

## **Reflections on the Information Sciences**

**By Melissa Ewing, December 12, 2020**

At the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester, I started my journey to become an information professional. Like doctors and lawyers, this will be a lifelong practice that requires constant personal and professional development. I feel it is important to be mindful of where I am on that journey and analyze what I have learned so far through the filter of learning outcome number five in the Wayne State University MILS program. The required outcome asks all students to, "Articulate and advocate for the foundations of the profession and its basic values and ethics such as intellectual freedom, information access and dissemination, and apply these principles to the advancement of the profession (Wayne State University School of Information Sciences, 2020)." I have learned about the underlying values and ethics of the information profession, and thought about the philosophy behind them, through many of the assignments in my first three classes, but the one I learned the most from was the Analysis Essay I worked on in my Information Professions course (INF 6010). This is the artifact I will explore in my reflective essay, as it had the most to do with helping me progress from someone who looks for the right answer in texts, to one who thinks about what they are reading and forms more questions, such as, what is my personal philosophy of professionalism in the information sciences?

I never thought of myself as a professional and have never thought about any profession having a philosophy, that started changing during the semester. I have always associated professionalism with uncomfortable clothing, boring meetings, and having to talk to people. I never thought much about how the values and ethics I personally held connected to my job. It

was while writing the Analysis Essay in INF 6010 that I started to see what an information professional was, and to see myself in that role. In that assignment I studied the core values, ethics, and assumptions of different professional organizations to define, examine, and associate myself with them. This is where I started to see which branches of the information sciences matched the values and ethics I saw in myself. Ethics and values that I wanted others to see in me. I was able to see my values and ethics reflected in the library and archival professions. I chose to explore Access and Use, Diversity, Preservation, and Privacy.

Through studying historical articles that detailed the beginnings of the archival profession and current materials that spoke of what directions archives were moving in. I was able to start seeing myself as more than just a technical services assistant following rules. I could see myself as a cataloging archivist or a digitization specialist, not just putting in the work of the job, but shaping the policies of whatever institution I became part of. I began to understand, instead of just feel, why these values are important to me. I was able to see how much I had in common with the professionals who are already practicing in the field of information sciences. I could see some of the philosophy behind these concepts instead of just the job duties associated with them. With being able to understand these concepts, I started to see my own philosophy emerge.

While working on the analysis essay, I read *Cultural Competency: A Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Archival Profession in the United States* by Ellen Engseth. I used to think that if I could get a job in an archive I could hide away and not be bothered by the rest of the world. After reading that article I realized being a professional archivist could, and should, mean more than just providing access to materials. It meant making it possible for

marginalized persons to get better information and opportunities, not just in their communities, but in the field of information sciences. Information professionals must prove to them that their voices and skills are important. I would not have read that article if I had not been researching the archival profession deeper than my desire to hide behind a thick stack of photographs and a scanner. I now think of myself as someone who not only believes in diversity but can help bring it into the profession.

The thought and work I put into the INF 6010 Analysis Essay has made it possible for me to shape a personal philosophy of the information professions. Like Saracevic (2017), I believe that information science is “interdisciplinary in nature (p. 2218)” and every field needs the support of information science. Access to information and opportunities can change people’s lives and it is the duty of the information professional to advocate for their profession and their patrons.

My current philosophy of the information sciences is: Information professionals must continually refine their cultural and professional competency to connect with diverse voices and fields. Information professionals must support everyone, from members of the public, to researchers in lab coats, in their research and growth as professionals and individuals. Information is not passive, and its guardians must not be either. Information professionals must strive to provide a place for diverse voices to be heard and work. Information professionals must remain mindful of who we are by periodically examining our skills, core values, and ethics.

## References

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