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<div align="center">Artifacts, Impacts, and the Song of Cicadas:</div>

<div align="center">Reflecting on my MLIS Degree</div>

August 31st, 2022. On this first day at Dominican University, cicadas thrummed outside the Rebecca Crown Library. The sky was speckled with white wispy clouds, welcoming some sunlight onto my admittedly shaky hands. I held onto my freshly printed school I.D. for dear life, clenching it as tightly as a rosary, as if praying for the strength to survive my first class *and* the three years of grad school ahead of me. I second-guessed if my MLIS was the "right" choice, but I couldn't turn back with so many people so kindly believing in me. I had received an ALA scholarship, a Dominican University scholarship, and partial tuition reimbursement from my library. Without these allies, I wouldn't have been able to pursue this dream of earning my MLIS. I wouldn't have listened to the cicadas before entering the deep, soothing silence that libraries uniquely shelter. I wouldn't have sat at a desk near the window, soaking in the last of the sunlight as dusk settled into the classroom of LIS 701.

Now, as the sun sets on my time in Dominican University's MLIS program, I'll reflect on these last three years. I'll discuss the program's five learning goals, along with each goal's three learning outcomes. As we go, I'll explore the avenues of growth regarding my understanding of libraries, my professional identity, and my career moving forward.

Speaking of professional identity, the first goal goes as follows: *Develop a professional identity and philosophy within the library and information professions*. I pursued this goal in my

very first class, LIS 701, by creating a paper, poster, and presentation regarding serving transgender communities in libraries. Beyond this project, advocacy remains essential to my philosophy as an information professional. For example, I've led LGBTQ+ programming at my library, such as storytimes, book clubs, and displays. I've also faced discrimination against LGBTQ+ programs within libraries, which has both drained and strengthened my resolve to fight for LGBTQ+ inclusion. In the end, aligning my professional philosophy to my actions necessitates continuing to advocate for LGBTQ+ representation and for all diverse communities - whether in my library role, my community leadership roles, or whatever the future may hold after graduating. I can trace this advocacy work back to my artifact, to that initial presentation on serving transgender communities.

I can also trace my professional identity back to the other two learning outcomes nestled within this goal. While my paper describes the evolving nature of core values and ethics (Outcome 1a), another artifact demonstrates how a model guides practice in diverse settings (Outcome 1b). In this blog post, I discussed the model of S.A.M.R. for technology integration in libraries. Coursework in educational technology and tech leadership has been integral to my studies. I've greatly enjoyed not only learning about technology integration, but also applying it to my coursework, library position, and community leadership roles. My enthusiasm for technology has become a part of my professional identity, in addition to opening up professional opportunities. If not for learning website design in LIS 724, I wouldn't have gained the experience or the enthusiasm for revamping the Elgin Poet Laureate website. My technology leadership was a key qualification for serving as Elgin's Poet Laureate. I thank my wonderful professor Nicole Zumpano for teaching LIS 724 and LIS 768, empowering myself and other students to gain confidence and competence regarding educational technology.

I've also gained confidence in my ability to participate in professional activities, which relates to Outcome 1c. Thanks to the marvelous professor and storyteller Janice Del Negro, I gained confidence in writing professional reviews. Just like with writing poetry, writing reviews entails practice, discipline, and joy. Just like how poetry can be viewed as difficult, I'd viewed review writing as difficult prior to this course. I've since learned that I can take on the challenge of writing reviews, so long as I am open to developing the craft. In doing so, I develop my professional identity as a reviewer and as a future librarian.

Solidifying this identity has empowered me to achieve Goal 2, which goes as follows: *Understand the essential nature of information and its relevance to our diverse society*. For describing various definitions and concepts of information (Outcome 2a), I included the artifact of a blog post describing media literacy. As information professionals, media literacy is an essential form of literacy, one that we practice for our library's benefit *and* teach for our patrons' betterment. My perspective of the types of literacies that libraries can foster expanded by welcoming media literacy under that umbrella.

After exploring the impact of media literacy in Outcome 2a, I explored the impact of policies in Outcome 2b through a blog post on acceptable use policies. My enthusiasm for technology shaped my learning experiences by analyzing these policies through the lens of digital citizenship. This artifact demonstrates how my perspective on libraries has shifted through the course of the program. Prior to writing this post and taking this course, I'd viewed policies as somewhat overrated - which I know may be sacrilege to any library professional reading this essay. However, when I analyzed these policies through their power to impact each person's agency, I began to understand that policies are not overrated, but rather, understated. Policies that are written *and* carried out to genuinely help patrons can have an impact on patrons

and staff, even if that impact isn't obvious at first glance. It was humbling to learn about this impact on agency and access through my MLIS coursework.

After discussing how policies shape the pathways to information needs, I showcased a response to an information need (Outcome 2c). I created a presentation, bookmark, handout, and Wakelet collection for welcoming autistic kids and caregivers to library storytimes. I consider this project to be one of my most significant learning experiences. It gave me an opportunity to engage with my professional identity as a librarian and advocate, to engage with a diverse community, and to utilize technology to achieve this goal (filming a presentation, using Canva to create handouts, and designing an interactive Wakelet collection). In other words, it brought the best out of my passions and my desired learning outcomes.

While my presentation served as a highlight of my learning process, I consider the next artifact to be a highlight of my learning product. This artifact fulfilled Goal 3, which goes as follows: *Navigate, curate and create information across the spectrum of human records*. In order to design a resource for facilitating access to information (Outcome 3a), I designed the website and social media handbook Tech Wizards. At this point in my studies, I'd designed two websites - a professional portfolio, and a resource guide for gem enthusiasts. Designing this third website, Tech Wizards, empowered me to build on my learning by creating a website (digital resource) all about other digital resources (social media). Tech Wizards is a culmination of my growing technology skills, my growing passion for tech literacy, and my growth as a technology leader in the field of library and information science. It's also a culmination of all my research on educational technology, and I enjoyed presenting this research in the form of a website. On day one of my degree, I'd never imagined designing a website, but I slowly learned that I enjoyed

treading these unfamiliar waters. Now, I'll dive right into new technologies, even if it can still be intimidating to start swimming.

On the subject of the intimidation factor, I was also greatly intimidated by cataloging. I'd originally enrolled in cataloging during my first semester. However, I quickly realized that I'd made the mistake of enrolling in three classes while working full-time, biting off way more than I could possibly chew. Hence, I dropped cataloging, saving it for a future semester. As of today, I'm currently learning cataloging, taking this final course in my final semester. I'm glad that I strategically procrastinated LIS 703 until the bitter end, using the time between my first and last semester to develop self-efficacy, a healthy curiosity for new technology, and much healthier study habits. This growth has led to enjoying, rather than dreading, cataloging. Thanks to this growth, I've successfully utilized resources and tools to manage information (Outcome 3b). My cataloging record is my artifact for this outcome, showcasing my ability to manage information through Simple Dublin Core and MARC, as well as my ability to take on a new challenge at a time when I'm better prepared to do so.

While cataloging certainly has a learning curve, I'd say that my greatest learning curve was my Service Evaluation Plan. This plan evaluates resources or tools that manage and facilitate access to information (Outcome 3c). Specifically, this plan details evaluation methods, tools, and outcomes for Oak Park Public Library's Chat with Hal reference service. Since this Rainbow Service impacts LGBTQ+ patrons, I was thrilled to evaluate a program aligned with my professional values. My enthusiasm was put to the test by how challenging it was to create a comprehensive, actionable evaluation plan. I faced obstacles in finding research literature with similar evaluations. I faced challenges narrowing down my focus to a specific inquiry question. I crumpled up draft after draft on the bumpy path to the final plan, littering my desk with failed

attempts. However, I learned that failure is a viable path toward progress. Thanks to my professor Kara Malenfant's constructive feedback and welcoming accommodations, as well as my stubborn persistence to learn the seemingly unlearnable, I eventually completed my new-and-improved service evaluation plan. I'm particularly proud of this artifact because of the determination it took to fail, and fail again, and eventually, succeed. This learning experience further shaped my experiences in the LIS field by making me more comfortable with failure, and therefore, more comfortable taking risks.

Speaking of professional practice, I enjoyed exploring the mutual impact between my academic studies and my library position. This relationship is explored in Goal 4, which goes as follows: *Synthesize theory and practice within a dynamic, evolving, and diverse information environment*. Applying research to professional practice (Outcome 4a), I showcased my Rainbow Family Storytime plan and presentation. In LIS 720, I dived deep into the research on emergent literacy. This research empowered me to develop a storytime that fostered literacy, engagement, and play. Since my Rainbow Family Storytime celebrates LGBTQ+ stories, I enjoyed integrating my research on LGBTQ+ inclusion, as well as my research on emergent literacy. Although I'd led rainbow storytimes prior to the course, learning the research and the tools helped me develop a more successful storytime. Additionally, this artifact helped me practice my storytime presentation skills in the form of a video submission, helping me cultivate and reflect on my storytime style.

In addition to gaining comfortability in filming storytimes, I gained confidence in filming tech tutorials. In order to evaluate technology (Outcome 4b), I created a tech tutorial video for the software Beanstack. Although I'd used Beanstack plenty of times in my library position, my studies provided a lens with which to evaluate this technology. Analyzing technology as an

evaluator, rather than solely a participant, provided new insights and helped me empathize with library patrons using this technology. This project helped me further shape my identity as a technology leader by learning how to advocate. Rather than advocating for technology in and of itself, tech leadership entails advocating for the people utilizing this technology, discerning how technologies can help and/or hinder learning, engagement, and in this case, reading. I'm proud of this artifact because I enjoyed finding creative ways to make the tutorial feel less dry and more delightful. For example, I enrolled my snake G.G. in the Beanstack program 1000 Books Before Kindergarten.

I also had terrific fun filming another tech tutorial for Lote4Kids, bringing an owl plushie guest and a pair of glasses in the spirit of the Lote4Kids mascot (an owl donning glasses). To demonstrate teaching and learning principles in relation to professional practice (Outcome 4c), I demonstrated the value of Lote4Kids to readers seeking multilingual stories. This tutorial is a form of reference instruction, serving as a key pathway to teaching and learning. I also created a lesson plan, providing a structured way to develop learning goals and outcomes. By filming the rainbow family storytime, Beanstack demo, and Lote4Kids tech tutorial, I learned that I'd love a librarian position where I can make the most out of technology to facilitate access, instruction, creativity, and joy.

One of my greatest moments of joy and creativity was composing a poem celebrating my library's 150th anniversary. This poem, Infinities, serves as my artifact for Goal 5, which goes as follows: *Effectively communicate and collaborate to deliver, market, and advocate for library and information services*. By performing Infinities at a library program and promoting the value of libraries in the poem, this poem creatively applies marketing principles to promote the value of libraries (Outcome 5a). It was a wonderful, slightly nerve-wracking experience to perform this

poem in a packed library lobby. I hope to continue using poetry in my career, connecting readers with a love of libraries and stories, as well as advocating for inclusion and the freedom to read.

While poetry is a traditionally creative way to communicate, my next artifact is a traditionally professional way to communicate. To demonstrate effective professional communication to achieve common understanding (Outcome 5b), I created a Memo Report for Adlai library, creating actionable data insights to improve the library's collection and services. Just as poetry must be presented effectively to have an impact on its audience, the memo needed to present data concisely and convincingly to impact stakeholders. I enjoyed the challenge of condensing pages worth of data into a two-page report. I hope to continue exploring the role of effective communication as both a poet and library professional.

My final artifact serves as a way to communicate my impact as a library professional. Inspired by Oak Park Public Library's Impact Report, I created a 2024 Impact Report showcasing my library programs. In addition to showcasing my broader library work, my Impact Report showcases my LGBTQ+ advocacy and poetry as components of librarianship, demonstrating that I'll have greater impact in a position that empowers me to bring these values and skill sets to the table.

What kind of career awaits after I graduate? To be perfectly honest, I feel comfortable saying that I don't know the future. Although I can still feel terrified of the uncertain and the ambiguous, I'm learning to be comfortable trusting in the process of navigating unknowns. On that first day at Dominican, the cicadas' song couldn't tell me if I'd made the "right" decision. Three years later, I can say that I made a wonderful decision sticking with my MLIS degree, even when graduate school was one of the hardest challenges I've ever conquered. Now that I'm nearing the finish line, I see a new challenge on the horizon - perhaps a career as a librarian,

LGBTQ+ leader, poet, or a combination of all three. As I apply to positions inside and outside of libraries, I'm confident that my MLIS degree has cultivated the skills and the communities to succeed. Although I'm primarily applying to youth librarian, teen librarian, and community engagement librarian positions, I'm thrilled for the opportunity to cultivate community wherever I may go. All in all, it's the sacredness of community threading through my journey, whether looking back at the past or looking ahead at the future.

However uncertain the future may be, it'll be there for me.