

Professional Values Statement

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Introduction

After working in libraries actively for fourteen years, I decided that the time was right for me to return to school and pursue my master's degree in library and information studies. I was already familiar with many aspects of the profession, such as checking in books, reading MARC records, and locating citations from an index. However, I was not aware that there were overarching principles that provided guidelines for libraries. The American Library Association has drafted several documents to demonstrate this point, such as the Freedom to Read statement and the Library Bill of Rights. In addition, the Core Values of Librarianship served as a support system for librarians themselves, as a set of standards for the profession as a whole ("Core values of librarianship").

The first semester of my studies in the Foundations course has been an introduction to the underpinnings of librarianship. I have become more familiar with the expectations that I will encounter when I become a professional librarian. The library world will continue to change and evolve as the larger society does. But with the Core Values as a starting point, I will be able to relate to some of the crucial issues of today that will become even more relevant in the days ahead.

Access, Democracy and Intellectual Freedom

Access to information has been vital to increasing intellectual discourse within our world, as well as to continue the free circulation of ideas. As the Internet becomes more indispensable as a reference tool, libraries have become information portals to those

who enter either through a door or the World Wide Web. For some patrons, the library has become their primary source for entering the Internet (Kranich, 2005). The “digital divide”, which refers to the gap between those who have the means to access the Internet and those who cannot, has been documented for several years (Coyle, 2007). It has frequently been cited as the dividing line for minorities, rural populations and the poor that has kept them from participating actively on the Internet. Recently, access to the Internet has been extended to other concerns, such as wireless capabilities, connection speeds, and ease of use (Haycock, 2004).

As noted by Thomas Jefferson, an informed citizen is the key to a functioning democracy. The library has become an important stakeholder in this concept, for it provides the access that users require to reach those materials in order to increase their understanding of the world around them. However, this can be complicated by the technologies that libraries have come to rely upon. Filters on library computers, while serving the need to block adult content from younger users, can also block information from the age-appropriate, such as the example of breast cancer (Kranich, 2005). Libraries must be able to respond with fervor to these challenges if they are to serve as brokers for the intellectually curious (Baldwin, 2006).

Related to both access and democracy is the need to support intellectual freedom. As patrons search for the materials that are of interest to them, they must be able to pursue their research without being restricted unnecessarily by age or location. Challenges to CIPA legislation in the courts have shown that librarians are willing to protect the rights of individual users in terms of access to legal content (Kranich, 2005). The rights to freedom of expression and freedom of speech must be respected in order for

access to exist. As I mentioned previously, the access must be there in order to necessitate the free exchange of ideas and information to contribute to the democratic society as a whole.

I feel that access has been one role that the library has done very well. In our society, the library has been a fundamental common denominator for all of its citizens: it has been the one place where people can access its materials free of charge. It has been a role that cannot be understated as questions of access have been associated with cost and privatization. This should be one expectation that citizens should continue to have as we move toward a future where such guarantees cannot always be made. Libraries must continue to operate in the interest of the people they are trying to serve, while not compromising their unique relationship with any potential user (Baldwin, 2006).

Confidentiality, Privacy and the Public Good

Privacy has become a hot-button topic in contemporary society. The years that have followed the attacks of September 11, 2001 have seen challenges to issues that have been confidential in nature before the attacks took place. Now, today's world has been dominated by the USA Patriot Act and initiatives such as immunity for telecommunications companies that participate in government spying programs. Library records have been scrutinized for being windows that could provide insight into the history of each patron that has used its services (Neuhaus, 2003). The presumed confidentiality of a reference session has become even more complicated with online communications. With IP addresses now being logged quite easily, it has become more difficult to maintain anonymity between patron and librarian when asking questions from instant messaging (Neuhaus, 2003).

Another challenge that libraries have faced has been as servants to the public good. Whether supported by taxes, tuition, or private contributions, libraries require the necessary capital in order to operate effectively. Unfortunately, decisions for funding have shifted away from the public good toward “private benefit”, leaving the majority of costs to rest with individuals while governmental support shrinks (Bailey-Hainer & Forsman, 2005). This direction has lent to the perspective that libraries are not worth public funding at all, because it is believed that there has not been any discernable measure for their services. As a result, libraries have been forced to seek other methods for funding as well as making the difficult choices to reduce costs: cutting the materials budget, trimming programs, and even scaling back hours of operation (Bailey-Hainer & Forsman, 2005).

Libraries should be able to maintain the privacy of their users while being able to respond to the needs of external agencies. Policies can be adapted to respond to requests for patron information while staying within the boundaries of the law. As the controversies over filtering have shown, libraries have to stay within their boundaries of making content available to all while being able to restrict sensitive content whenever it becomes necessary (Kranich, 2005). If these principles should become compromised, the special relationship that libraries enjoy with their users could be damaged severely.

Librarians cannot afford to be modest with their successes in such an environment where private benefits have become the “buzzwords” of government efforts to lower revenues. They may have to take a reactive approach to try and halt the decline at first, but they must proactive to demonstrate how library programs contribute to the *public* good, making them even more of an asset. In that manner, librarians may not carry the

same professional influence of doctors or lawyers, but they can show that as professionals they do have something to share in public discourse (Baldwin, 2006).

Diversity, Professionalism and Service

One fact that cannot be denied is the changing face of our society. The multicultural makeup on the fabric of America has been represented by its newest citizens who can share common languages besides English. Also, these new populations have come to expect to find themselves reflected in the society in some way. Librarians have risen to meet this growing demand by building stronger collections that represent a broad section of languages and the people who speak them (Kranich, 2005). Further, librarians themselves have begun to represent these diverse segments of society as more under-represented groups join the profession (Kim & Sin, 2008). In turn, libraries have taken diversity more into account among their respective staff, respecting individual differences as well as embracing the common traits (Kreitz, 2008).

Professionalism has always been a focus of major emphasis to librarians. Starting with the first library school, librarians have been recognized as highly skilled workers who offer a service to the public as a whole. Beyond that, librarians have produced various bodies of work that have served to expand the current body of knowledge as well as adding new concepts for all areas of librarianship (Bastian & Yakel, 2005). Professional organizations, such as the American Library Association and its respective entities, have served as resources for sharing information as well as providing networking opportunities among its members. Even professionalism has been incorporated into the level of a local library, from the mentoring system for apprentice librarians to dressing in a manner that sets patrons at ease (Manasco & Jones, 2002).

As a whole, libraries revolve heavily upon the services they provide. Of course, this would include the individual services in each area of the library, such as circulation or collection development. This has also been extended to include the many programs that libraries would sponsor, such as a Bookmobile or a space for a community group to perform a play. In the age of the Internet, virtual services have been added to the responsibilities of a library. Internet messaging programs, along with simple e-mail, has become an effective tool for achieving reference services beyond the walls of many libraries (Kibbee, 2006).

Users no longer have to come into the building for answers as long as their computer has an Internet connection. However, that hasn't stopped libraries from becoming a place in the community beyond so-called "books and mortar only" structures. Taking the lead from corporate entities such as Barnes and Noble, libraries have begun to redefine themselves as comfortable social spaces for their users to stay before they depart (Gayton, 2008). While maintaining their role as a place of learning as well as a new place to congregate, libraries have become instrumental to setting the tone for the next phase of their existence.

Libraries should also be unafraid to innovate and try new things. I believe that as more parties become familiar with the role libraries serve in the community, the range of programs and services they offer will indicate how unique these places have become. Also, as non-partisan agencies, libraries can serve as potential agents of change and not sponsor a political agenda (Baldwin, 2006). Libraries still have a lot to offer their communities, but the way they can participate has not yet been written; those will be the discoveries yet to come.

Education, Preservation and Social Responsibility

As supporters of education and lifelong learning, the library has become even more vital to the fabric of the twenty-first century. Literacy has moved beyond being able to merely read and write to include the acumen to navigate computers and the Internet (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2008). The skills to use a computer effectively have become a new method for communication especially as the younger users adopt the new technologies at a much faster rate. In addition, education becomes vital to information literacy in order to prepare users for the challenge of evaluating online resources for content and worth toward making informed decisions (Kranich, 2005). As users become more informed, then they should become active contributors to their society.

As their users become more knowledgeable, libraries should never abandon their role as preservers of knowledge. Libraries have come to understand that they cannot collect everything, but they should not surrender all of their materials once they have been superseded by other media. Digitization has developed as the latest trend for preservation, particularly with scholarly materials (Hahn, 2008). Electronic journals have become the primary containers for anyone who is seeking the latest information even before the printed version has been released (Brady, McCord, & Galbraith, 2006). However, as certain technologies are no longer supported, libraries must be able to fulfill the promise of access until another format can replace it; CD-ROMs are becoming the microcards of their day in some institutions (Rubin, 2004a).

I have commented on the social responsibilities of libraries in several places already, but it cannot be mentioned enough: libraries serve as an important catalyst to

intellectual discourse within a truly democratic society (Baldwin, 2006). From a practical standpoint, this could be a goal that could be too difficult to meet within a society. The viewpoints, perspectives, and opinions from all persons can be too difficult to manage, much less come to a point of consensus. But if libraries promote themselves as stewards of the public good, then it becomes easier to craft a position that supports that approach. Policies that have been built upon this role can also serve this purpose (Kranich, 2005). This is also where librarians can also move beyond the unfortunate “Marian the Librarian” stereotype that still permeates the culture of librarians and become something more dynamic in the eyes of the public (Jackson, 2000). Innovative programs, self promotion, and the identity of champions of democracy can all be used to secure the place of librarians in the community at large.

Conclusions

In our changing world, libraries continue to play a valuable role and provide a valuable service. The core values of librarianship become a gauge to place the actions of librarians beyond personal self interest and toward the service of the profession as a whole (Rubin, 2004b). As detailed in each section, each of the core values plays an important role in the profession, but the primary one has been that this is a profession of service. Through that service, librarians have the possibility of turning all potential users into active participants of the community.

As I studied each of the core values, I observed how each one flowed into the next, creating a continuum that provided a framework for the profession as a whole. Popular wisdom has suggested that libraries are no longer relevant, but I would counter that libraries are merely finding their way in this new environment of change. As a

participant of this change, I must be able to ground myself in these values as I provide service to anyone seeking my expertise. As a professional librarian, I will have to be able separate my own personal perceptions in the service of the library itself. Information can be chaotic and overwhelming to those who are unfamiliar with its behaviors; I will serve to bring some order to that chaos and assist that patron toward the knowledge they would be seeking.

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