

Reflective Essay

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IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

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March 7, 2026

Abstract

Now that my time at ODUGlobal is reaching an end, it is appropriate for me to reflect on how the skills I learned as a student will enhance my leadership in the workforce. Since my occupation requires interdisciplinary knowledge and applications, I focused on skills that are useful in multiple settings. My electronic portfolio displays work I am proud of, and here I will explain how I made these artifacts and why they matter to my professional development.

Introduction

While attending ODUGlobal, I have taken courses within several disciplines to prepare me for the workforce with interdisciplinary insight. My professors from the leadership, social science, law, human services, and health departments urged me to develop numerous skills that serve my leadership ability and professional judgement. In my electronic portfolio I present three skills learned from work experience and formal education that I feel are most relevant to my occupation: collection development, research, and synthesis. Each of these skills are important for my occupation as a library worker, and are most effective when combined. Since my education branched into several disciplines, I have learned to approach these skills through multiple perspectives and enhance them through related competencies. Interdisciplinary understanding allows me to problem-solve imaginatively and adapt to learning new material, as I will illustrate in this essay.

Collection Development

Collection development is a subfield of library science that focuses on the materials curated by library workers. I directed collection development for my library branch's science section partially by happenstance— I was trained by a librarian who then had to take leave for several weeks to recover from a medical procedure. In this time I served as the collection development leader for our library branch. I took this responsibility seriously and consulted our library's collection development policy, met with the leader of collection services, and watched webinars on the principles of collection development. Two of the certificates for these webinars are included in the collection development section of my portfolio, but I earned several others.

Once I was adequately educated, I began removing outdated materials and researching reputable, diverse titles on a variety of conditions to minimize lack of information for ill or

disabled patrons. Through self-directed learning, I developed professional judgement for a task above my skill level, and was permitted to continue it once my librarian returned. Education in this realm is interdisciplinary; one must understand foundations of library science, publishing, medical research, and public health to serve our patrons effectively.

I included this skill on my electronic portfolio because it is relevant to my occupation, but also because I am proud of it. When I view the list of books I recommended for public use both physically and digitally, I feel that I did my community a service, and one that may not have mattered to me if I had not suffered from lack of medical information myself. Through this process, I learned more about medical conditions I was unfamiliar with and realized that honed research skills extend beyond academia and have the potential to alter someone's life. Pairing empathy with research inspired me to value it as a humanistic skill I must continue to enhance.

Research

In the paragraphs above, I mentioned the importance of research. This is a skill I have developed over time through my interdisciplinary range of courses. For my portfolio I included three research projects that took the most work, either with the depth of the required research or the requirement to present my findings through multimedia. For each project, I independently selected a topic related to my interest in health and disability.

My first project was for my Health Literacy course. While researching the medical topic I chose, I ensured that I surveyed multiple peer-reviewed papers to note widely accepted ideas and others that required further investigation. This is a key process, because not every peer-reviewed paper is reputable. Some are outdated and rely on insufficient evidence and weak methodology. My bibliography included six resources, although there were others I scrutinized and omitted after deciding they were irrelevant or insufficient. My research on the Americans with

Disabilities Act for my Leadership and Law course went similarly, except I consulted legal sources of information over medical ones. Legal reports are difficult to understand at times because of their jargon. Nonprofessionals must read legal materials attentively to ensure they understand judgements and outcomes. Skimming through articles is not sufficient for either of these fields and results in ineffective research that increases misinformation.

A PowerPoint was required for these two projects, which meant summarizing my findings comprehensively on slides with only so much room. Fulfilling this task is not simple, the researcher must fully understand their topic to prioritize key ideas and present them accurately through concise language. The PowerPoint must also be designed with digital writing principles, so that the material is readable when presented and has an impact on the viewer. These projects were a precursor to my digital writing education I will touch on later.

My Interdisciplinary Theory final paper I included in this section was the most in-depth research I conducted at ODUGlobal. For this course, I researched suicide prevention. This required three research branches that had to remain disciplinary and separate; I selected to research my topic through the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and biology. The research articles we used could not be interdisciplinary, because it was our assignment to synthesize the material ourselves. I quickly learned that most research on suicide prevention includes interdisciplinary thought. The research librarian I consulted for advice concluded our meeting by warning that I set myself up for ‘research hell’, yet I was determined to rise to the occasion.

For months, I went over a wealth of articles, most of which were unusable for my purposes. However, my persistence eventually yielded me quality research on theory and applications for suicide prevention that I used to evaluate the necessity of interdisciplinarity through my own lens. Without outside influence, I analyzed each intervention and made a unique

argument as to why they must be synthesized to recognize risk factors and prevent suicide, either acutely or longitudinally. I take pride in this research because it took the most effort out of my other research assignments at ODUGlobal and my final argument for interdisciplinarity was firm.

Synthesis

Synthesis is the end product of an interdisciplinary understanding; leaders use synthesized information to enhance their insight, decision making, and projects through multidimensional analysis. The leadership courses I took at ODUGlobal further prepared me for the workforce through encouraging interdisciplinary thought and synthesis. The first essay I included in my synthesis section is my final paper for Foundations of Leadership. It presents an overview of how my librarian propelled me into new responsibilities throughout the year we worked together. This essay pushed me to examine my values and synthesize them with my career experience. Synthesis is not solely a process of combining academic and workforce principles, it can assist in understanding experiences and personhood too. When we have a firm understanding of our values, we develop the self-awareness to apply them fully in our leadership. As I wrote, I decided that synthesizing empowerment, empathy, believing in everyone's ability to learn, and remaining curious and open to new perceptions is how I want to lead.

Remaining curious and interested in learning is a necessity in today's workforce landscape where new technology is developed rapidly. My project for Digital Writing on creating fiction with ChatGPT was inspired by technological curiosity and exploring human emotions and experiences through storytelling. In doing this, I synthesized how generative artificial intelligence and human thought interact and produce similarities. However, I also evaluated the weakness and immorality of using generative artificial intelligence to replace the unique perceptions of the human mind. I made this argument with the rhetorical principles of ethos,

pathos, and logos. This was an entertaining project to work on, because I included a piece of fiction I wrote within it. Overall, the project asserts my ability to synthesize information from different disciplines, and apply rhetoric and imagination to enhance my analysis.

Lastly, I included the final project for my digital writing course. This project required us to synthesize rhetoric with web design and digital writing principles. For the project, I interviewed fans of an existing interest of mine, *The Incredible Hulk*, to understand the prosocial impact of the series and present a rhetorical argument regarding its worth. Since a requirement of this project was to include multimedia, I synthesized text, images, graphs, video, and web design to serve my digital essay. My professor noted that my project was the most emotionally moving out of every submission she graded, which overjoyed me. This was a time-consuming project that required problem-solving and creativity and I am proud that it was deemed effective.

Conclusion

The projects I included in my electronic portfolio are a selection of the work I am most proud of, since their difficulty contributed to my skillset. My collection development, research, and synthesis skills are the result of learning in my profession and through ODUGlobal's departments for leadership, social science, law, human services, and health. When I earn my diploma, 'leadership' is the only discipline that will be written on it. This electronic portfolio shows that my major is one discipline of many I have explored; my overall knowledge reflects principles from across these disciplines. Skills that stem from the main three in my portfolio include health literacy, emotional intelligence, understanding of legal rights, use of rhetoric, digital writing, creative thinking, and multidimensional analysis.

I feel wholly prepared for the continuation of my career because I have not only expanded my skillset but realized that my commitment for learning is endless. Just a few months

from the time of this writing, I will graduate. This only frees up more time for me to continue educating myself and develop new skills and relationships with other leaders. I look forward to the future, because it has much to teach me, and I readily embrace that knowledge.