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LIS 590: DFW with IHME

Professor Helene Williams

Assignment 5: Reflection and Final Artifacts

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Overview of Host Site and Projects:

I participated in directed field work with the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), a research institute specializing in global health statistics. Within IHME, I collaborated with the Data Library Services team on two projects involving the maintenance of physical data books within their lending library.

The initial project involved evaluating the condition of over 100 deteriorating books, procuring suitable bindings to ensure their preservation, and subsequently rebinding them. For the other project, I coordinated the translation of citation information of 50 data books in various languages so that they could be added to the lending library inventory. Some of the titles I worked to preserve and add to the collection are difficult, if not impossible, to find elsewhere – rendering this work crucial to maintain health information from around the world. It's important to note that the majority of data, particularly concerning health, tends to mirror the prevailing and oppressive values of capitalist, patriarchal, cisheteronormative, settler-colonial, and Western societies. By safeguarding diverse data sources from countries like communist Poland to contemporary Indonesia, in their original languages, we bring a richness of perspectives to the collection that challenges dominant health narratives. This is crucial internationalist work towards health justice and equity that the IHME Data Library Services team is committed to, and for which I am grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute to – and intend to continue throughout my career.

Self-Evaluation and Reflection:

I initially thought that I would be able to complete my first two projects quickly. The front end work of the project came together relatively quickly. I was able to inventory the books, make my purchase requests, and contact translators within the first few weeks. However, the subsequent weeks brought a sobering realization of the project's true scope. Navigating bureaucratic financial structures and coordinating among disparate and busy health researchers asynchronously proved to be much more involved and time-intensive tasks than I had initially anticipated.

During periods of awaiting responses from various individuals, I expanded my workload by delving into processing books and updating the lending library's inventory. This experience served as a valuable lesson, emphasizing that the extent and timeframe for executing a project rarely align with initial expectations. It underscored the importance of building flexibility into project timelines to account for unforeseen complexities. Fortunately, my site supervisors understood this reality and provided reassuring feedback regarding my progress on the projects. It took some time for the reality to sink in for me that these projects were going to take much longer than expected, and would require detailed documentation so that I could keep track of the many moving pieces.

My data science, data curation, and information organization coursework proved fundamental to completing these projects. Through these projects I bolstered many crucial skills that are transferable to a wide variety of information environments. I independently and simultaneously managed projects that required coordination with a wide variety of people both within and without of a large bureaucratic organization. Balancing multiple projects autonomously while collaborating with a broad range of individuals both within and outside a large bureaucratic institution underscored the need for organizational and interpersonal prowess – foundational attributes in library and information science work.

This experience served as a reminder that my seemingly unrelated past endeavors – such as high school tutoring and public and academic library reference work – have collectively equipped me with the capabilities vital for this and various other future LIS undertakings. Though my resume may not reflect work with organizations of similar scope or purpose to that of IHME, the skills I have been building prepared me to do this work. This prospect excites to the multitude of possibilities available to me in my future endeavors.

Whatever works I do in the future, I want to ensure that I am able to continue my commitment to social justice, equity, and liberation. Doubt has often crept in about the significance of my work in the face of the complex, interwoven crises our world faces. However, as previously mentioned, my contributions in this project, no matter how modest they might have appeared, align with the collective efforts of librarians worldwide to ensure our collections mirror the diverse spectrum of human experiences. I intend to continue the work of centering the voices of people and communities who have been historically excluded from conversations such as those in public health. This directed field work has provided me with a crucial reassurance: that even the most seemingly minor actions, as long as they are executed with the care and thoughtfulness they warrant, can play a role in advancing the cause of justice and liberation. After all, if I can end this essay with a corny quote from David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, "My life amounts to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean. Yet, what is any ocean, but a multitude of drops?"