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WLA Professional Development Award Reflection Paper

In May of 2018, I was awarded with the WLA Professional Development Award. I planned to use these funds to pay towards my tuition at SUNY Buffalo, where I am enrolled in their graduate school of education. Currently I have just completed my first semester of library and information science classes with a 3.8 GPA. I was enrolled in two online classes LIS507 Information Life Cycle, and LIS 508 Information Users and Uses. LIS 507 taught me many of the technical aspects of information science. The class introduced me to the nature of information and ways in which its structure and representation affect information retrieval. The course laid out the theoretical foundation for understanding and applying a range of concepts and techniques for both creating and using traditional, modern, and future information systems. Major knowledge organization, metadata and retrieval systems were taught to me and I was shown how they are used in a practical application setting. The course emphasized the importance of the user in system design. I was also introduced to the many roles of information preservation, information security and digital curation. We briefly touched on barriers to equity of access and retrieval resulting from cultural, linguistic, and gender biases are be examined. It was a fascinating class to say the least but very technical.

For LIS 508 Information Users and Uses, I learned about Information services and systems and how they must be designed based on information behavior. Studying about how people think about, access, evaluate, and use information. This course introduced me to that knowledge base, to prepare employees how to design and deliver systems and services that match the needs of diverse information users. Upon completion of this course, I was able to understand the information behavior of a diversity of user groups. Then apply an understanding of information behavior to professional information work, including providing support, intermediation, instruction, and design of information services, demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between information behavior theory and professional information practice, and of the ways in which theory and research inform and influence that practice. This was vital for me, as the setting I currently work in, is extremely diverse. My patrons are from all educational, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Currently I work at SUNY Westchester Community College and it has been a rich, diverse, and rewarding experience.

The reasons these classes were so rewarding for me was the information I gained and the impact it has left on me currently. Information behavior relates to my field directly in a plethora of ways. The foundation of everything I do in my Academic Library is driven by information technology and behavior. Waves of students come in on a daily basis to my library where I am currently a library technician. Aside from course reserve material, they seek guidance and information on topics assigned to them by their professors. Students from all backgrounds both cultural, economic and age begin their IB journey here. Many are overwhelmed with the

abundance of resources that is offered to them in modern day academic libraries. IB can be scary if not downright brutal for some. Particularly when the student faces a language barrier as well. I witness the frustration in the students as they are given an assignment so vague and try to work with a reference librarian. The expectation from some is that the librarian is there to do most of the assignment for you or do all of the research. Through proper IB instruction and a great reference librarian, the relationship of user and instructor can be a wonderful Information experience. When the patron/student is shown how to research properly and use scholarly sources, and disseminate information pertaining to their assignment, the student then starts to learn while practicing the art of proper research through IB. Then I am eagerly excited to participate in countless scenarios that happen every day in my building, when I become an Academic Librarian. To say that the concept of IB relates to my future career would be an understatement. IB surrounds the career of an Academic Librarian in the modern era. The resources (IB) accessed through our fingertips are endless, the choices vast, and the results are endless.

Another new concept I have learned and made an impact on me was articles I read in my LIS 507 class on Cognitive Research. It touched on several studies that highlight the differences of people and their information retrieval. Demographics affect user experiences and search results in ways I never knew. Allwood & Wang explored the fact that user ethnicity affects their attitudes toward technology. Different ethnic groups can have positive and negative feelings about computers and therefor may affect their information retrieval. Temple & Lips focused on gender differences and their comfort and confidences with technology and again differences were found between control groups. Rather than focus on these differences, I found it fascinating to know that not only cultural background or age can affect your preconceived notions on technology, and affect your information search, but your sex as well!

An article by Carol Kuhlthau's focused on information retrieval system (ISP) and the stages of it. This article opened my eyes to information seeking through the perspective of the patron, and how grueling a task it could be. It can be grueling due to the multiple steps required after that initial search. When you are assigned a research paper in high school or undergrad days, there is a sense of instant stress and anxiety. In addition, Kuhlthau touches on that issue of feeling hesitation, confusion and uncertainty. She explains the six stages of ISP from Initiation, Selection, Exploration, Formulation, Collection, and Presentation. It is completely comforting and relevant when you read these findings. When you are assigned a large project to complete by a certain date, it can be daunting. However, it is amazing and somewhat comforting to know that that experience is not unique to just me but everyone. The fact that a process that we have all experienced since High School has a theory assigned to it with structured formulated steps proves the mass occurrence of it and need to study it. She goes in detail about the reducing of uncertainty when the user eventually dives into their research and begins to tackle the project. Each stage of the ISP process is fascinating for multiple reasons but most importantly to me.

All of this is just a fraction of the theories and concepts I have learned this past Fall. However, I wanted to highlight concepts and readings that were truly memorable to me. The WLA award afforded me the opportunity to have all of these learning experiences. The award

was the first stepping-stone for me, reaffirming my decision to go back to school and pursue my Master's degree. I was honored and grateful by the WLA for choosing me. The $500 motivated me to continue the hard work and advance forward in this long journey of being a part time graduate student.