Kira Hyde

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E-Portfolio

Reflection Essay for Dominican University

Masters of Library and Information Sciences Program

When I was twelve, I remember loving going to the library whenever I had the chance. We had just moved to a small village and the library was a 10-minute walk from my home. That summer my mom suggested that I volunteer at the library. I spent that summer learning how to shelve books, put together summer reading kits, help with programming and so much more. I saw that the library was not just my escape but an important part of the community. It was during this summer I realized what I wanted to be when I grew up, a librarian. At college I became one of the few freshmen to get a job working at the campus library. After college I continued working in libraries until I realized it was time to get my masters.

 I had done two archiving internships and was very passionate about archives, museums and special collections. When I started searching for a master’s program I knew I wanted one that was a Masters of Library and Information Science but also had a specialty with archiving. Dominican University has the “[Archives and Cultural Heritage Resources and Services](https://www.dom.edu/certificate-archives-and-cultural-heritage-resources-and-services)” certificate which I was very excited about. In my admission essay I even wrote about my excitement for that certificate.

 In 2020 I was accepted into the Master of Library and Information Sciences program at Dominican University. This is also when the Covid-19 pandemic began. Doing my master’s during this turbulent time helped me see that libraries are not weak and dying out. Instead, they are strong, resilient and changing to meet the community's needs. When I first started to work in libraries there was an overwhelming theme of community. Libraries are community centers and places to enrich the people that use them. With the pandemic I have seen firsthand that libraries are not book warehouses nor are they stagnant. Instead, they have shifted and grown with the times.

 This program has been invaluable in seeing so many ways how libraries are keeping up with change and how they are so community and user based. In most of my classes’ readings were current or we were asked to look at them through a current lens. This was important to me because my main goal in doing this program is to see what library theory is and how to apply it in my future career. Common themes in my classes and studies were, right to information, diversity, and community.

 So many of the classes that I took I was only mildly interested in, but I quickly found that there is so much to learn about libraries. One thing I appreciated about this program was the variety of classes offered. Students could really focus on one thing, such as digital skills and libraries. Many of the first classes I took I was happy to find taught how the skills we were learning were universal. For example, my research class had a strong emphasis on helping patrons with references. We talked about customer service skills and being attentive to patrons. We also discussed the best way to answer questions and help patrons learn research skills. Most of this was aimed at public libraries but as I took the class, I thought about how I could apply these same skills to archiving work or special collections. Even now that my focus has shifted to academic libraries, I see that those same reference skills are going to be invaluable.

 Another class I am grateful I took was the core values class. This class introduced things I believed and thought but had not fully realized were values. Working in my college library I remember learning about freedom and the right to information. It was something I knew was important, but I had not realized that it is important to flesh out values and make sure they are included in policies. In many of my classes we discussed how having policies, strategies, and goals written down is immensely important for libraries. This class taught me to identify my values and make sure they are included in library policy. Having clear policies makes them easier to enforce. One way this has proved relevant is in book banning. In class we discussed the importance of having a policy in place for challenged books. I belong to a Facebook of librarians who bring their issues to the group so they can discuss things. One recurring issue is the book banning and challenging. Libraries that struggle with these challenges are partly because they do not have a set policy in place.

 One of the other themes I noticed in many of my classes is making libraries more diverse and welcoming. My core values class was one of the first places I got to discuss these ideas. In this class and in other classes we talked about recognizing our own privilege and biases. Even though I have library experience I do not think before this program I had felt the weight that librarians have to make active efforts to support diversity. Outside of this program I have done some diversity, equity, inclusion training (DEI) and I have discovered it is more complex then I realized.

 One of the other classes I took that really left an impact on me was my collection management course. I signed up for this class because I thought it would be simple and was curious that I would learn. It was such a well-structured class. We learned about all the different things that go into creating a good collection. Things like evaluating your community and its needs, when and what you should discard, and how to examine your bias so that you are best serving your community.

 This is one of the last classes that I took. Once I took an archiving class I started to question my interest. Then I needed to take a break from the program. Once I returned my goals had shifted from an archiving specialty to just finishing my masters taking classes that interested me. When I signed up for classes my passion for libraries started to ignite. I realized that maybe I just needed to get the master’s and apply what I learned wherever I ended up.

During my collections class we did an assignment where we had to build a special collection. We got to choose the parameters and the details. I chose to make a collection for an academic library that just got a new specialty. This assignment was called *Creating a Core Collection,* and it is one of the assignments I was excited to include in this portfolio. I connected it with learning outcome 2a which states “describe various definitions and concepts of information”. For this assignment we had to create a collection within a strict budget, and we had to find reviews that justified adding the resource to our collection. This was such a fun and interesting exercise. I realized that part of my excitement came from the assignment connecting to an academic library.

Now that I was almost done with my program, I started to ask myself what do I enjoy about libraries? What can I do with my new degree? How have my plans changed? Going into my last semester I chose to take a class that is focused on academic libraries. I currently live in a college town. When I first started the program, I was very open to relocating. Now I am very happy where I live and I would prefer to work where I am. This was an important realization because once I discovered my excitement to work in academia new possibilities opened up.

I appreciate that this program has been flexible enough that I could shift my focus so late in the program. So many of my classes were great at showing how similar skills could be transferred to different library settings. Knowing how to transfer skills based on the job I have is going to make me incredibly marketable.

This portfolio was an excellent way to return to things I learned and also assignments I had worked really hard on. Some of my favorite pieces of evidence included in this paper are my “Leadership” paper, my reader advisory interview, and my “Core Collections” assignment. My leadership paper was a great way to showcase everything I learned from that first class. It helped me really figure out what I want in a future workspace and the kind of co-worker or supervisor I want to be. This paper really helped me connect with learning outcome 5c, “demonstrate leadership principles in an educational, professional, or community context.” I took what I had learned, and I had the chance to interview a librarian in the field to see how those skills translate in real circumstances.

Seeing how skills transfer from the classroom to currently working librarians is also why I connected so strongly with my reader advisory interview. For over half an hour I had a very open and honest discussion about the reader advisory skills I learned. In that interview I had the chance to network and to see what meaningful librarianship looks like. This interview was one that came to mind for learning outcome 1c, “participate in professional activities and associations, such as professional conferences and meetings, internships and practicums, and professional email discussions and social media.” Collaboration, networking, and learning with colleagues is going to be an important part of my career path. This assignment was a great merging of practicing what I learned and practicing professional development.

Another assignment I was proud of is my “Core Collection” assignment. I have mentioned that this was an important part of shifting my career to academic libraries. It was also just an incredible experience to do really through research. It fits well with learning outcome 2a, “describe various definitions and concepts of information.” When creating a collection, we no longer just look for books. When I created this collection I included books, periodicals, and databases. There is so much information and so many ways to consume it. Creating this collection helped me to see the value in looking for resources outside of books.

I had an advantage going into this program because I have worked in libraries. I have not only worked in one library but two systems plus my college library, and two archive internships. This comes to around seven different libraries. Some of the things I already valued before this program were libraries are community centers, libraries are for everyone and need to be accessible, intellectual freedom, and libraries are living entities that need to evolve to meet community needs.

As I went through this program, I saw that many of these values are held by others in this field. Taking classes I learned more about these issues and how to better articulate what I thought about these issues. It was very exciting because two major things happened while I was doing this program, the Covid 19 pandemic happened, and AI became more relevant. Both of these things were addressed in classes. We discussed how libraries need to adjust to change. I found this incredible reaffirming that as a field we are on the same page. This is one of the things I really want to bring to my future jobs. I want to be someone willing to stay on top of news and collaborate with other colleges on how to keep up with community needs.

In this program I was given the chance to learn so many new things. I also met so many incredible people. It was so useful to have a flexible program so that I could shift my focus from archives to academic libraries. I am not sure what my next step in my career is but I know that completing my masters was an important part of what comes next. I would love to work at a local academic specialized library. I currently work as a receptionist in a law office, and I am looking into potentially transferring to a law library. Another library that I am interested in is a library that specializes in the fine arts. In my undergrad I was a liberal arts major and loved studying everything that came with that. I think one of the most valuable things I learned during this program was the importance of professional development like networking and collaboration. I’m excited about where and what those connections can lead to. Overall, I am feeling confident in the things I have learned in this program and am excited to see them play out in my career.