Overcoming Today’s Ethical Challenges for Librarians and Vendors

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Ethics defined

- Area of study that deals with ideas about what is good and bad behavior, what is morally right or wrong

- Professional **ethics** (Knasiak, 2015)
  - Being in accordance with the accepted principles of right and wrong that govern the conduct of a profession
Where can libraries turn for help?

- ALA Code of Ethics
- Library Bill of Rights
  - Set forth the foundational principles of the profession
- IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers
- National Codes of Ethics for Librarians (by country)
- Locally developed library code of ethics
ALCTS Statement on Principles and Standards of Acquisitions Practice

1. gives first consideration to objectives and policies of his or her institution;
2. strives to obtain maximum ultimate value of each dollar of expenditure;
3. grants all competing vendors equal consideration insofar as the established policies library permit, and regards each transaction on its own merits;
4. works for honesty, truth, and fairness in buying and selling, denounces all forms and manifestations of bribery;
5. declines personal gifts and gratuities;
6. uses only by consent original ideas and designs devised by one vendor for competitive purchasing purposes;
7. accords a prompt courteous reception insofar as conditions permit to all who call on legitimate business missions;
8. fosters and promotes fair, ethical, and legal trade practices;
9. avoids sharp practice;
10. strives consistently for knowledge of the publishing and bookselling industry;
11. strives to establish practical and efficient methods for the conduct of his/her office;
12. counsels and assists fellow acquisitions librarians in performance of their duties, whenever occasion permits.

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Shachaf study (2005)

- Most frequently identified principles in codes of ethics:
  - Confidentiality & privacy
  - Integrity
  - Equal access to information
  - Professional development
- Less frequently identified principles:
  - Democracy
  - Copyright and Intellectual Property
  - Responsibility toward society
Principles related to ethics...

Principles for Professionals
- Honesty/Truthfulness
- Fairness
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Responsibility

Ethics in Practice
- Good faith business practices
- Direct and honest communication
- Availability of full information
- Willingness to compromise and negotiate
- Assumed good faith
Ethics for library vendors

- Respect
  - Privacy
- Integrity
- Customer focus
  - Results, do what they say they will
- Transparency
  - Pricing/Quotes/Service Fees
- Financial viability
- Provide references
Ethical issues libraries encounter

- Copyright issues (Luo, 2016)
- Confidentiality and privacy issues (Luo, 2016)
- Personal beliefs/bias centering around:
  - intellectual freedom
  - censorship
- Equitable access to information (Luo, 2016)
- Bibliocentrism (Smiraglia, 2009)
- Double duty – collection managers as selectors as potential conflict of interest (Morrissey, 2008)
Ethical issues libraries encounter, cont’d...

- Obligations to be ethical in the acquisitions and maintenance of journal collections
  - Avoid biases and conflicts of interest (Luo, 2016)
- Gifts and legacies (Cassell, Johnson, Mansfield, & Zhang, 2008)
- Is the information you have, yours to share (Morrissey, 2008)
- Special librarians have a dual identity arising from their work in libraries – do they support the goals of the profession or the organization (Preer, 2008)
- Hiring of relatives – preference to an employee’s child (Cihawk & Howland, 2012)
- Stealing from unique works in rare book collections (Mervosh, 2018)
Other ethical issues - that touch our lives as librarians

- Peer Review – double blind review
- Published research articles – ethical standards in research
- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty
- Electronic waste and the environment – ethical concern of the information age
- Writing employee reviews and referrals
Best Practices

- Establish ethical standards
  - Develop your own statement or code of ethics relating to some of the above issues
- Educate staff
- Take transgressions seriously – enforce frontline behavior
- Engage in conversations both inside and outside of the library to build relationships before issues arise
- Have a clear understanding of ethical expectations as we move into the future

Source: (Wagner, 2015)

- Set the tone from the top
- Measure effectiveness
Takeaways

- Thoughts and communication around ethical issues
- Hallmarks of potential ethical violations
- Best practices for when potential ethical violations are involved
References

- Luo, L. (2016). Ethical issues in reference: an in-depth view from the librarians’ perspective
- Preer, J. (2008). Library ethics
- Morrissey, L.J. (2008). Ethical issues in collection development