

Queens College/ Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Personal Statement by Yago S. Cura

At the current moment, I can think of no more subversive act than to become a librarian. In this time of half-truths, artful circumspection, and “truthiness,” librarians are poised to assume the role of guides, enablers, and agents of the future demos. Likewise, the shift from print media to digital media has challenged librarians to internalize myriad new protocols, dialects, and platforms—very few housed within the walls of “respectable” media purveyors. Indeed, the explosion of digital media in the last ten years has given the demos an immediate venue, an imminent stage.

I believe that the professional that can enable the demos to distinguish fact from fiction, and guide them towards balanced arguments currently finds herself in an interesting, yes, subversive position. More importantly, I am convinced that Literacy, the political act of knowing how to read, saves lives. It might not drag you out of a burning building; it might not rival Kevlar for density, or nudge Penicillin from its pinnacle. Literacy will not operate the Jaws of Life to release you from the twisted, metal pretzel of a collision. But, it might one day be that activity that defines who you have become, and the thing that keeps you from sullen delinquency, or a life more ordinary.

I have seen Literacy throw students a life-raft. I have seen the ghastly apparatus of a memory find solace in a piece of poetry. I have seen confession, digression, disenfranchisement; I have seen students “aggy” over the last copy of Sista Souljah’s The Coldest Winter Ever. I have witnessed minds brim fire over the realization that lyrics in Hip-Hop insist on the hyperbolic, or that they are fortified by literary elements like metaphor, simile, and idiom. I can attest to all these things simply because I chose to teach English Language Arts in the Bronx, in one of America’s many trenches, from 2004 to the present.

As an inner-city teacher, I learned leagues about my students, but I also learned leagues about myself. I have realized that I am an educator, as well as a role model, whether I like it or not. Another thing I have learned is that the prevalent inequalities in our educational system are not going to be fixed by a silver bullet. If we are to close the gap in achievement between inner-city and suburban schools, our country has to also close the gap in quality of life between inner-city communities and suburban communities. I am not talking about giving minority students an Early-Start; I am talking about giving the community a jump start by making the library an aorta of the community.

You must not only emphasize literacy in schools; you should ensure that the parents and guardians of students engage in literacy with their children. And this is the main reason I would like to pursue a degree in Library Science at your institution. I feel it will give me the practice, skills-set, and confidence needed to be a very real and visible aspect of a community’s life. Furthermore, if democracy and education are to remain staples of our national character, then one of the functions of future scholars, especially librarians, should be to ensure our thoroughfares of information, dialogue, and dissention stay open to review, scrutiny, and revision.