

# Professional Values Statement

Revised from LIS 600

LIS 698- CAPSTONE

April 22, 2011

Authored by: Christian Burris

## **Introduction**

At the beginning of my career in the library and information science program, I wrote a paper based on what my professional values would be as a librarian. At the time, I had been working in an academic library for over fourteen years as paraprofessional, and for most of it I approached my experience only as a job. I enjoyed what I was doing, and I also liked being in an environment that valued the education and learning, taking measures that information to support these causes would remain free and open to those who would use it. Later, I felt the job evolving into a career as I began to see librarianship as a step toward finding my calling in life. I had always been an active supporter of the value of information and how it can affect the perceptions to shape a viewpoint of the world.

Now, as I am about to graduate the Library and Information Studies program, I will take up the mantle as an “information professional”. In the “Foundations” course, my professional values statement examined the eleven precepts of the Core Values Statement by the American Library Association (“Core values of librarianship”.) as they would relate to my upcoming career. At the close of my time in the program, I will use the same framework to reexamine those precepts again, this time as a student with a broadened perspective as well as a greater sensitivity toward the objectivity of these principles.

## **Access, Democracy and Intellectual Freedom**

Library users have been the reason for libraries to exist: as long as libraries have been the keepers of information, those who have been interested in using information have come to use them. As a result, library users should have the opportunity to use library materials without being either scrutinized or monitored while doing so. The American Library Association has reinforced this point with the Freedom to Statement, guaranteeing users their right to access

library materials without censorship or challenge (“The Freedom to Read Statement”). As a librarian, it would be my responsibility to protect the users who may not share the same point of view not only from each other, but to ensure their rights to use library materials in good faith and mutual respect. In turn, I should not allow my own perceptions about a particular viewpoint to dictate my approach to materials. Ethically, it would be my responsibility to continue the exchange of differing ideas as a way to foster new ideas and dialogue for all sides about a particular area of personal research (Code of ethics of the American Library Association).

This is not to say that all ethical matters could be easily solved. When the Wikileaks scandal broke last year, the Library of Congress was reluctantly forced to block access to these sources from their users on the grounds that the information contained in them was released illegally to the public (Kniffel, 2011). As the preeminent library in the United States, this decision sent ripples to other libraries in the country about what could happen if they ended up in the same situation. It served as a reminder that even though the freedom to read is an inherent guarantee, there may be times when this principle can be subjected to external legal pressures. In a similar manner, concerns have arisen over filtering on computers in public and school libraries. While these filters are often required due to local policies, questions over their privacy and accuracy have led patrons to wonder if they are too little or too much interference in their affairs (Houghton-Jan, 2010). These challenges will not deter me from my mission; for I intend to ensure that access will be given to the patrons I serve.

### **Confidentiality, Privacy and the Public Good**

As the freedom to read demonstrates, libraries have been respectful of patron rights. The guarantee of patron confidentiality is another measure of the social contract that libraries have with their patrons. The transaction history that a patron has with a library has been protected

from outside agencies whenever possible, even in the years that followed the introduction of the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001. Libraries have developed policies that account for the requests of the Patriot Act while keeping the confidentiality of patrons intact whenever possible. Again, the Code of Ethics serves as a set of guidelines to these moments of potential crisis as well as a starting point to enact policies that would continue to safeguard the rights of patrons. My position would be to protect the privacy of patrons as often as possible, since this ties in closely with the confidentiality policy that made libraries unique among public institutions. If the public good were at risk, however, I would rely upon the policies rooted in the Code of Ethics to know when these agreements in confidence could be bent in order to satisfy a specific circumstance.

In the information age that exists today, libraries have to be even more vigilant about the information that they have kept for specific reasons (Dixon, 2008). With the ease of sharing information that has developed as a result of social media tools, libraries have to be even more cautious about retention patterns, the frequency of purging records, and the danger of releasing information that can track patrons through their transaction history. I would have to be certain to keep my fellow librarians and support staff updated about developments that could lead to the reevaluation of specific policies; further, I would do my best to keep librarians aware of their responsibilities under the law when information is demanded by external agencies. Returning to the environment of social media, it would be easy to casually let a privileged portion of information unexpectedly slip into the larger community. These moments could damage the relationship of trust that has existed between libraries and patrons, for patrons may feel that their activities could be subjected to public scrutiny (Dettlaff, 2005). If that trust were ever compromised, patrons may feel that libraries would no longer exist as places of safety; as a librarian, I would do my best to prevent that from happening.

## **Diversity, Professionalism and Service**

The population of America is changing rapidly in terms of several demographics, including ethnicity, age, and familial relationships. As a result, libraries have changed in order to reflect their primary stakeholders in their communities. Buildings have been refitted to comply with standards in the Americans with Disabilities Act, such as automatic doors and signage to assist the visually impaired. Collections have been updated to include materials that are up to date and current to address incoming populations who speak different languages and have a different faith tradition. In all, the growing mobility of these segments of the population has led to their presence in locations that may not have been expected a few short years ago. My position would be to make the library a more inclusive place, representing the changing mosaic of a population that has become a part of the surrounding community. As an information professional, I would make certain that these patrons would be able find their materials without any hindrance toward their path to discovery.

In terms of library services, they must be brought up to date to serve the interest of the surrounding community as much as possible. For instance, public libraries have seen a growing number of members of the Latino community becoming part of their regular patrons. Library collections have been reflective of this fact, adding more books in Spanish and adding bilingual signage to lead users to the materials they desire (Welburn, 2010). These have often been dictated by a government mandate, but libraries have frequently risen to the need by being ahead of the curve and developing these services without being directed to do so. Libraries have also been able to develop new programs to reach members of these diverse groups effectively when the numbers become significant. In another example, some academic libraries have seen an increase in the number of first generation students, non-traditional students, and students from

distance education programs; these are groups who may not have had exposure to the current technologies that these libraries have to offer (Switzer, 2008). Academic libraries have had to tailor the descriptions of their services to each group, realizing that each one has their own specific needs and challenges as they approach the same set of materials. I would do my best to develop materials that can be used by any group seeking the services of my library, ensuring their comfort and confidence as they interact with any resource.

### **Education, Preservation and Social Responsibility**

From their roles as the traditional keepers of knowledge to the contemporary guides toward information, the role of librarians has not changed in terms of being educators. Librarians are obligated to educate and uplift the experiences of their users whenever possible, with the hope of instilling a desire of lifelong learning with every subsequent visit. The tools that modern librarians have at their disposal allow them the chance to engage their users more directly, such as online chats, clickers for library instruction, and even face to face sessions with users not on the premises. This represents the social responsibility that librarians have with the larger community, and it is a twofold manner of engagement. First, libraries have been able to reach into a communities where others agencies have not been able to go. Bookmobiles, for example, have been a way for potential users to interact with library materials where they live. Also, members of the community have the opportunity to see the resources of a library in action. This can also change the perception libraries do not look beyond their four walls, especially when the staff has been seen performing library services in the community at large. The role of a library as a repository would be maintained, while the role of librarians would be expanded. This possibility of outreach has been an interest of mine for many years, and the chance to put people I touch with library resources wherever they are would be a worthwhile endeavor.

Libraries are exploring and refining their methods to be more interactive with their communities and ensure their responsibility as content providers. For instance, public libraries have been developing programs to educate their patrons about how to search for government materials that have moved online in recent years (Jaeger & Bertot, 2009). This is of significant importance, since government documents are no longer issued in print and the model for their discovery has changed. The fact that librarians have accepted this recent challenge demonstrated a commitment to see that their patrons have the skills to interact with this new format effectively. In spite of these efforts, there will still be patrons who will have no familiarity with libraries. Some of these demographics, such as ethnicity and age, have been mentioned previously. However, there are underserved populations in terms of economic, social and related backgrounds without the means to discover libraries for themselves. Librarians must be willing to engage in extensive patron education to bring these potential users in line with their contemporaries (Rude & Hauptman, 1990). These segments of the population may be the most in need for library service, and only by careful introduction can this occur. This is an exciting challenge, and I would take the time to share the joy of libraries with everyone who would be interested.

## **Conclusion**

My values as a professional librarian have not changed since my initial paper three and a half years ago. The attitudes I had toward these values, along with my own understanding about how to apply them to my career, have only matured during this short passage of time. I feel excited about becoming a professional librarian, and I know that my values will continue to grow as I enter the next phase of my career.

## References

Code of ethics of the American Library Association. (January 22, 2008). Retrieved April 20, 2011 from

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>

Core values of librarianship. (June 29, 2004). Retrieved April 20, 2011 from

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm>

Detlaff, C. (2005). *Protecting user privacy in the library* doi:10.1300/J107v13n04• 03

Dixon, P. (2008). Ethical issues implicit in library authentication and access management: Risks and best practices. *Journal of Library Administration*, 47(3), 141-162. Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=33247800&site=ehost-live>

The freedom to read statement. (June 30, 2004). Retrieved April 20, 2011 from

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/ftstatement/freedomreadstatement.cfm>

Houghton-Jan, S. (2010). Chapter 4: Internet filtering. *Library Technology Reports*, 46(8), 25-33.

Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=55483470&site=ehost-live>

Jaeger, P. T., & Bertot, J. C. (2009). E-government education in public libraries: New service

roles and expanding social responsibilities. *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science*, 50(1), 39-49. Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=59668075&site=ehost-live>

- Kniffel, L. (2011). Federal ban of WikiLeaks website embroils library of congress. *American Libraries*, 42(1), 26-27. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=57173950&site=ehost-live>
- Rude, R., & Hauptman, R. (1990). To serve the unserved: Social responsibility in the academy. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 15(6), 364. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9705305864&site=ehost-live>
- Switzer, A. T. (2008). Redefining diversity: Creating an inclusive academic library through diversity initiatives. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 15(3), 280-300.  
doi:10.1080/10691310802258182
- Welburn, W. C. (2010). Creating inclusive communities: Diversity and the responses of academic libraries. In (pp. 355-363) Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=52040625&site=ehost-live>