage data and digital resources to empower users, bridge the digital divide, and ensure everyone has a fair shot at information literacy. Librarians are no longer passive guardians of knowledge; they are active partners in research, data analysis, and knowledge creation. In this digital age, the role of a "technical griot" becomes even more crucial. Just like West African storytellers who ensured historical tales and cultural preservation, librarians and library workers (etc.) have a responsibility to ensure information systems are fair, equitable, and avoid perpetuating the dangers of a single narrative.

The shift from viewing libraries as repositories to dynamic information hubs has fueled my desire for a career in library information technology. Leveraging my analytical skills and passion for user

behavior, I see myself excelling in analyzing user search patterns and circulation data to inform user-driven collection development and optimize information services. The digital realm excites me, and as a budding Information Specialist, I envision myself curating and digitizing cultural heritage materials, developing ontologies and taxonomies, and ensuring broader access to knowledge. Across all these paths, my overarching goal remains constant: to contribute to libraries as inclusive spaces that empower individuals and communities. I am confident that the knowledge, skills, and perspectives gained through the LIS program will equip me to thrive in this dynamic field and make a meaningful impact on my community.

Conclusion

My e-portfolio is more than a collection of projects; it serves as a reflection of my skills and values as a librarian who thrives in collaborative environments. It highlights my love for learning, particularly in exploring new technologies and digital tools, and my consistent ability to exceed expectations. While showcasing technical proficiency in data analysis, information organization, and user-centered design— all instrumental for creating user-friendly and accessible library systems—my true passion lies in advocacy. My dedication to ensuring equitable access to information, regardless of background, is evident throughout my projects, such as those analyzing resource allocation and social justice concerns. This drive to bridge divides extends beyond data analysis; I possess a strong aptitude for creative problem-solving and building bridges between diverse communities. These interpersonal skills are equally crucial for fostering a more vibrant and inclusive library landscape where everyone feels welcome and empowered.