

ALISE
Information Ethics Special Interest Group

October 10, 2006

**POSITION STATEMENT ON
INFORMATION ETHICS IN LIS EDUCATION**

Knowledge and understanding of pluralistic intercultural information ethical theories and concepts, including the ethical conflicts and responsibilities facing library and information professionals around the world, are necessary to relevant teaching, learning, and reflection in the field of library and information studies and information-related professions. Many important areas and issues¹ currently facing library and information professionals can only be understood in light of their ethical contexts. Also, the contributions that library and information studies can make to knowledge societies can be significantly informed by their attention to information ethics.

As suggested by universal core values promoted by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions² and other professional organizations and world bodies³ it is our responsibility to participate critically in the global discourse of information ethics, as it pertains to, at least, the following articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- ✓ Respect for the dignity of human beings (Art. 1);
- ✓ Confidentiality (Art. 1, 2, 3, 6);
- ✓ Equality of opportunity (Art. 2, 7);
- ✓ Privacy (Art. 3, 12);
- ✓ Right to be protected from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Art. 5);
- ✓ Right to own property (Art. 17);
- ✓ Right to right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art. 18);
- ✓ Right to freedom of opinion and expression (Art. 19);
- ✓ Right to peaceful assembly and association (Art. 20);
- ✓ Right to economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for dignity and the free development of personality (Art. 22);
- ✓ Right to education (Art. 26);
- ✓ Right to participate in the cultural life of the community (Art. 27);
- ✓ Right to the protection of the moral and material interests concerning any scientific, literary or artistic production (Art. 27).⁴

The Information Ethics Special Interest Group of the Association for Library and Information Science Education strongly advocates that information ethics should be encouraged as an important aspect of education, research, scholarship, service, and practice in library and information studies and in other related professions. It therefore advocates that attention to information ethics (either through the curriculum, instructor expertise, resources, or symposia) be developed and enhanced in all programs of library and information studies education. Schools of library and information studies are urged to implement this recommendation to achieve the following desirable outcomes:

1. The curriculum should be informed by information ethics through a unit in the required foundations (or equivalent) course. This unit should cover the following student objectives:
 - ✓ to be able to recognize and articulate ethical conflicts in the information field;
 - ✓ to inculcate a sense of responsibility with regard to the consequences of individual and collective interactions in the information field;
 - ✓ to provide the foundations for intercultural dialogue through the recognition of different kinds of information cultures and values;
 - ✓ to provide basic knowledge about ethical theories and concepts and about their relevance to everyday information work; and,
 - ✓ to learn to reflect ethically and to think critically and to carry these abilities into their professional life.

2. There should be offered periodically one or more courses devoted specifically to information ethics. Such courses should be taught by a qualified member of the faculty and be based on international literatures from a diversity of viewpoints.

3. Information ethics should be included in study and discussion across the library and information curriculum. It should be infused throughout the curriculum in such areas as management, young adult services, information literacy training, and information-technology related courses.

4. There should be ongoing engagement with information ethics, as challenging questions and issues need to be revisited through the lenses of individuals, institutions, and societies.

Note: This position statement draws on content produced by the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE) and on the structure of the Statement on History in Education for Library and Information Science by the Library History Round Table (LHRT) of the American Library Association (ALA).

¹ Issues encompass such areas as: intellectual freedom; intellectual property; open access; preservation; balance in collections; fair use; post 9-11 surveillance; cultural destruction; censorship; cognitive capitalism; imposed technologies; public access to government information; privatization; information rights; academic freedom; workplace speech; systemic racism; international relations; impermanent access to purchased electronic records; general agreements on trade and services (GATS) and trade related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS); serving the poor, homeless, and people living on fixed income; anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality; human security; national security policies; the global tightening of information and border controls; transborder data flow, and information poverty. Furthermore, relevant issues in print culture are challenged in digital culture.

² IFLA's Core Values: (1) the endorsement of the principles of freedom of access to information, ideas and works of imagination and freedom of expression embodied in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; (2) the belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being; (3) the conviction that delivery of high quality library and information services helps guarantee that access; and, (4) the commitment to enable all Members of the Federation to engage in, and benefit from, its activities without regard to citizenship, disability, ethnic origin, gender, geographical location, language, political philosophy, race or religion. <http://www.ifla.org/III/intro00.htm>

³ See also statements from the American Library Association, the Canadian Library Association, the American Society for Information Science, the Canadian Association for Information Science, and the United Nations General Assembly 2005 World Summit.

⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>