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Introduction: Valuing Librarianship: Core Values in Theory and Practice

SELINDA A. BERG AND HEIDI LM JACOBS

In 2011 we published an article in *Library Trends* where we concluded, “It is worth considering why the ALA Core Values seem to have lost their traction or relevance in the daily work librarians perform. There may be political, institutional, professional, or organizational reasons why this has happened and these factors would be well worth exploring” (Jacobs & Berg, 2011, p. 391). In 2014, as the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the American Library Association’s (ALA) “Core Values of Librarianship” came and went without any scholarly or professional attention, we found we were still considering these questions and issued a call to librarians and LIS faculty to explore these questions along with us. As Maura Seale eloquently asserts in her contribution to this special issue, “ALA’s Core ‘Core Values of Librarianship’ (2004) wants to tell a story” (p. 596). This special issue, “Valuing Librarianship: Core Values in Theory and Practice,” is an attempt to tell some of those stories.

The “Core Values of Librarianship” statement was adopted by the ALA Council in 2004. The development and adoption of the statement was lively, vocal, and highly controversial; however, since its adoption the conversation related to the document has been relatively quiet—discussed infrequently, applied sparingly, and cited modestly. When one compares the application and citations of the Core Value document (cited twelve times in Scopus) to that of the ACRL’s “Standards of Information Literacy,” also adopted in 2004 (cited 939 times in Scopus), the difference is remarkable.¹ When cited in the literature, the Core Value statement is mostly used as a brief reference point in research or discussions. The Core Values are often referenced in the literature as a means to anchor, promote, or justify specific projects or approaches to services (see, for example, Potter, 2008; Prendergast, 2013; Spiro, 2012), but rarely as representations

or in-depth investigations of how an individual value or cluster of values guide(s) librarians' practice or philosophy.² By asking practitioners and LIS scholars to explore librarianship's past, present, and future in relation to the eleven Core Values outlined by the ALA, this collection brings the Core Values themselves and the statement to the fore of the conversation. Using the "Core Values of Librarianship" statement as a framework, this special issue of *Library Trends* explores how these Core Values have (or have not) informed, influenced, guided, and contextualized libraries and librarianship, and considers what role these Core Values might have in guiding our profession in the future.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CORE VALUES: CONTROVERSY FROM THE ONSET

Donald Sager (2001) described the initial stages of developing the "Core Values of Librarianship" as "one of the most contentious professional issues that arose [in 2000]" (p. 149). Sager chaired the first Task Force on Core Values, originally appointed to address a recommendation that emerged from the 1999 Congress on Professional Education (CPE). Specifically, the Task Force was mandated to "clarify the core values (credo) of the profession. Although the Association has issued a number of documents that imply values for the profession (e.g., the Code of Ethics, statements on intellectual freedom, and Libraries: An American Value), there is no clear explication to which members can refer and through which decisions can be assessed" (American Library Association, 1999). The Task Force aimed to make clear the values that were at the core of the profession of librarianship.

The assigned work of the Task Force was daunting, and some considered it to be impossible (Budd, 2008; Koehler, 2003; Sager, 2001). They were tasked with identifying and succinctly articulating what values were at the core of an incredibly diverse profession made up of a wide array of types of professional librarians who serve even more diverse populations of users. However, only one year after being tasked with this job, the Task Force presented "Librarianship and Information Service: A Statement on Core Values" at the 2001 ALA Annual Conference on March 25, 2000.³ The values identified by the Task Force were

- the connection of people to ideas;
- the assurance of free and open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works;
- the commitment to literacy and learning;
- respect for the individuality and diversity of all people;
- freedom for all people to form, hold, and express their own beliefs;
- the preservation of the human record;

- excellence in professional service to our communities;
- the formation of partnerships to advance these ideas.

This draft faced many criticisms, including accusations of being too narrow, too passive, too brief (Berry, 2000; Rosenzweig, 2000; Sager, 2001), and ultimately “fundamentally flawed” (Rosenzweig, 2000). Mark Rosenzweig, a vocal critic of the document, accused the initial draft of Core Values of attempting to “re-define the core values of librarianship in a way that suits a new agenda, and one not very conducive to the promotion of the concerns of social responsibility” (n.p.). In the end the ALA Council did not accept the proposed statement of Core Values brought forth in 2001. Following the disbandment of the original Task Force, a second one was formed and charged with once again identifying and articulating those values that are at the core of the profession of librarianship.

In 2004 a new draft of the Core Values was presented to the ALA Council by the second Task Force (ALA, 2004b). The new group presented its outcome, which outlined eleven Core Values of the profession at the 2004 ALA Annual Conference. The Council adopted the second attempt at outlining the Core Values presented in the “Core Values of Librarianship” (table 1). Unlike the initial draft, commentary and criticism about the process and content of the second draft is much more scant. This absence of criticism may be due to the fact that the second version of the document draws heavily on preexisting ALA documents, such as the “Freedom to Read” statement, and the ALA’s “Mission Statement,” “Library Code of Ethics,” and “Library Bill of Rights.” The adopted statement of Core Values is in many ways a reiteration and distillation of these foundational ALA documents. As the Task Force noted, “It would be difficult, if not impossible, to express our values more eloquently than ALA already has in [these documents]” (ALA, 2004a, n.p.). The Core Values statement effectively summarizes the beliefs and principals that frame key ALA documents as a means to formulate the central and foundational values that are intended to “define, inform, and guide our professional practice” (n.p.).

CORE VALUES

Rather than articulating our own definition of what a *core value* is, we leave this task to our contributing authors, who each take a different approach

Table 1. Eleven Core Values adopted in 2004 by the ALA Council

Access	Preservation
Confidentiality/Privacy	The Public Good
Democracy	Professionalism
Diversity	Service
Education and Lifelong Learning	Social Responsibility
Intellectual Freedom	

to defining *core values* and articulating their importance to the professional conversations. Our authors' diverse and nuanced discussions reveal the complexities involved in defining terms like *core values*. Nevertheless, it is important to note the work that professionals and scholars have done in attempts to identify the values that are core to librarianship outside of the ALA process (Dole, Hurych, & Koehler, 2000; Froehlich 2000; Gorman, 2000; Koehler, 2003; Rodger, 1998), as well as to provide critiques and insights on the values that have been included and excluded for the ALA list (Anderson, 2013; Golrick, 2013). Additionally, and more predominantly, the usefulness, application, and meaning of a Core Values statement in itself have been discussed and debated in the literature. A wide range of views has been presented. Sager (2001) tied the need for the clear articulation of values to professionalism, arguing that "without common values, [librarianship is] not a profession" (p. 152). In stark contrast, John Berry III (2000) considers that it is futile to attempt to articulate succinctly and meaningfully values and beliefs that librarians hold intensely and passionately: "Let's then agree that the codification of values is better left to God, Jefferson, and Ranganathan" (p. 6).

The zealous language is reflective of the depth of passion for and commitment to librarianship that so many possess. While there are multiple and conflicting perspectives presented in the literature, the corpus of library literature does suggest multiple benefits to articulating those tenets that are at the core of our profession, including building consensus and unity among the diverse members of the profession (DeCandido, 2000; Rodger, 1998); acculturating and preparing new students (Sager, 2001); providing certainty or clarity in direction for professional and institutional decisions (Rodger, 1998); offering an anchor for discussions and conversations with groups and individuals who are outside of the library community (Sager, 2001); and providing links to both the past and the future (Gorman, 2000; Rodger, 1998; Sager, 2001). Ultimately, it is possible that Core Values can provide reassurance that we are doing the right thing. As Michael Gorman (2000, p. 7) clarifies: "Even failure is bearable because your values tell you that what you did was worthwhile and the end you were trying to achieve was honorable." While there are varying perspectives on the benefits of such a statement, reflecting on the enduring beliefs that underlie the profession in itself offers value.

Conversations about the values that provide the framework for librarian's work as individuals, as institutions, and as a profession are critical to highlight both our points of convergence and points of divergence. John Budd (2008) asserts that "as reflective practitioners we are *obliged* to examine the assumptions, stated, and unstated, that underlie values in general and the values of professionals in particular. This is a necessity, not a luxury" (p. 46; emphasis in original). In this special issue, LIS practition-

ers and scholars share their examinations and investigations into these eleven Core Values.

“VALUING LIBRARIANSHIP”: IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

Since its adoption in 2004, the statement of Core Values has been a relatively quiet document. While multiple perceptions of the purpose, application, and utility of the Core Values are presented in the LIS and related literature, rarely are the eleven individual Core Values investigated as tenets that “define, inform, and guide our professional practice” (ALA, 2004a, n.p.). In this special issue, a diverse group of LIS scholars and practitioners examine the Core Values in just this way. The contributors of these papers were asked to write on one or two of the eleven Core Values outlined in the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship.”

The issue starts out with Alana Kumbier and Julia Starkey’s critical examination of the Core Value of Access. They present and apply the work of scholars of disability studies and disability justice activism in order to advocate for a more holistic conception of *Access*, one that is not just about addressing the problems of access to information. Kumbier and Starkey argue that the ALA’s current conception of Access relies upon a traditional and narrow view, wherein access is something that individuals either do or do not have. Instead, they call for librarians and LIS scholars to examine the social and power dimensions that underlie the value of Access, and to pay attention to valuable alternative perspectives of traditional views of access and disability brought forth by the communities within disability studies and disability justice activism, including collective access and the social model of disability. Through adopting a broader conception of *access* than that put forth by the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship,” the work we do that reflects the Core Value of Access will also enhance our contributions to the Core Values of Social Responsibility and Diversity.

The Core Value of Confidentiality/Privacy is explored in a collaborative paper between LIS scholar and educator D. Grant Campbell, and academic librarian Scott Cowan. They bring to light a paradox that exists in Privacy for members of the LGBTQ community negotiating their sexual identities: “open inquiry requires the protection of secrets” (p. 496). Campbell and Cowan place this paradox within the context of new technologies used in libraries. While social media offers potential advantages to LGBTQ youth, the impact of big data and its ability to infer personal information from mining and tracking user behavior may threaten social media users’ privacy and confidentiality. In turn, Campbell and Cowan advocate for the increased use of linked data and new cataloging standards for libraries that better address the ALA’s paradox of Privacy: the need for open, free inquiry by individuals, and the simultaneous need for rigorous protection of their secrets.

LIS scholars and educators Sarah Roberts and Safiya Noble advocate for more overt and active inclusion of the Core Values of Social Responsibility and Diversity in the education environments of future library and information professionals. Using two examples from their own experiences, they demonstrate the ways in which LIS faculties' engagement with activism within contemporary social issues may assist in increasing students' future interest and ability to engage in the conversations and activities that reflect and promote librarianship's Core Values of Social Responsibility and Diversity.

James Elmborg, of the University of Iowa's School of Library and Information Science, traces the origins of the concept of *Lifelong Learning* and examines its place in library culture as a Core Value. He concludes that "Lifelong Learning as an ALA Core Value means something different depending on whether we view it through the lens of administrative progressivism or progressive pedagogy" (p. 554). In this way and others, Elmborg highlights throughout his paper that while the term is used extensively in library rhetoric, Lifelong Learning as a Core Value is open to multiple interpretations.

Raymond Pun considers the Core Value of Intellectual Freedom within the historical context of China. Making use of historical texts, memoirs, essays, and travel papers, China's censorship policies are mapped out from the Qin dynasty to the present day. Pun pays special attention to the role and place of libraries in China's history while Intellectual Freedom has undergone considerable changes and challenges. Pun, who has previously worked at New York University Shanghai, also provides insights into the ways in which new Sino-American partnership universities and international library cooperations are critical to the advocacy and promotion of intellectual freedom within the academic institutions and beyond.

Rebecka Sheffield, the executive director of the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, interrogates the narrowness of the ALA's definition and perception of the Core Value of Preservation. She calls on librarians to conceive of "preservation as something more than placing records into acid-free folders or migrating data to stave off obsolescence, but as a duty to steward unexplored histories" (p. 573). By working toward ensuring the preservation of histories of underrepresented cultural, ethno-racial, religious, and spiritual communities, librarians will embrace and enact the Core Value of Preservation. Like Kumbier and Starkey, Sheffield highlights the ways in which expanding our definition and activities related to Preservation will also contribute to our work toward other Core Values, including Diversity and Social Responsibility.

Seale, a reference librarian at Georgetown University, situates two of the eleven Core Values of librarianship, Democracy and The Public Good, within the context of the public representation of the Ferguson Public Library's response to the 2014 killing of Michael Brown by a police officer

in Ferguson, Missouri. While Seale recognizes the work of the Ferguson Public Library as “unequivocally valuable and beneficial to both the immediate and larger communities” (p. 588), she investigates how library discourses “frame, talk about, and make sense of the Ferguson Library” (p. 588). Specifically, Seale highlights how liberalism and capitalism distance the Core Values statement and library discourses about the Ferguson Public Library from their political, economic, social, and historical contexts. Because of this decoupling, she questions the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship” statement’s ability to “articulate a convincing defense of The Public Good or Democracy or libraries’ role in either” (p. 599).

Professionalism as a Core Value of librarianship is investigated by Emily Drabinski, who is a reference librarian at Long Island University, Brooklyn. She considers the ambiguity of the definition of *professionalization* in the Core Values statement and within the profession of librarianship as a whole, and interrogates the positive and negative outcomes of professionalization for librarians. Drabinski highlights that professionalization is beneficial to many, including the ALA as an organization; however, because of its potential to exclude and segregate she questions the compatibility of Professionalism with the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship.”

The Core Value of Service is prominent in Deborah Hicks’s report of her empirical research on the professional identities of librarians, undertaken as part of her doctoral program in education policy studies. Hicks uses a discourse-analysis approach in analyzing three data sources—professional journals, e-mail discussion lists, and research interviews—to examine the role that service and advocacy play in the construction of the professional identity of librarians. In her analysis, the elements of the Core Value of Service, as defined in the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship,” are evident in the advocacy efforts of librarians.

The authors represented in this special issue come from multiple geographic, professional, and scholarly backgrounds and provide unique insights into a document, the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship,” which has remained relatively quiet over the past decade. The wide array of topics and voices included in this special issue is reflective of the richness of the conversations surrounding the Core Values document.

PART OF A LARGER CONVERSATION

The papers collected in this special issue offer a critical response to the ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship” and raise multiple questions to be addressed in the future. Many other compelling topics surrounding the Core Values remain to be explored and investigated. The insights and debates that arise from the Core Values document will be ongoing, and this collection has introduced new ideas and new voices to those very important conversations.

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NOTES

1. The reporting of the numbers of citations for these two documents from a single database is not meant to be hard empirical evidence nor scientific representation of the impact of them; however, the authors believe that it does represent the uptake of the documents.
2. Notable exceptions that explore the ways in which the ALA's "Core Values of Librarianship" informs librarians' practices include: Fleischmann (2011), Jacobs and Berg (2011), and Miller (2007).
3. Sager (2001) provides an interesting commentary and overview of the process that the Task Force followed in order to produce a draft document.

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