

Liz Grauel | MLIS Reflection | June 2023

My path to librarianship is a meandering one, rooted in a love of reading and community and an ongoing quest to marry my passions for learning and justice. In my first academic life I studied social economics at the undergraduate and graduate levels, with focus on gender income inequality and the political economy. After a decade working in the software industry while engaging my true passion for social justice and economic equity through unpaid community projects, I became committed to making a change and centering my energy on justice and equity work. I entered my second life as a scholar seeking a dual master's degree in Social Work and Library and Information Science, realizing quickly that I found grounding in the studies of digital and information equity, libraries as third place, and community informatics. This has shaped my approach as an MLIS student at Dominican University, where I've stepped away from social work and intentionally centered my studies in social justice through information and libraries, cobbling together an unofficial concentration of my own through enrollment in courses like Community Informatics and Critical Race Information Theory. As a human beyond the classroom I am engaged in the ongoing work of community engagement and activism, antiracism, and active allyship. As I step into my post-MLIS, second career as an academic librarian, I do so in a specialty area focused on transformation: of curriculum, of libraries and academic research, and of the creation, dissemination, and interpretation of knowledge.

My time spent in the classroom has been critical to growing my understanding of librarianship, and as valuable has been the wisdom I've developed through additional learning venues during my time at Dominican. As a student and research assistant I've focused deeply on social justice and information equity, leading me to publish several articles in scholarly and trade publications and to become deeply involved with a dynamic group of scholars and academics who work to address issues of racial, gender, and economic equity in the LIS field. These opportunities, and

this engagement with my learning community, have become the most powerful and empowering development experiences of my life. I am challenged to grow as a student, a scholar, a community member, and a practitioner. In community, my views and preconceived notions are disputed and challenged. For my community, and for myself, I've developed a personal vision statement: *My vision as a curious, passionate, and critical seeker of knowledge is to grow as an ally and activist in my community by challenging unjust and ineffective systems and disrupting barriers to information and learning*

The following pages of this essay are written to reflect upon my experience achieving the five learning goals of Dominican University's MLIS program. Moving goal by goal, I will share what I have learned, how I have grown, and the skills and understandings I have developed along the way. I will elaborate on the impact of the sampling of work provided in my e-Portfolio, spending time on those artifacts I value most. Through this essay I hope readers will take away my sincere interest, effort, and humility. While I've walked miles in my time as a student, there are still millions to go, on roads yet to be laid.

LEARNING GOAL 1

Develop a professional identity and philosophy within the library and information professions.

While there are a few artifacts that are more about skill and less about identity and philosophy in my portfolio, a great deal of my learning has shaped my progress towards this learning goal, and I am proud of having found opportunities to carry social justice and critical lenses through most of my coursework at Dominican. Among the artifacts I included as evidence of fulfilling the three outcomes associated with this learning goal is one which has been most significant in my time as a student. *Disrupting Institutional Racism in the Public Library* is an essay I wrote for the 2022 SOIS Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Essay Contest. While I am very proud and honored to

have won first prize, I value this work for what went into creating it. It embodies the early articulation of my professional identity and philosophy through the application of Critical Race Theory as a lens for understanding institutional and structural racism within LIS institutions. Beyond sharing history and perspective, it is my first step into providing recommendations as much to readers as to myself. This is a piece written relatively early into my scholarly work in this domain, and I would write parts of it differently now - a sign of growth and development - however, I stand by it and refer to it often. The themes and philosophy in this paper are the thread that pulls together many of my other portfolio items: critique, future-focus, transformation.

Another important piece of fulfilling this learning goal is showing that I can 'do it'. The poster presentation accompanying my paper in Outcome 1a, also the first-ever MLIS project in my time, is one way to prove it. Second is my Marian Library Archives Practicum. This was my first 'real' library work experience, getting me out of my academia writing comfort zone and into a work setting. While I don't expect to become an archivist, this experience confirmed my path into librarianship, and was also helpful in building the network that has led to my tenure track faculty role at University of Dayton. The combination of writing, scholarly presentation skills, and practicum experience rounded out my development of professional identity and philosophy well.

LEARNING GOAL 2

Understand the essential nature of information and its relevance to our diverse society.

Much of the work of which I am most proud is associated to this goal. The artifact for Outcome 2a labeled *Data, Information, and Power* is a reflection in which I define what I mean by data and by information, and begin to build a model of how data and information is used to create, maintain, or remove power from people. Something that I found myself writing again and again throughout my classes is that information is about people and for people. And information is not binary: the idea that rules that determine what is and is not information is deeply rooted in

coloniality and white supremacy. I could go on here, but I don't need to - many of the artifacts in this e-Portfolio can fill in the blanks.

While being a part-time student sometimes made it seem like graduation was very far away, it also had perks: almost every elective I was interested in became available over the 2.5 year period. Some of my best work came from these opportunities to dive deeper into a topic of interest. The artifact described above is one of them, and so are those I listed for Outcomes 2b and 2c. I'll start with 2b. In LIS-755 one of our major assignments was to complete a comparative country report, analyzing the information infrastructure and information policy in the U.S. and in the selected country and comparing them to one another. My project focused on Japan, and allowed me to both develop a deep understanding of information policy in both countries as well as to apply knowledge from LIS-758 (Community Informatics) to the conversation. LIS-758 is where my artifact for Outcome 2c emerged. Conducting a needs assessment and then responding with an information resource was more than just coursework - it was real community work for the place I live. The culmination of theory, activism, policy analysis, information needs assessment and resource development throughout these samples and the entirety of my time in the program demanded a deep understanding of information as a phenomenon and as an asset to society in many contexts.

LEARNING GOAL 3

Navigate, curate and create information across the spectrum of human records.

Now we're starting to double-dip. The Community Informatics website I describe as fulfilling part of Learning Goal 2 also fulfills Outcome 3a, and the Comparative Country Report fulfills 3c. But with so many artifacts to choose from, why not focus on some fresh ones here?

Like Learning Goal 1, this Learning Goal has some ‘prove it’ moments which I met with artifacts in Outcomes 3a and 3b. My artifact for 3b is pretty straightforward: my final exam from LIS-703 proving that I can (after much practice) organize, describe, and catalog information with a level of basic proficiency. Outcome 3a builds on my informatics interests. I decided to also take Health Informatics (LIS-794), where I was exposed to both policy analysis (hello Learning Goal 2) and the development of health information resources for specific communities. One such resource is a website, *Resources for Lung Cancer Patients & Caregivers*, which provides information about resources, policies, and technology relevant to patients and caregivers of patients with lung cancer. Curating this site was both an exercise that fulfills a learning outcome and one that is personal to me as a former caregiver to my mom when she was suffering from lung cancer. Again, information is about and for people.

The artifact I listed for Outcome 3c is a little bit of an oddball, but an extracurricular work I am proud of and wanted to bring in anyway. It may be a bit risky, but since other artifacts can also fulfill this outcome I decided to stay true to myself and show my take on a non-traditional evaluation of tools and resources that facilitate access to information. I was invited to write a book review of Noble & Tynes’ *The Intersectional Internet* for a special edition of *Education for Information*. It was hard. Intellectually rigorous content using a somewhat new-to-LIS lens, and on top of that, I was writing under duress as my sister had died the month it was due. Things were hard, and I have a strong emotional connection to this piece. I chose it for this outcome because the book itself demonstrates a counter-perspective and approach to how information resources and tools are evaluated, and it goes from the technology to the policy to the human level, considering how information is created, curated, navigated, and used with different tools and resources. While other artifacts I’ve mentioned can fill the ‘show me’ role, this piece helps to demonstrate how I approach the act of evaluation.

LEARNING GOAL 4

Synthesize theory and practice within a dynamic, evolving, and diverse information environment.

As a budding Frieren pädagoge (nod to my professor and co-author, Dr. Dunbar), I believe that knowledge is co-created and that I am not merely a vessel into which information was poured. Part of that is actually applying the theories and ideas to practice. I had quite a few projects to choose from to demonstrate the application of such to research and practice, and I chose my *Service Evaluation Analysis* because it shows not only that the research and analysis techniques preferred in real-world LIS settings were successfully poured into the my brain, but that I can use that knowledge to work within my profession to analyze services in a community setting - and bring others along while I do it. If I were to implement this analysis, I'd probably be extending it to include participatory methods and community (non-professional) expertise. It's addressing something that really does exist where I live, and has given me the opportunity to network and understand.

The artifacts I shared for Outcomes 4b and c were created during my final course in the program: LIS-724. I'll admit, I had approached the course with skepticism. It met my final degree requirement and was the only available option, but it was intended for school librarians and media specialists, which I am not. The class required a lot of blogging, and at first I was full of self-pity, but once I started and began to adapt the prompts to my own career, I found an incredible amount of value in the work. Everything we did in the class was about evaluating technology and how it meets the needs of the population we serve, with an eye to access and accessibility and usefulness. Both the blog and the professional web presence I share enabled me to think deeply and demonstrate the ability to transition theory and ideas to practical applications, and to create resources that are useful to other professionals. In fact, the blog will continue as I transition from student to professional this month.

LEARNING GOAL 5

Effectively communicate and collaborate to deliver, market, and advocate for library and information services.

Before and during my time at Dominican I was the head of marketing for a software company, and then the owner of my own marketing firm. I have a ton of experience from on-the-job learning, and the work I completed towards this goal has changed and strengthened the type of communicator, marketer, advocate, and leader I am becoming. Four of the five artifacts I listed for this learning goal came from LIS-707, and I would use the Marketing Plan and Strategic Communications Plans in professional marketing capacities today. These are artifacts that I would be proud to deliver to clients and that I believe can be successfully implemented as described.

There are two artifacts I'd like to comment on specifically. First is the group research question write up. I included this because it is an example of work that required professional communication to complete, and it was both challenging and an occasion for growth. My team had both logistical challenges (spread across time zones with conflicting work schedules... and the class was asynchronous) and diversity of experience, skills, and interests, so to complete our work together required flexibility, patience, and kindness. It was very stressful - for me, this work was completed in the same period of time when my sister died, and one of my teammates also suffered a family loss - but my teammates openness, professionalism, and demeanor helped me to become a better contributor.

The Individual Development Plan I provided for Outcome 5c is the second artifact of note. This was a final project for LIS-707, and has been front-of-mind as I am writing this essay as well as

throughout my job search and interviewing process. It is a constant reminder about the leader I aspire to be - and if I become that leader, it will be time for bigger aspirations.

WRAPPING UP

It was challenging to select the artifacts to include in my e-Portfolio because I am proud of all the work I've completed during my time as an MLIS student. I am proud of the work because I am proud of myself for saying yes to the pivot in my comfortable, established-career life and for walking all the way in. I took all of my time in this program seriously. I was here with intention, and my intention was to make the most of not just the time, energy, and money expended but of the relationships, expertise, and humanity my learning community shared with me. I came to change my career, and I did, but more than a job I changed me. You changed me. We changed together, and the future of our profession, our communities, and our worlds depends on us changing in the right ways. Thank you for being here with me.