

The Impact of Professional Ethics on Library and Information Studies

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Abstract

Ethical behavior in libraries goes beyond service to users. Academic librarian may need to adhere to the ethical guidelines and values of their professions. The purpose of the paper is to investigate the level of professionalism in librarianship and to ascertain the current status, trends and opportunities within the profession among academic librarians. The method of the study is descriptive survey design which was adapted in qualitative research methods. Libraries depend on ethical principles more than any other profession because library services are essentially human-oriented. Librarians must follow the intellectual freedom principle, libraries are humanistic institutions, and librarians must have a moral responsibility to the patrons, adhering to the value of human life. It will be useful to describe current conditions and identify key issues of library and information ethics, ethical principles in different professions.

Keywords: Ethical Behavior, Academic Librarian, Librarianship, Qualitative Research methods, Intellectual freedom principle

Introduction

Library and information centers are repositories for humanity's knowledge or information; they are our past, our present, and also our future. They are much more than storehouses for books, and include many other forms of data. The knowledge or information available in libraries must be accessible to all people. Retrieval of particular types of information requires specialized knowledge and database searches that are beyond the capabilities of many users, and particularly of undergraduates starting their university careers. LIS professionals need to share that knowledge or information with users, instructing them on how to use electronic or digital information resources and the Internet so they can do research on their own, while pointing out the limits and problems associated with electronic research.¹

Libraries from time immemorial are serving the societies by collecting, organizing, preserving and disseminating information available in multiple formats. Libraries as information centers play a significant role in uplifting a society socially, culturally, intellectually, scientifically, economically by providing information to those who are in need of information. LIS profession is a service oriented profession with a mission and the mission is to fulfill the information needs of the people. Libraries comprise of three elements viz., library staff (LIS professionals), information sources and library patrons. LIS (Librian) professionals are acting as a link between the library patrons and information sources. In order to make libraries vibrant institutions, library staff has to perform their professional obligations in a right manner so that mission of libraries is achieved without any hindrance. This obligation of LIS to perform in a right manner has given rise to the concept of professional ethics in LIS profession. Let us first discuss the meaning of ethics, professional ethics and then ethical issues in LIS profession.

Definitions of "Ethics"

The word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word, 'ethikos' meaning custom or character.

The Webster dictionary defines ethics as, the discipline dealing with what is good and bad or right and wrong or with moral duty and obligation.'

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¹ D. Sager, "The Search for librarianship's Care Values," *Public libraries*, 40 (3) (2001), 149-153. (Hereafter cited as Sager).

Different authors and researchers have defined the term ethics differently. Marnburg, 2000, defines ethics as 'theories about what is right and wrong'. The researchers however defined it as 'critical examination of the standards of good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice' field of moral philosophy and 'conception of right and wrong behavior and defining when actions are moral and when they are immoral.'²

Ethics has been gaining attention of academicians and researchers around the globe. Such codes of professional ethics provide LIS professionals with guiding principles and norms to face ethical dilemmas or obtaining solutions to various problems.

Ethical and professional Codes and principles are not meant to replace law or morality but to serve as guidelines for professional conduct. According to Finks (1991), professional ethical codes, values or principles should define the limits of acceptable conduct and give guidance to what kind of actions are regarded as right or wrong in the occupation. The American library Association Code of Ethics provides broad statements that guide ethical decision making and serve as framework for the profession.³

Literature Review

There are various research studies highlighting the importance of professional ethics and ethic principles of LIS. This study enables the researcher to identify research gaps in the previous studies.

Darch's (1975) study went a long way to show that before the development of a code of ethics, there was a need for librarians to first understand their place in society. The regulating body ought to be composed of professionals from different kinds of libraries in Nigeria, such as academic, public and private libraries.⁴

Allan (1993) suggested that values may be defined as "generalized abstract ideas held by human individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad".⁵

IFLA (1999) as guidelines for professional associations on "Developing policies and procedures for the library associations" recommends that the latter should develop a code of ethics/ conduct, along with articles of association and regulations.⁶

Entsua-meash (2004) Succinctly encapsulated this idea when he opined that some of the basic attributes of a profession are that it should have a body of knowledge which allows people to assess the accomplishments and standards of the formal content of the educational systems of the profession. In addition, he affirmed that there should be the presence of an underlying theory and code of ethics that guides the activities of the practitioners, as well as a common association that takes care of its members.⁷

² O Marnburg, "professionalizing the library and information science profession in Nigeria," IFLA journal 36, no.2 (2000): 155.

³ Lee Finks, "Values without Shame," American Libraries 20 (1989): 352-356.(Hereafter Cited as Finks)

⁴ C. Darch, "The status of professional librarians in Nigerian Universities," International Library Review, 60, no.7, 1975: 495-502.

⁵ D. Allan, "Values: Key Ideas in Human Thought, Facts on File," (New York: 1993), 769-770.

⁶ International Federation of library Associations and Institutions, "Management of library Association section: Developing policies and procedures for the library Association," The Electronic library 22, no.5 (1999): 417, accessed February 13, 2019, www.ifla.org/VII/340/pub/devpol-e.htm.

⁷ C Entsua-mensah, "Professionalism and the expanding horizons of the information profession: the challenges facing librarians in the 21st century," Ghana Library Journal 16, no.1 (2004): 1-7.

Objectives of the Study

The major focus of the present study is professional ethics on LIS profession and ascertains the current status, trends, and opportunities within the profession among academic librarians.

The study has also been undertaken with the objectives of the following aspects:

- To do librarian's value librarianship as a profession
- to involve systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct
- To take the right steps and right things under every circumstance
- To make librarians put more effort with regard to professional development
- To adhere to the ethical guidelines and rules of their institutions
- To determine the impact of professional ethics on LIS

Methodology

Methodology applied in the present study is descriptive survey design which was adapted in qualitative research methods. For this, the relevant data are collected and recorded. The area of the study was the library and Information studies profession.

Professional Ethics

Library and Information workers are expected to follow certain ethical standards, typically codified in documents called codes of Ethics. These codes offer a basis for making ethical decisions and applying ethical solutions to problems in LIS.⁸

In the United States professional librarian ethics are codified in the ALA's code of Ethics. However, there are other codes of ethics that are important to the LIS community.

Professional means a person who has knowledge of some specific fields.

Professional ethics encompass the personal, organizational and corporate standards of behavior expected of professionals.

Professional Ethics is professionally accepted as standards of personal and business behavior, values and guiding principles. Codes of professional ethics are often established by professional organizations to help guide members in performing their job function according to sound and consisted ethical principles.

Professional ethics is the ethical norms, values and principle that guide a profession and ethics of decisions made within the profession.

Five Law of Library and Information Studies

Establishing a core set of values is not the only way to define and provide direction for a field. Many of the natural sciences are based not on values, but on scientific laws. This led mathematician and librarian S.R. Ramnganathan to propose five laws of library science in 1931. Ranganathan envisioned these laws as a set of fundamental laws, analogous to the scientific laws that serve as fundamental principles for natural and some social sciences. Ranganathan's original laws were:

- Books are for use
- Every reader [their] book
- Every book its reader
- Save the time of the reader
- A library is a growing organism.⁹

The Values of Librarianship

⁸ Sager, 152.

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Values are essential to the Success and future of librarianship: they highlight what is important and worthy in the long run," and help to define our profession. In a literature review on professional values in LIS, Lee Finks argues, that these values fall into four categories.:

- 1. professional values are inherent in librarianship and include recognizing the importance of service and stewardship: maintaining philosophical values that reflect wisdom, truth, and neutrality, preserving democratic values; and being passionate about reading and books.
- 2. General values are "Commonly shared by normal, healthy people, whatever their field." Librarian's work, social, and satisfaction values express a commitment to lifelong learning, the importance of tolerance and cooperating, and the need to feel accepted.
- 3. Personal values specifically belong to library workers and include humanistic, idealistic, conservative, and aesthetic values.
- 4. Rival values threaten the mission of libraries with bureaucratic, anti-intellectual and nihilistic ideas. Librarians must have faith in the profession's ability to do good. ¹⁰

Ethical Principles for library and Information Studies (LIS) Professionals

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions-2007: Ethical Principles for LIS professionals, Librarians and other Information Workers, Ethical Principles for LIS Professionals: Users Services.

- LIS Professional save to all users equally in accordance with mandate and legal bases. LIS Professionals offer high quality services to all users.
- LIS Professional provide users/clients access to holdings and publicly accessible information resources.
- LIS Professionals inform and advise all users/ clients objectively, impartially and courteously, and assist them in retrieving the information they need.
- LIS Professionals treat all clients with equal respect, regardless of their origin, race, age, social status, creed, gender or sexual orientation.
- LIS Professional observe the principles of barrier free accessibility.
- LIS Professionals protect children and youths from contents unsuitable for them according to the Young Persons Protection Act and other legal regulations
- LIS Professionals respect all clients' privacy. Personal data will be saved only to ensure service delivery and only within the legal framework. Library Professionals will share personal data with other institutions only as required by law.
- LIS Professionals perform for duties in a professional manner regardless of personal opinion and view. Ethical Principles for LIS Professionals: Other Services
- LIS Professional encourage the shaping of opinion and the free flow of information as well as the existence of libraries and information services to facilitate free access to all kinds of information resources provided by our democratic society. We reject censorship of content.
- LIS Professionals protect of cultural heritage according to the libraries; collecting mandate.
- LIS Professionals support science and research by profiling information, resources and related services, also promote the freedom of science and research.
- LIS Professionals are committed to the principle of lifelong learning in order to improve own competence and the competence of all members of the Public. In this context LIS Professionals see ourselves in a continual improvement process to optimize services for users/clients.

¹⁰ Finks, 390.

- LIS professionals organize events to promote reading and the active use of information, alone and in cooperation with partners.
- LIS Professionals relationship with suppliers and other business partners is based on a high ethical standard.
- LIS Professionals choose information resources exclusively according to objective criteria, their quality and their suitability to meet the needs of library users/ clients regardless of personal preferences and influences of third parties. Library reference services and professional competence guarantee access to all information resources.
- LIS Professionals actively advertise library services and facilities to the members of the public to make them aware of all means of access to public information.
- LIS Professionals provide information on the internet as data and full-texts within the legal limits to increase accessibility.
- LIS Professionals apply our professional competence to preserve heritage holdings for future generations.
- LIS Professionals treat our colleagues with fairness and respect, and promote a culture of cooperation, responsible acting and mutual trust.
- Professional independence, respect, fairness, willingness to cooperate and critical loyalty define our interactions with our superiors and superior authorities.¹¹

Code of Ethics for Library and Information's Science (LIS) Professionals

Professional Ethics may be defined as a code of conduct written or unwritten for regularity the behavior of a LIS professional towards himself, society, information resources, institute, colleagues, profession and clients (Users).

According to American Library Association, a code of ethics serves in "making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professional providing information services, library trustees and library staffs."

According to IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers, "The code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is offered as a series of ethical propositions for the guidance of individual librarians as creating or revising their own codes." The function of codes of ethics can be described.

- Access to information
- Responsibilities towards individuals and society
- Privacy, secrecy and transparency
- Open access and intellectual property
- Neutrality, personal integrity and profession skills
- Colleague and employer/ employee relationship further study
- Access to information

Access to information

The core mission of librarians and other information workers is to ensure access to information for all for personal development, education, cultural enrichment, leisure, economic activity and informed participation in and enhancement of democracy. Librarians and other information workers reject the denial and restriction of access to information and ideas most particularly through censorship whether by states, governments, or religious or civil society institutions. Librarians and other information workers offering services to the

¹¹ Hog, K.M., "Information Ethics and its implications for library and Information professionals: A contemporary Analysis. Philosophy and progress: LI-LII, January-June, July-December, 2012. DOI: <http://dx.doi-org/10.3329/vslil-2.17677>.

public should make every endeavor to offer access to their collection and services free of cost to the user. If membership fees and administrative charges are inevitable, they should be kept as low as possible and practical solution found so that socially disadvantaged people are not excluded. Librarians and other information workers promote and publicize their collection and services so that users and prospective users are aware of their existence and availability. Librarians and other information workers use the most effective ways to make the material accessible to all. For this purpose they seek to ensure that the websites of libraries and other information institutions comply with international standards for accessibility and access to them is not subject to barriers.

Responsibilities towards individuals and society

In order to promote inclusion and eradicate discrimination, librarians and other information workers ensure that the right of accessing information is not denied and that equitable services are provided for everyone whatever their age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender identity, heritage, education, income, immigration and asylum-seeking status, marital status, origin, race, religion or sexual orientation. Librarians and other information workers respect language minorities of a country and their right to access information in their own language. Librarians and other information workers organize and present content in a way that allows an autonomous user to find the information s/he needs. Librarians and other information workers help and support users in their information searching. Librarians and other information workers offer services to increase reading skills. They promote information literacy including the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and create, use and communicate information. And they promote the ethical use of information thereby helping to eliminate plagiarism and other forms of misuse of information. Librarians and other information workers respect the protection of minors while ensuring this does not impact on the information rights of adults.

Privacy, secrecy and transparency

Librarians and other information workers respect personal privacy, and the protection of personal data, necessarily shared between individuals and institutions. The relationship between the library and the user is one of confidentiality and librarians and other information workers will take appropriate measures to ensure that user data is not shared beyond the original transaction. Librarians and other information workers support and participate in transparency so that the workings of government, administration and business are opened to the scrutiny of the general public. They also recognize that it is in the public interest that misconduct, corruption and crime be exposed by what constitute breaches of confidentiality by so-called whistleblowers.

Open access and intellectual property

Librarians and other information workers' interest is to provide the best possible access for library users to information and ideas in any media or format. This includes support of the principles of open access, open source, and open licenses. Librarians and other information workers aim to provide fair, swift, economical and effective access to informant for users. Librarians and other informant workers have a professional duty to advocate for exceptions and limitations to copyright restrictions for libraries Librarians and other information workers are partners of authors, publishers and other creators of copyright protected works. Librarians and other information workers recognize the intellectual property right of authors and other creators and will seek to ensure that their rights are respected. Librarians and other information workers negotiate the most favorable terms for access to works on behalf of their users and seek to ensure that access is not unnecessarily prevented or hindered by the mode of

administration of intellectual property laws and that licenses do not override exceptions for libraries contained in national legislation. Librarians and other information workers encourage governments to establish an intellectual property regime that appropriately respects balance between the interests of rights holders and individuals and the institutions such as libraries which serve them. Librarians and other information workers also advocate that copyright terms should be limited and that information that has fallen in the public domain remains public and free.

Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills

Librarians and other information workers are strictly committed to neutrality and an unbiased stance regarding collection, access and service. Neutrality results in the most balanced collection and the most balanced access to information achievable. Librarians and other information workers define and publish their policies for section, organization, preservation, provision, and dissemination of information. Librarians and other informant workers distinguish between their personal convictions and professional duties. They do not advance private interests or personal beliefs at the expense of neutrality. Librarians and other information workers have the right to form in the workplace provided it does not infringe the principle of neutrality towards users. Librarians and other information workers counter corruption directly affecting librarianship, as in the sourcing and supply of library materials, appointments to library post and administration of library contracts and finances. Librarians and other information workers strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing their knowledge and skills. They aim at the highest standards of service quality and thus promote the positive reputation of the profession.

Colleague and employer/employee relationship

Librarians and other information workers treat each other with fairness and respect. Librarians and other information workers oppose discrimination in any aspect of employment because of age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender, marital status, origin, race, religion or sexual orientation. Librarians and other information workers promote equal payment and benefits for men and women holding comparable jobs. Librarians and other information workers share their professional experience with collegians and they help and guide new professionals to enter the professional community and develop their skills. They contribute to the activities of their professional association and participate in research and publication on professional matters. Librarians and other information workers strive to earn a reputation and status based on their professionalism and ethical behavior. They do not compete with colleagues by the use of unfair methods.¹²

The ALA's Code of Ethics

Highest level of service to all users:

- To provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.

Intellectual freedom

- To uphold the principals of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

¹² Henry T.Blanke, "Librarianship and political Values: Neutrality are commitment? "Library Journal (1989): 39-43.

Intellectual freedom is a major area of conflict within libraries. It is a goal that most library workers can agree on in theory, but situations in everyday library work can complicate this seemingly simple rule.

Privacy and confidentiality

- To protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resource consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.

Intellectual property rights

- To recognize and respect intellectual property rights

Intellectual property rights are a difficult issue. Most of the rest of the ALA's Code of Ethics talks about how libraries should provide unrestricted access to information, copyright and other intellectual property rights can sometimes provide restrictions on this flow of information. Libraries have taken an active interest in open licensing, free software, and new publication and distribution models that respect the rights of information creators while allowing more widespread access to ideas.

Respecting fellow library workers

- To treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.

Non-advancement of private interests

- To don't advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.

Distinguishing between personal convictions and professional duties

- To distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.

Excellence in the profession

- To strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Conclusion

Ethics for LIS professionals includes: fairness, truthfulness, transparency, accountability and responsibility of these professions towards themselves, users, organization/institution, peers and society as well. LIS professionals play an extremely vital role as participants in the information society, given that their mission includes gathering, processing, distributing and using information. Only the LIS professionals have an efficiency and skill to pull out a drop of information from the vast ocean of knowledge. All such websites are not authentic and providing qualitative, appropriate and valuable information. LIS professionals have a knowledge, training and expertise to find out and disseminate accurate information to users from those resources in appropriate time. LIS professional face many critical situations at the time of providing information services to users. At that time they must rely on their professional standards and value of the institute. LIS professionals have to make efforts to raise the social prestige of the profession and recognition of its prospective role in the information era by promoting and following norms and standards of code of ethics.

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