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Mark Vargas
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8 January 2009

Dear Mr. Vargas,

In fulfillment of the requirements for receiving a LIBRAS Continuing Professional Development Grant, I am writing to report on my continuing education activities this past fall and to thank you again for awarding me this very nice grant.

I completed my first semester in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) on December 14, 2008. I am delighted to report that I earned "As" in the two courses in which I was enrolled: Information Organization and Access (LIS501) and Digital Libraries: Research and Practice (LIS590DIL). Both were taken for four credits.

"Digital Libraries: Research and Practice" was a combination of practical and theoretical learning. For the first half of the semester, we were required to complete weekly lab tasks designed to gain hands-on experience with various aspects of any digital library, such as interface design issues, browse and search features, and cataloging. In the second half of the semester, we developed small, focused digital libraries in groups for a final project. We used Greenstone, an open source digital library solution developed at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Although I've had the opportunity to work with Greenstone in the past, I enjoyed the chance to reacquaint myself with the software, learning about new and upcoming features and how Greenstone might fit in with my work at Columbia College. Throughout the semester we were required to contribute, often, substantial posts that addressed both our weekly readings and pointed questions by the professor. These exercises investigated the theory behind digital libraries from the general "define a digital library" to the more specific aspects of digital libraries, such as character encoding byte orders as they pertain to digitizing and storing textual data. We were also required to complete one lengthy paper, investigating in depth the interface designs between four digital libraries. Though I had read a number of the assigned readings prior to enrolling in this course, I very much appreciated perusing those articles deemed foundational to digital librarianship, my area of interest. For that matter, the entire course is considered essential for those planning to work in the field of digital libraries.

"Information Organization and Access" (LIS501) is one of the two foundational courses in GSLIS and a core requirement for all students. Whereas the other foundational course, "Libraries, Information and Society," with its focus on the profession, professional ethics, literacy, and intellectual freedom (among other topics),

presents broad themes in library and information science (LIS), "Information Organization and Access" introduces more empirical aspects of LIS. LIS501 dealt with practical realities of organizing information, following the path of information from its creation to its dissemination in a library environment. Topics covered included cataloging principles and theories, metadata application and levels of description, and the systems employed to manage this work (the role of integrated library systems) and its dissemination (the Online Public Access Catalog). Woven throughout the semester was a focus on the end-user, the library patron. Indeed, two weeks and one assignment were devoted to exploring aspects of information seeking and information behavior among users. I found the concepts, science, variety of research methods, and depth of study about information behavior illuminating and very engaging. I look forward to future opportunities when I may investigate this area of study in greater depth. In total, there were five short writing assignments, five slightly longer writing assignments (4-6 pages) and a final group project, for which, as a group, we developed a collection complete with collection policy, mission statement, and cataloging strategy. The group project included an accompanying paper (separate from the ten writings already mentioned).

Both courses stressed (numerous) shorter assignments and group work. This was a learning experience and broke significantly with my previous graduate educational experience, in Art History, which focused on one (perhaps two) lengthy research papers per class and an accompanying formal presentation. As such, I needed an adjusted time-management strategy and to find creative solutions to group work solely through computer networks. I managed both and I look forward to next semester.

I am very grateful and I feel very privileged to have received a LIBRAS Continuing Professional Development Grant and 100% of those funds will be allocated to tuition. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Ford