

Image of Librarians – Elevator Speech

LIS 5020 – Walbolt

“You're studying to be a librarian? You need a Master's degree for that?!”

I have heard these questions asked so many times, and before I applied to USF's Library and Information Science program I repeatedly asked myself why did I HAVE to get a Master's degree to be a librarian. Couldn't I just learn on the job? It can't be THAT hard. As this is only my first semester working toward my Master's, I don't have all the answers but I know this to be true: it would be impossible to do an effective job as a librarian without the educational foundation necessary to have a full understanding of the library's processes and systems.

I visit my local public library at least once a week. I volunteer alphabetizing and shelving books. I research new and varied materials outside my worldview to check-out for my family so we can be exposed to lives and cultures unlike our own. This would never be enough to step into a job as a librarian and hit the ground running. I would not know about metadata, cataloging, or budgeting, for example. I could learn these things without a degree but it would be less-structured and piecemeal.

And I would not be working together with like-minded individuals who are all studying to be librarians. This collaborative environment is key to unlocking the library and information science code to understanding all things library-related. Although it is more difficult to collaborate via an online course platform, bouncing ideas off my classmates and knowing others stand with me as I struggle with balancing graduate school, my job, and my personal life has been everything.

Seeking a master's degree in library and information science has allowed me to begin to find my voice in the profession, and discern what values matter to me. What will I stand up for, and who will I stand up for when I am a librarian? I know I will make space to listen and amplify others' voices. I know that as a white woman I am what people traditionally see when they picture a librarian, and that needs to change. I know that equity for all will be a theme I will repeatedly assert. I know that I want to fight for greater public access to copyrighted works, which means submitting comments and leading action when the Copyright Act is finally revised. I know that my education of the library world will never cease, and that my acquisition of a Master's degree is the foundation upon which it stands.

Earlier this semester I had the opportunity to attend a lecture given by Jessamyn West, who spoke about libraries being social justice issues, and social justice being a library issue. Everything she said reverberated with me, but one thing in particular stood out. She asserted that as a librarian, I need to effectively represent the world around me AND my dream world. My dream world is working in a library with a community that knows all are genuinely welcome, and we engage, create, and turn ideas into action. I see some of my dream world present with my fellow Master's program students, and I cannot wait to build library havens with you and others.