

## Professional Development Statement (April 15, 2021)

For an assignment in Professor Leah Lievrouw's *Human/Computer Interaction* course, I was tasked with writing a "design manifesto/professional philosophy" – a brief statement describing the principles that inform my work as a professional, scholar, or designer. This proved harder to write than I first thought: I had never considered myself any of those things. Eventually, after thinking through the projects I had worked on over the years and distilling what I had most enjoyed about them, I came up with:

*The Unibrow Principle: where high-brow intellectual pursuits and low-brow media... meet in the middle.*

Surprisingly, this horrible pun does an accurate job describing my professional philosophy. I enjoy finding ways to make academic, dry, or obscure topics accessible to a broader audience using media types that are usually relegated to "leisure activities." Creating games, plays, and fiction that reimagine literature, history, and science, I try to spark curiosity in people to learn more about subjects they might have previously thought of as boring.

Before applying to Graduate School, I had been immersed in the world of community theatre, working in various capacities as a grant writer, stage manager, costume builder, playwriting instructor, and occasional actor. I had adapted several 19<sup>th</sup> century novels into stage plays for young actors and provided dramaturgical research for directors, allowing those involved in the production to embody an entirely different way of life. Despite my limited programming skills, I wanted to create databases that would help costumers keep track of their stock, and computer games that tell interactive versions of classic stories. Eventually, I realized

that these projects fit into a category called “Digital Humanities,” and that the MLIS program at UCLA had many courses that would teach me the skills needed to bring my ideas to fruition.

While I enjoyed learning about all aspects of librarianship, I stayed well within the Informatics track for my first year in the program. I developed a baseline understanding of the technology that underlies every aspect of information organization, and learned that the decisions made during development can have major ethical consequences. I took courses in data librarianship, which showed me that *anything* could be data if captured the right way, and helped develop a migration plan for a digital archaeology website.

When classes went virtual in the middle of March 2020, and everyone had to adapt to a new way of doing things, I felt that it was even more important to make sure I got the most out of my education. While I wasn’t able to pursue any internships during the pandemic, I took advantage of any opportunity to listen to librarians and information specialists talk about their jobs. I worked remotely for the IS Lab, keeping the job board updated and designing virtual workshops for MLIS students. I signed up for online courses in computer programming and web development to develop practical technological skills. During the summer, I attended virtual conferences held by the Digital Humanities Summer Institute and the Electronic Literature Organization, and signed up for their emailing lists to be notified of other presentations throughout the school year.

For my second year in the program, I took classes in Archival Preservation and Cataloging to round out my librarianship education; however, I was still able to integrate Digital Humanities methods into these courses. Through trial-and-error, I was able to use PowerPoint to create interactive modules that would guide my classmates through the principles of relational database design or the rise and fall of Flash Multimedia Player (although there are probably

better choices for interactive media). I also taught a workshop for the Portfolio class that walked my classmates through setting up a website through GitHub.

Being in graduate school during a pandemic has provided me with a secondary education in virtual pedagogy. After four quarters of courses taught through Zoom, I have been able to evaluate the kinds of instructional methods that are most effective for remote education. Unsurprisingly, the same methods and protocols used for in-person classes do not translate well to entirely virtual spaces; instead, finding ways to build community between students and professors, foster empathy, and encourage each other is paramount to having a decent experience. During this isolating time, it was refreshing when instructors would check in with their students at the beginning of class, adapt final projects to be completed in smaller installments over the course of a quarter, and provide alternative readings in the forms of asynchronous lectures, podcasts, and videos. Using the Zoom chat to ask less formal questions and provide levity to the class helped to overcome feelings of isolation and apathy. Since a large part of my professional goals involve creating digital educational content, these experiences are valuable to keep in mind when designing future projects.

Two years has gone by fast, and I'm not done learning. While I regret not being able to work in an on-campus library or gain internship experience, I have been meeting with recent alumni to talk about their experiences in the field and plan to conduct informational interviews with more special collections librarians and database curators to learn more about their careers. Post-graduation, I will continue to take online courses to improve my technological skills in web development and database management. I also plan on continuing to attend DHSI and ELO conferences – maybe in person someday!

I often worry that my research interests are too frivolous; after all, my design manifesto is based around a pun. But if I've learned anything over that past two years, it's that the humanities are vitally important. We could not have survived without streaming media, digital library collections, digitized archives, games, art projects, and other things that are considered to be merely entertainment. In times of high anxiety and uncertainty, we need stories and art to connect us, ease our troubles, or help us see issues from another multiple angles. As the world slowly enters its post-pandemic phase, I hope to find opportunities to make the humanities relevant to daily life – through technology, enthusiasm, and a sense of humor.