On Ethical Assessment: Locating and Applying the Core Values of Library and Information Science

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Introduction

In this paper, I provide a brief history of the development of values within Library and Information Studies (LIS), drawing on the literature of LIS, sociology, professionalism, value studies, and practical ethics. I begin by tracing the outlines of professional identity as a way of staking out a claim to values. I then turn to the definition and purpose of values, before enumerating the main values present in the LIS literature. Finally, I present an overview of the contemporary conversation and practical applications related to values, focusing on the American Library Association (ALA) Core Values of Librarianship.

Defining a profession

The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science describes librarianship as "the profession devoted to applying theory and technology to the creation, selection, organization, management, preservation, dissemination, and utilization of collections of information in all formats." Starting with this claim that library work is part of a profession, we can briefly examine the attributes that define a profession. To help illuminate these characteristics, we can look to the sociology literature. Greenwood outlines five basic attributes of a profession: systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and a culture.[1] The analysis presented in this paper will focus primarily on the ethical code as a professional attribute. Greenwood describes an ethical code as a guide to occupational behavior that carries altruistic overtones and a public service-orientation. Such an ethical code can be enforced formally by a professional association empowered to censure members, or informally via pressure exerted from one colleague to another. Larson also includes a code of ethics as one of the basic elements of a profession, along with a professional association that can speak for the members of the profession.[2] A code of ethics or other mode of ethical self-regulation continues to be an important professional marker into the 20th century.[3] Such values-based ethical behavior generates trust both among professionals internally and also between professionals and external parties such as clients or community members who receive professional services. A shared set of values is commonly included in these discussions of professional characteristics, and is seen as definitional for a profession.

The LIS literature includes its own discussions of professionalism, focusing on professional definitions and professional ethics. Hansson claims that "it is possible to argue that librarianship is one of the founding professions of civilisation."[4] The evidence brought to bear on this claim is a tradition of documenting ethical statements that render LIS activities as legitimate through history. The boundaries of the profession, in essence, are drawn by a self-defined standard of ethical behavior.[5] Hansson furthermore states "As a special niche in this research [of library ethics] we find the quest for a shared set of universal values for librarianship."[6] This niche represents a critical aspect of the identity of LIS practitioners. Sager articulates the motivation for this search for shared values: "Without common values, we are not a profession."[7] This idea is echoed by Diamond and Dragich: "Professionalism in librarianship should also be defined largely in terms of values."[8] This strain of thought connecting ethics with professional identity has a long history in LIS literature, as demonstrated by Tyler, who outlines a professional boundary according to two primary characteristics, both rooted in ethical theory and practice: first, the presence of a recognized code of ethics or statement of principles; second, the use of professional techniques that are

based less on routine action and more on the application and interpretation of principles.[9] This decades-long conversation reveals the definitional importance of ethics and values for the LIS profession.

Others, however, acknowledge the murkier boundaries of the LIS profession. Citing the sociology of libraries, Abbott, for instance, categorizes librarianship as a semi-profession because it lacks the full scope of professional attributes such as a licensing body and a fee-for-service model as in law or medicine.[10] For similar reasons, Hauptman describes librarianship as "anomalous" as a profession, since LIS professionals are neither purely consultants remunerated by individual clients nor purely scholars remunerated by professional organizing bodies.[11] The ethical code itself demonstrates the nuanced professional status of information workers: Winter notes that ethical codes per se are not of high significance to the LIS profession because neither sanctions nor legal ramifications can be applied by any governing body, as can occur with, for example, disbarment in the legal profession.[12] As opposed to formal "structurally professionalized groups" such as law or medicine, Winter describes LIS workers as being members of a "normatively professionalized group," for whom an ethical code is not a binding or enforceable document, but for whom "ethical issues" are still of great importance and are investigated within the profession with common theoretical and practical pursuits. As a further example of this in-between professional status, the ALA offers accreditation for graduate education in library and information science, but does not offer accreditation, licensing, or ethical enforcement for library institutions or individual professionals. Libraries are also structured on an indirect fee-for-service model, in which a librarian is not directly compensated by a patron or a student for their services, but rather through public financing such as taxes or private financing such as university tuition. For reasons such as these, the LIS profession does not fit perfectly into established professional models.

The nuanced status of the LIS profession has drawn continued attention and criticism. Drabinski notes, "In library discourses about professionalization, writers tend to begin with a discussion of what constitutes a profession and then describe the ways that librarianship does or does not 'measure up.'"[13] The attempt to measure up is related to status within society, and the higher compensation that corresponds to higher-status professions. This critique of library professionalism turns its attention inward through a lens of exclusion, examining why some library professionals such as credentialed librarians are paid more than other library workers such as front-line staff who may lack high-status credentials.[14] Still, a focus on the relationship between values and the profession is present through these discussions. In an expansive work on library ethics, Preer tells us, "I believe that a measure of a profession's development is its understanding of the values that govern its practice."[15] Moreover, Rubin articulates a "value model" of LIS professionalism, whereby "the professional foundation of LIS is not its knowledge or techniques, but its fundamental values. The significance of LIS lies not in mastery of sources, organizational skills, or technological competence, but in *why* LIS professionals perform the functions they do."[16] The *why* of LIS work—rooted in shared values—is recognized as an essential attribute of the LIS profession.

Having established a connection between a profession and a set of values, we can turn to the nuances of a value: definitions, purposes, and enumerations.

Defining a value

From the LIS literature we can identify an operational definition of a values. An early definition of a value comes from Yerkey, who states that values "provide premises for understanding and communication."[17] Rubin says that "values are strongly held beliefs that serve to guide our actions."[18] And Seminelli asserts that "the values of a profession are the beliefs of the group."[19] These beliefs, however, can shift and change over time, as professional values and their definitions are dependent on contextual factors such as political and social change.[20] Drabinski reminds us that a value is not fixed, but rather "continually produced and reproduced in the library discourse," and that professional values are

"ideas to be struggled over in both discourse and practice."[21] From these sources, we can derive a definition of a library value as a belief commonly held and continually refined by members of the LIS profession that guides professional conduct. With this definition in mind, we turn next to the evident purpose of a value in the context of LIS practice.

Defining the purpose of values

The LIS literature has demonstrated an interest in articulating the purpose of a value in the context of LIS practice. It will be helpful to first outline basic categories of values. Koehler describes three basic forms of values: *regulatory* values that explicitly detail acceptable or unacceptable behavioral norms; *aspirational* values that are defined by abstract goals and represent a professional ideal; and *educational* values that provide specific instruction, guidance, and explanation.[22] Koehler offers an interpretation of these value categories and their interrelation: "regulatory values prescribe or proscribe behavior, aspirational values provide targets to quest toward, and educational values describe the reasons for prescriptions and proscriptions but also the map toward desired ends." Within LIS, values appear primarily as *aspirational*, as there is no explicit regulatory body nor are there commonly agreed-upon instructions as to how to realize a value.

In further investigating the purpose of aspirational values, we can find additional nuance in the form of a chronological framing. The LIS literature features a notable focus on the "timescape" of librarianship and values. In this way, values function as a stabilizing element that situates LIS professionals in a past, present, and future of practice. We begin with Sager, who outlines four applications of values:

- To aid [LIS professionals] in addressing the problems that regularly confront them
- To improve the preparation of those who are entering the profession
- To better articulate to our public and users the important role that libraries and librarians play in society
- To build a bridge between the past and the future[23]

These four value applications are largely reflected in subsequent LIS literature, though with further readings as a reference, we can reconfigure these four applications around a chronological structure. Sager's first and second applications can be combined under a heading based around present time, called "professional ethics." Sager's third and fourth applications can be combined under a heading based around the past and the future, called "foundations and futures." I explicate further below.

Professional and practical ethics

The literature focuses primarily on the influence of values on current practice. This represents the principal purpose of articulating a set of values for LIS—as a ground for professional ethics. In this way, values guide everyday action and decision-making for LIS professionals. Fister, for example, cites "our traditional values" as a way to guide the "practical steps" needed to build a more just world that LIS professionals wish to inhabit.[24] Weissinger argues that professional values rationalize collective action.[25] Our professional values can provide a framework for ethical conduct, policies, and services.[26] Preer recognizes that practical library operations "all require not only professional competence but ethical judgment," and that professional values can help determine right or wrong conduct.[27] For Rubin, "'Ethical' considerations are those involved in deciding what is good or right in terms of the treatment of human beings, human actions and values."[28] This application of values presumes that people "want to do what is 'right.'"[29] LIS professionals have been shown to be committed to doing the 'right thing,' and see ethics as a key part of professional integrity.[30] For Gorman, "ethics are the application of values."[31] As professionals, "we must know, observe, and use ethical standards that embody our core values."[32] Values are additionally useful because they can also function as standards of goal-setting and assessment.[33] The

practical purpose of professional values is summarized by Peterson: "It is clear that ethical principles and professional values are indispensable both in defining long-range goals and objectives one hand, and in setting policies and determining procedures on the other."[34] The literature indicates that ethics and values are interrelated elements that guide professional conduct. Ethics is a system of determining the right thing to do; values are seen as a key component in this system by serving as the basis of deliberation and decision-making.[35]

In applying abstract and aspirational values to everyday scenarios, practical ethics is the main theoretical lens through which values are studied in the LIS literature. Practical ethics is defined as the application of ethical theory to real-world situations.[36] Practical ethics prompts the practitioner to ask how one should behave in particular situations, with all of the attendant contextual factors and conflicts. Notably, practical ethics is not rooted necessarily in an existing code or a moral system, but serves rather to prompt a process of principled reflection which leads to the clarification of assumptions, alternatives, and action.[37] In the context of LIS practice, practical ethics is seen as vital.[38] As Budd notes of LIS work: "professionals have to be cognizant of practical (or applied) ethics; that is, translating the theories of ethics into action."[39] For Buschman, Rosenzweig, and Harger, "the heart of a librarian's professionalism. . . . lies in putting these values into practice."[40] Diamond and Dragich similarly conclude: "For librarians, the heart of good practice lies in maintaining the core values of librarianship while adapting to continually changing information environments."[41] And for Rubin and Froehlich, "Understanding these values improves our ability to recognize ethical situations and to make ethical decisions and balance the competing organizational factors."[42] Shared values then become the operational principles of an ethical practice, and a standard to which LIS professionals can resolve dilemmas and measure professional success.

Foundations and futures: values as a stabilizing force through times of change

In addition to a focus on the influence of values on current practice, the library literature reveals an interest in examining the past and future of library values as a means of creating stability through time, especially in the face of change driven by technology or economic pressures. Enumerating and adhering to a set of professional values reflects a desire to root the unknown future of libraries in a knowable past. This concept of values as both the foundation and future of ethical LIS practice is a concept that most clearly emerged toward the turn of the millennium.[43] Hauptman observes that ethics "does not matter very much to librarians" and that only recently have "information specialists turned their attention to ethical matters."[44] The two decades leading up to the turn of the 21st century "have seen a dramatic increase in the number of articles dealing with ethics and librarianship."[45] This view is also advanced by Lindsey and Prentice: "Ethics . . . have not been burning professional issues during the several centuries of American librarianship. The question appears to have been irrelevant prior to 1900, and some would say that it has been of little relevance since."[46] Koehler furthermore observes that, "For most of its history, librarianship was none too concerned with its own ethics."[47] The LIS profession long demonstrated a cool approach to ethics—until a surge of technology-driven change at the end of the 20th century motivated a new professional engagement with values and ethics.

In Koehler's analysis of the history of LIS values and ethics, the computer and other networked technologies have redefined LIS practice, and have thus prompted a renewed focus on values as a means of achieving stability through change.[48] Several writers similarly drew attention to the rapid technological change of the coming century, arguing that the LIS profession was being fundamentally redefined and restructured through technological, political, and social change.[49] With information technologies promising to transform the information professions, ethics and values emerged as a burning issue in the closing years of the 20th century.

Crowe and Anthes describe the expected impact of technology on ethical practice: "Academic librarians face a new working environment engendered by the rapid growth of information and advances in information technology... Value conflicts and ethical dilemmas arise from the more active, substantive role required of the academic librarian by technological developments."[50] With the introduction of modern information technologies, the production of information dramatically increased in both amount and type, thus presenting new challenges for LIS professionals in terms of collection development, reference services, online and in-person access, and preservation.

Information technologies that developed toward the turn of the century promised a sea change to the information professions, and so the decade of the 1990s was a time of concern for many LIS professionals related to the future of their practice. The contemporary history of this era and the intensity of its concern is recounted by Sapp and Gilmour: "In librarianship, as indeed in almost all of modern society, the year 2000 was a numerically arbitrary but symbolically significant milestone... By 1995, librarians had been bombarded with a hailstorm of predictions about their future."[51] One such prediction comes from Abbott in a 1993 plenary lecture on the President's Program at the American Library Association: "To the profession as a whole, the central challenges lie in embracing the various information technologies of the future and the groups that service them."[52] This was a central question for LIS professionals at this time: how best to understand and evolve with the rapid change brought on by information technologies. In response, a renewed focus on professional values emerged as one path forward.

Through uncertain change, shared values are seen as a way to guide the profession into the future as the foundation of professional activities and services.[53] In response to technology-conditioned change, Hauptman, for example, appeals to professional values as a guide: "Understanding foundational structures and principles in addition to technological gadgetry and at least attempting to foresee where we are heading will help information workers to serve their constituencies in a productive, legal, and ethical manner."[54] The foundational purpose of values in the face of professional uncertainty was further reflected through major organizing bodies, as evidenced by the then-President of the ALA Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) identifying the theme of 1997–1998 as *Facing the Millennium: Values for the Electronic Information Age*, and asserting that "traditional values are still relevant in the electronic information age."[55]

While technology was viewed as the primary driver of change in the 1990s, other forces such as market pressures and business logic have been viewed as a threat to alter LIS practice.[56] Budget reductions and resource scarcity, for example, prompted difficult decisions related to services and collections.[57] LIS professionals in the 1990s did not have an agreed-upon set of shared values, and through their absence Bushing recognizes the steadying purpose of professional values, reiterating that there should not be "different ethical considerations in hard times such as these when values and principles are harder to identify and prioritize."[58] Hauptman reiterates the call for a more values-based practice: "Ethics matters because it allows us to implement our divergent values," and that "if we adhere to traditional values, we will not be seduced into believing that when institutions change so must our commitments."[59] In times of perceived change such as with technology in the 1990s and political forces of the 2010s, LIS professionals seek to reclaim and reaffirm values in order to reestablish norms of professional practice and identity. Indeed, then-President of ALA Barbara J. Ford conveyed this idea directly in her president's message of 1998:

> Ethical principles and professional values guide the work of librarians. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas now and to generations in the new millennium. In the emerging Digital Age, the identity and integrity of our profession are being challenged, and we must constantly reexamine our professional vision in order to seize every opportunity to put our values and ethics into practice.[60]

This call to a values-based practice is carried forward in 2014 by the then-president of the ALA's Reference and User Services Association, who—in an article titled "Continuity and Change, or, Will I Ever be Prepared for What Comes Next?"—remarks, "The enduring principles that are the foundation of the library reassure me that libraries have a future, no matter the changes around us."[61] Through periods of professional uncertainty or difficulty, values are seen as a grounding element for the LIS professional.

Reflecting the aspirational purpose of values, Froehlich says that values represent an abstract, ideal professional, and that the habitual actions of librarians and library users are the measure of realizing values.[62] In this way, articulating and adhering to values is a means of connecting the past and the future. This approach seeks to establish a recognizable LIS professional through a continuum of practice, what Gorman calls a "golden thread" that defines librarianship as a profession no matter where it is practiced.[63] Gorman's major contribution to this discussion is titled *Our Enduring Values Revisited: Librarianship in an Ever-Changing World*.[64] The language of "enduring values" seeks to confer to the profession a timelessness, the need for which is expressed in the subtitle language of an "ever-changing world." Sager, Baker, Burke, Hilyard, and Welles use additional metaphor to describe values as the "cement that holds the profession together," and "a global positioning system" that serve as "landmarks" directing LIS professions toward a shared future.[65] The quest for LIS values is motivated by a desire for stability, with a shared set of values functioning as a compass to current and future LIS professionals. Values then function as a way to maintain a tradition of library practice into a future that is uncertain and quickly changing.

In addition to signaling internally, professional values can also serve as a tool for coherent communication and engagement with those outside of the LIS profession. In this there is a secondary call to share our values to external stakeholders such as publics, campus entities, and the wider community so as to communicate our traditional and lasting value as a profession and to build trust.[66] Sager describes library values that can be used "to better articulate to our public and users the important role that libraries and librarians play in society."[67] This view is reinforced by Seminelli, who argues that LIS values themselves represent the value that libraries can bring to the community, and that librarians can focus on communicating values to our external communities as a bulwark against, for example, budget cuts.[68] Gorman explicitly ties a change-orientation with the internal and external signal function of values: "we need to examine and affirm the core values of our profession if we are to flourish in a time of change and maintain the ethic of service to individuals and society that distinguishes our profession."[69] Likewise, Sager et al. say by adhering to a set of traditional and aspirational values, LIS can gain a "greater understanding of our role in society, and society gains a clearer understanding of the importance of the library and information science profession."[70] And Foster and McMenemy state that, in addition to providing standards for professionals to adhere to, values are important for "communicat[ing] a set of values to the wider world."[71]

We have now established a sequence of points: LIS possesses the characteristics of a profession, notably a set of shared values; values are defined as commonly-held beliefs of members of a profession; values function to guide ethical action during everyday situations, and to connect past and future practice. Now let us turn to enumerating the values present in the LIS literature.

Enumerating the common values

Value studies in the 20th century: towards shared values

The earliest published set of values for the LIS profession is most commonly cited as Ranganthan's *Five Laws of Library Science*:

- Books Are For Use
- Every Reader His/Her Book
- Every Book Its Reader
- Save The Time Of The Reader
- The Library Is A Growing Organism[72]

Following Ranganathan, discussion of professional ethics and shared values appeared infrequently throughout the 20th century.[73] During this time a few LIS writers issued calls-to-action for other members of the profession to commit greater attention and resources toward value studies. *Library Journal* editor Eric Moon, for example, insisted that "the [LIS] profession does have ethical questions to grapple with and should find a way to formulate a position on some of them."[74] Moon offers a number of potential ethical questions for consideration, such as "automation and its potential for massive invasion of privacy." To resolve our professional dilemmas, Moon proposes a renewed definition of the LIS ethos, a fresh ethical code, or some other mechanism that can help LIS professionals better enact a values-based practice. Cohen furthermore tells LIS professionals that "we would deal better with our daily tasks if we thought a little more often and a little harder about the principles and purposes that underlie our work."[75] As evidenced in the literature, however, the LIS profession did not demonstrate a widespread interest in the underlying principles of the work for another two decades—not until the fundamental change of automation and information technologies more fully showed itself as the century drew to a close.

At this time, members of the library profession began to express concern that the rise of technology would alter the work of librarianship, with a renewed appeal to define and emphasize values as a stabilizing force. In a speech marking the 20th anniversary of OCLC, information school dean and ALA president F. William Summers captures this urge when he remarks on "the challenge that we face in trying to embrace technology without losing our basic values and how technology can alter those values."[76] Summers enumerates a set of professional values (individual autonomy, privacy, equality, freedom, and access) closing with, "it is those values which we must seek to preserve in the years to come." With this speech, Summers inaugurates the modern conversation around the enumeration of professional values. Summers' call is then picked up by Finks, who offers a "fresh look" at values by encouraging LIS professionals "to call [values] to consciousness and criticize and question them, to apply them to our problems and quandaries, to invoke them as we plan and make decisions, and ultimately to cherish and celebrate them."[77] Finks searches for values that are the "essence of our calling," and "inherent in librarianship," and that "originate in the nature of our mission." The literature at this time calls attention to a perceived need to articulate professional values in practice.[78]

The urgent question of values that are inherent, original, essential, or "core" then becomes fertile ground for debate throughout the following decade leading up to the turn of the millennium.[79] A prominent voice during this period is Gorman, who attempts to speak for the profession in a series of publications beginning in 1997 with *Our Singular Strengths*, in which Gorman offers 144 meditations on librarianship, including eight values and five updated laws to match Ranganathan's original set. Gorman's centerpiece contribution is *Our Enduring Values*, originally published in 2000 and updated in 2015. In this work, Gorman draws primarily on the work of Ranganathan,[80] Rothstein,[81] Shera,[82] and Finks[83] to propose eight professional values: stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, rationalism, literacy and learning, equity of access, privacy, and democracy. Gorman's enumeration has been recognized as the "most ambitious attempt to define a core set of values for the library profession since Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science."[84] And Gorman mostly hits the mark in his enumeration. Burd, for example, says that Gorman's values are "intrinsic to the profession."[85] Hauptman states that "Gorman's values are our values."[86] Follow-up research comparing Gorman's values to ethical codes and value statements across the world, however, shows that while there is some degree of broad consensus around a small core of values, Gorman's values reflect a particular American cultural perspective.[87] The small core of LIS values shared

across the globe include service, privacy, and equity of access, while Gorman's American sensibility uniquely includes rationalism, democracy, and literacy and learning.

At the same time that Gorman is developing a set of values, others are attempting a more empirical approach to determining LIS values. Koehler and Pemberton examined values statements and ethical codes from across the information professions.[88] In an attempt to deduce a model code that contains a core set of ethical principles for LIS, Koehler and Pemberton identify five values:

1. Whenever possible, place the needs of clients above other concerns.

2. Understand the roles of the information practitioner and strive to meet them with the greatest possible skill and competence.

3. Support the needs and interests of the profession and the professional association(s).

4. Insofar as they do not conflict with professional obligations, be sensitive and responsive to social responsibilities appropriate to the profession.

5. Be aware of and be responsive to the rights of users, employers, fellow practitioners, one's community, the larger society.

As an extension of this work, Koehler, Hurych, and Dole identify leading values for LIS professionals via a profession-wide survey.[89] Nearly all librarians identify patron service as their first order ethical principle. The leading values for academic librarians in the United States are service to the patron, preservation, and intellectual freedom. As a follow-up to this research, Koehler, Hurych, Dole, and Wall distributed a similar survey to a wider study population, reaching more geographical regions and types of LIS professional.[90] They found service again is the top-rated value for LIS professionals, followed most commonly by a combination of information literacy, intellectual freedom, equality, and preservation. Finally, Koehler concludes this line of inquiry by proposing the following six core values for the LIS profession: intellectual freedom, privacy, intellectual property, professional neutrality, preservation, equity of access.[91] Koehler cautions, however, that it is difficult to express a single set of values across the information professions. Similarly, Dole and Hurych observe that despite growing interest at this time in values studies, no standard definitions have emerged.[92] Nearly 20 years prior, Peterson notes the same lack of professional consensus: "librarianship, claiming status among the professions, has struggled over the years to clarify and arrive at a set of ethical principles."[93] This decades-long struggle to find shared principles is demonstrated by the wide range of values proposed during the period between Ranganathan's *Five Laws* in 1931 and the publication of the ALA Core Values Statement in 2004 (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1. LIS Values as represented in published literature 1931–2003, in descending order of commonality

Value	Number of Citations	Citations
Service	12	Ranganathan, 1931; Rothstein, 1968; Shera, 1970; Finks, 1989; Baker, 1992; Buschman et al., 1994; Hisle, 1998; Sager et al., 1999; Koehler and Pemberton, 2000; Koehler, Hurych, and Dole, 2000; Koehler, Hurych, Dole, and Wall, 2000; Gorman, 2000/2015

Value	Number of Citations	Citations
Access	9	Ranganathan, 1931; Finks, 1989; Summers, 1989; Rodger, 1998; Sager et al., 1999; Koehler, Hurych, and Dole, 2000; Koehler, Hurych, Dole, and Wall, 2000; Koehler, 2003; Gorman, 2000/2015
Intellectual Freedom	6	Rothstein, 1968; Baker, 1992; Buschman et al., 1994; Hisle, 1998; Koehler, 2003; Gorman, 2000/2015
Literacy and Learning	6	Rothstein, 1968; Shera, 1970; Finks, 1989; Rodger, 1998; Sager et al., 1999; Gorman, 2000/2015
Professionalism	5	Rothstein, 1968; Peterson, 1983; Baker, 1992; St. Clair, 1997; Koehler and Pemberton, 2000
Stewardship	5	Ranganathan, 1931; Shera, 1970; Finks, 1989; Buschman et al., 1994; Gorman, 2000/2015
Privacy	4	Summers, 1989; Gorman, 2000/2015; Froehlich, 2000; Koehler, 2003
Social Responsibility	4	Rubin, 1991; Buschman et al., 1994; Koehler and Pemberton, 2000; Rubin and Froehlich, 1996/2010
Individual Autonomy	4	Summers, 1989; Rubin, 1991; Baker, 1992; Rubin and Froehlich, 1996/2010
Democracy	3	Ranganathan, 1931; Finks, 1989; Gorman, 2000/2015
Preservation	3	Koehler, Hurych, and Dole, 2000; Koehler, Hurych, Dole, and Wall, 2000; Koehler, 2003
Justice	2	Baker, 1992; Johnson, 1994
People	2	Peterson, 1983; Rodger, 1998
The Public Good	2	Shera, 1970; Rubin, 1991
Truth	2	Finks, 1989; Rubin and Froehlich, 1996/2010
Scholarship	1	Shera, 1970
Honesty	1	Peterson, 1983
Equality	1	Summers, 1989
Survival	1	Rubin, 1991
Care	1	Baker, 1992

Value	Number of Citations	Citations
Integrity	1	St. Clair, 1997
Humaneness	1	St. Clair, 1997
Fairness	1	St. Clair, 1997
Excellence	1	St. Clair, 1997
Diversity	1	Sager et al., 1999
Passion	1	Sager et al., 1999
Minimal Well-Being	1	Froehlich, 2000
Protection from Injury	1	Froehlich, 2000
Recognition for One's Work	1	Froehlich, 2000
Tolerance	1	Rubin and Froehlich, 1996/2010
Beauty	1	Rubin and Froehlich, 1996/2010
Rights	1	Koehler and Pemberton, 2000
Intellectual Property	1	Koehler, 2003
Neutrality	1	Koehler, 2003
Rationalism	1	Gorman, 2000/2015

Figure 1. LIS values as represented in the literature, 1931–2003

LIS Values as represented in LIS literature, 1931-2003
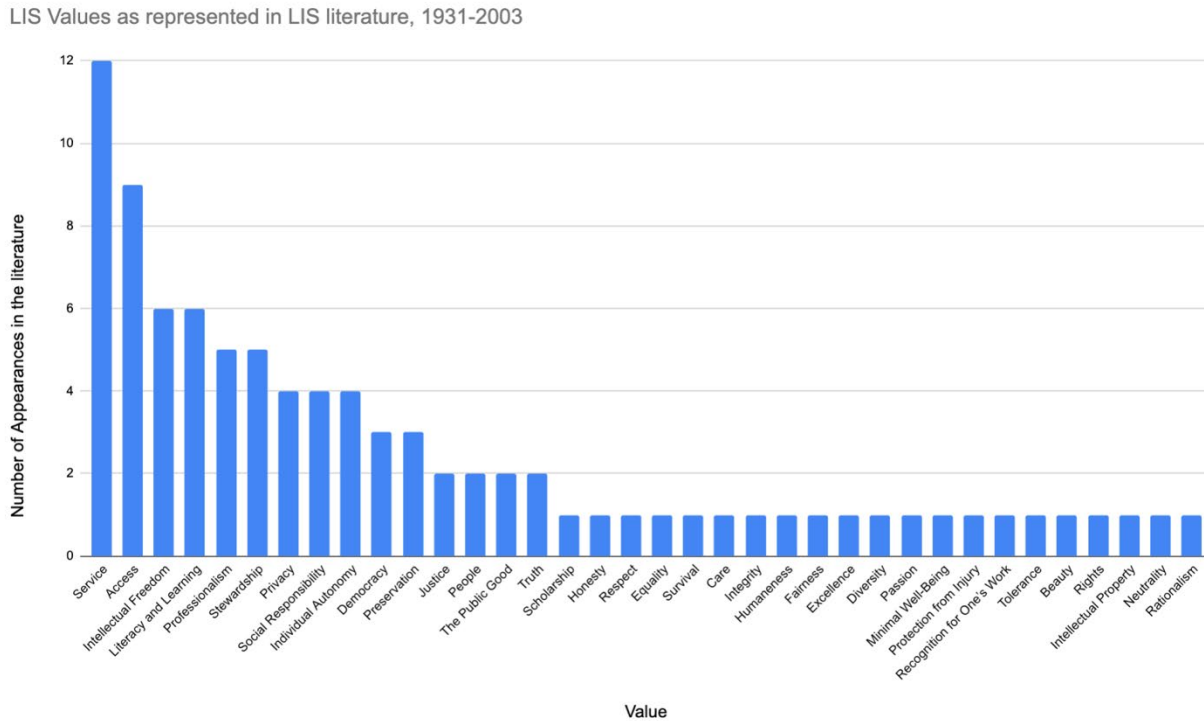
The literature reveals that 36 distinct values have been put forward for consideration as core values. The long tail of Figure 1 shows the lack of agreement among the LIS professional community as to a set of shared values. Relative agreement at the top of chart, however, suggests the potential for arriving at an agreed-upon set of "core" values. In arguing for the need to establish core professional values, Baker maintains that identifying profession-wide guidelines is not the work of an individual, but rather a task "best left to a broad-based committee of persons knowledgeable about library administration and about ethical principles."[94] The urgency of the time motivated the quest for shared values, and so it happened that the American Library Association entered the discussion with the goal of articulating a set of core values for the LIS community.

Value studies in the 21st century: ALA Core Values Task Force and Core Values Statement

As a response to the growing but inconclusive debate around core values, the question of professional values was elevated to a national level with the formation in 1999 of the ALA Core Values Task Force (CVTF1), which was followed in 2001 by the Second Task Force on Core Values (CVTF2). The work of these two committees ultimately produced a document published in 2004 and codified in 2005, "Core Values of Librarianship." This document represents a key inflection point for the practical and scholarly conversation around enumerating LIS core values. In publications that pre-date the Core Values statement, researchers debated the definitions, purposes, and enumerations of LIS professional values. Following its publication, the Core Values statement has become the primary point of reference in discussing and debating LIS professional values. It will be helpful to provide a brief historical background as to the development of the ALA Core Values Statement.

The effort to craft a core values statement for the LIS profession was led by Don Sager, who remarked in 2001, "One of the most contentious professional issues that arose during the past year was the question of whether the American Library Association should adopt a set of core values for the profession, and if so,

what those core values would be." Among the already-available, ethics-related documents, Sager finds nuance that justifies a stand-alone Core Values statement. He remarks of the following documents:

- The *Code of Ethics*, first published in 1939, describes LIS professional obligations and standards[95]
- The *Library Bill of Rights* first published in 1939, describes obligations to those served[96]
- The *Libraries: An American Value* statement, first published in 1999, describes LIS commitment to the community[97]

In contrast and complement to the above documents, a Core Values statement would "summarize the basic beliefs that the members of this profession hold in common." This need was derived from a recommendation that emerged in spring 1999 at the First Congress on Professional Education. At that meeting, members of ALA identified professional values as an area for further discussion, with a motivation of "defining librarianship for the new millennium."[98] Existing documents were not sufficient for this purpose: "although the Association has issued a number of documents that imply values for the profession (e.g., the code of ethics, the statement on intellectual freedom, the affirmation of libraries as an American value), there is no clear explication to which members can refer and through which decisions can be assessed; the resulting statement should be developed with partner groups or endorsed by them as the values of librarianship."[99] To lead the drafting of such a statement, Sager served as chair of the first Core Values Task Force. The CVTS1 was appointed "to clarify the core values (credo) of the profession."[100] The task force met in person in 1999 to draft a statement, then distributed a sequence of drafts through a variety of communication channels such as email lists and ALA bureaucratic structures. After receiving hundreds of comments, the task force released its fifth and final draft in 2000. The CVTS1 sought to create a jargon-free, comprehensive, and concise list of values.[101] The initial enumeration included the following values:

- Connection of people to ideas
- Assurance of free and open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works
- Commitment to literacy and learning
- Respect for the individuality and the diversity of all people
- Freedom for all people to form, to hold, and to express their own beliefs
- Preservation of the human record
- Excellence in professional service to our communities
- Formation of partnerships to advance these values

Upon release, this initial set of core values was not well received by the wider LIS community. The editor of *Library Journal* objected to the process and the result, saying that the CVTF1 applied a flawed committee-based approach to draft a statement containing "vague generalizations" that "weakly" convey how deeply and strongly the LIS community holds these values.[102] The process of the CVTF1 was seen as exclusionary and inconsistent with efforts to further diversify the profession.[103] In an email thread following the release of the draft statement, members of ALA governance and the wider community expressed concern, including the following responses to the statement: it is disappointing, headed in the wrong direction, does not comprehend current issues, is not worthy of endorsement, lacks significance, and adds nothing to the understanding of values.[104] Contributors to this email thread recognized that the ALA Core Values statement promised to become a "primary point of reference for a good long time in matters of much moment to the profession." The expected importance of the ALA Core Values statement accounts for the impassioned response from the community.

In response to the continued desire for a clarified Core Values statement, combined with the need for a better process and outcome, ALA convened the Second Core Values Task Force with Patricia Glass Schuman as chair just a few months after the work of the CVTF1 concluded.[105] Whereas the first committee worked for about one year, the second committee worked for 3 years, and employed a more inclusive process with intentional facilitation of profession-wide contributions.[106] The goal of the CVTF2 was to "help librarians and library school students discuss their understanding of, and commitment to, the values that librarianship represents" and that "contribute to our unique perspectives as librarians. [These values] represent essential and enduring beliefs that we uphold over time."[107] In summer 2003, the CVTF2 delivered a set of values, then adopted in summer 2004 and finally codified as an official ALA document in January 2005.[108] The Core Values Statement articulates the function of values: "The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values which define, inform, and guide our professional practice." The Core Values Statement produced by the CVTF2 is still in effect today. It enumerates the following values (descriptions are quoted directly from the Core Values Statement):

- Access: All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users.

- Confidentiality/Privacy: Protecting user privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship.

- Democracy: A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves.

- Diversity: We value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve.

- Education and Lifelong Learning: ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all.

- Intellectual Freedom: We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

- Preservation: The Association supports the preservation of information published in all media and formats. The association affirms that the preservation of information resources is central to libraries and librarianship.

- The Public Good: ALA reaffirms the following fundamental values of libraries in the context of discussing outsourcing and privatization of library services. These values include that libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies.

- Professionalism: The American Library Association supports the provision of library services by professionally qualified personnel who have been educated in graduate programs within institutions of higher education. It is of vital importance that there be professional education available to meet the social needs and goals of library services.

- Service: We provide the highest level of service to all library users. We 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.

- Social Responsibility: ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement.

These eleven values are still in effect today as an official statement of the ALA, with one additional modification. Reflecting the evolving nature of values, the Core Values Statement was revised in 2019 with the endorsement of thousands of LIS professionals to include "sustainability" as a newly added core value, with the following description quoted directly from the revised Core Values Statement:

- Sustainability: ALA is supporting the library community by showing its commitment to assisting in the development of sustainable libraries with the addition of sustainability as a core value of librarianship. This consists of practices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible and socially equitable. Libraries play an important and unique role in promoting community awareness about resilience, climate change and a sustainable future. They are also leading by example by taking steps to reduce their environmental footprint.

The additional value of sustainability will "inspire, cultivate and encourage" professional action, and will "guide decisions for the future of our society."[109] This language reinforces the concept of a value as an aspirational, time-oriented, and practice-based tool for directing the ethical conduct and future development of LIS professionals.

The core values in practice

Core values as a practical guide

Core values continues to be a topic of interest today for practitioners and researchers. Since 2004, attention has been focused on interpreting, critiquing, and operationalizing the ALA Core Values Statement. The Core Values "articulate professional beliefs" for LIS practitioners.[110] The Core Values would thus represent "the mission of our profession."[111] In terms of relevancy and purpose, the Core Values have been recognized to "fairly represent the values of LIS professionals in general and provide a sensible framework for how US professionals should conduct themselves."[112] Connaway and Faniel connect the concept of core values back to Ranganathan's original five laws, while also pointing to the continued purpose of professional values as a stabilizing element: "[Ranganathan's laws] establish a framework that keeps us focused on the core values of librarianship—values that have remained remarkably consistent across a time that has seen incredible change in information technology."[113]

In practice, the values are most often invoked when grounding and guiding the work of LIS professionals.[114] This includes professional activities such as outreach and advocacy,[115] social engagement and responsibility,[116] LIS education,[117] information literacy,[118] hiring,[119] disability and access,[120] cataloging and classification,[121] leadership,[122] technology and web development,[123] digital collections and infrastructures,[124] intellectual freedom,[125] labor issues,[126] professional identities,[127] and library administration.[128] Reflecting both the aspirational nature and also the practical application of

values, Schroeder and Hollister observe that with "scores of articles devoted to [the values] . . . it is heartening that librarians, as a professional group, created and abide by the Core Values of Librarianship statement."[129]

Despite the evident usefulness of the Core Values, some have noted their limitations. The Core Values have been seen as overly idealized or too aspirational, to a point that "erases power relations, obfuscates social inequalities, and denies history."[130] The Core Values are also not necessarily accepted as essential. This is evident in studies that attempt to locate a different set of values more relevant for specific areas of practice, such as instruction.[131] In reaching for a more transformative LIS practice, Kumbier and Starkey cast a critical eye on the pragmatism of the Core Values statement, noting that the values reflect already-extant, dominant commitments and functions of librarianship in a way that forecloses other possible avenues for theory and practice.[132]

The main current of conversation regarding professional values and the ALA Core Values statement is characterized by a balance of practical application and contemplative self-reflection. Berg and Jacobs see the Core Values as an important point of reference in developing practices and policies through collaborative dialogue: "the ALA Core Values are reflective of librarians' professional strengths and librarianship's possibilities and thus are a generative place from which to start conversations."[133] Continual examination is necessary, say Berg and Jacobs, because the Core Values—while powerful and inspiring proclamations—are not workable plans of action, and so a certain amount of translation is required to operationalize the ideas expressed within the Core Values statement. Continual reexamination, reinterpretation, and defense of core values is necessary due to ever-shifting conditions of the wider world.[134] And Budd tells us 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."[135] Despite these calls for ethical self-examination, it has been noted that LIS has not followed through with action: "It seems that librarians and other information professionals are falling behind in the field of ethics, in that there is little critical reflection on the customs and traditions (morals) of our profession in light of the changes in the world around us."[136]

Core values and vocational awe

The emerging concept of "vocational awe" adds a useful critical dimension to the conversation around core values. The theory of vocational awe presents three main points of critique—that LIS values are canonized, idealized, and weaponized. I briefly discuss these three areas below.

First introduced by Ettarh, vocational awe is "the idea that libraries as institutions are inherently good. It assumes that some or all core aspects of the profession are beyond critique, and it, in turn, underpins many librarians' sense of identity and emotional investment in the profession."[137] One of the core aspects of the profession is core values. Vocational awe theorizes that LIS is seen as a sacred calling, and that its values are canonical and thus incontestable. The core value of access, Ettarh points out, has not been achieved equally in American society, as Black citizens were systematically denied access to libraries for much of the 20th century. When LIS values are positioned as an unquestionable canon, Ettarh argues that such a positioning prevents the profession from examining and addressing its historical and contemporary flaws, including practices that perpetuate race- and gender-based oppressions. Quoting Ettarh: "in fact, each value on which librarianship prides itself is inequitably distributed amongst society."[138]

Vocational awe further shows that LIS values represent a hegemonic ideal of practice that excludes those who object to or expand beyond the core set. Just as certain values are included in the canon, so are others excluded. LIS Core Values reflect a Western, enlightenment perspective.[139] Rather than expressing universal truths from a neutral point of view, the LIS Core Values contain inherent cultural biases that over time have been idealized into a dominant norm of behavior. This normative behavior can exclude

academic librarians of historically minoritized identities, resulting in negative effects for those who do not conform to the ideal.[140] Similarly, Moeller has applied vocation awe in the context of disability studies, arguing that "the concept of 'vocational awe' within librarianship, like professionalism, is also based upon unacknowledged expectations of normative bodies and minds and thus reinforces this process of displacing those who do not represent the 'ideal' professional."[141]

When values are canonized and idealized, they can then become weaponized against dissenting views that seek to change or challenge dominant modes of librarianship. The analysis presented above shows service to be the leading value in LIS. And indeed service may be said to be the dominant mode of LIS work, even to the detriment of LIS workers themselves. Ettarh describes the effect of overwork and undercompensation, as the library professional is compensated not in material goods or a healthy workplace, but rather the good feelings of working in a profession that espouses good values and delivers good service.[142] Notably, LIS professionals are compelled into self-sacrificial working conditions in order to uphold the service value, even in cases involving personal health.[143] When service is upheld as the highest priority—taking precedence over healthy relationship-building or workplace democracy— negative impacts can be seen in staff retention, morale, and productivity.[144] Service first becomes a canonized and irreproachable value, then its expression is idealized through a normative practice of self-sacrifice, and finally those who uphold the value may face diminished personal health while those who challenge the value may face professional exclusion. Through the lens of vocational awe, Gorman's "golden thread" of professional continuity begins to look more like the binding tie of professional conformity.

Taken together, the canonization, idealization, and weaponization of the Core Values complicates the Core Values as potential pathways for professional and societal growth. In this way, Ettarh's theory of vocational awe illuminates the landscape of values-in-conflict. Professional commitments to service, for example, can lead to trade-offs with other values, as when user privacy is affected by tracking software that promises to improve library services. In a case such as this, privacy and intellectual freedom are in conflict with service—but vocational awe blocks the practitioner from considering the harmful implications of this conflict, because a commitment to the service value is seen as inherently good and therefore not in need of critical examination.

Future Directions

Value studies and professional ethics are fertile ground for continued inquiry. The work discussed in this paper is one contribution to the growing interest in this area, and many additional research questions are apparent, including: How does the discussion of different values shift over time? What is the relationship between professional values and the cultural identity of the practitioner? How is each value—such as beauty—understood to operate in practice? How do different value statements interrelate and align, as when a library practitioner is able to refer to value statements produced by the library, the university, and the ALA? Moving further, an additional possible path forward involves applying a lens of practical ethics to the pressures and conflicts that influence the work of LIS professionals and assessment practitioners. Research here might examine common ethical dilemmas that assessment practitioners encounter, along with a study of the ethical responses and actions that attempt to resolve those dilemmas.

Conclusion

Library and Information Studies is recognized as a semi-profession. Within that context, professional values serve as commonly-held beliefs about the profession that guide practitioners towards ethical and consistent professional conduct. Values serve as the underlying principles that inform a practical ethics for the LIS profession. After much debate in the 1990s as to the enumeration of specific values, the American Library Association in 2005 codified a set of professional values that reflect the history and

ongoing development of LIS practice. These values include: Access, Confidentiality/Privacy, Democracy, Diversity, Education and Lifelong Learning, Intellectual Freedom, The Public Good, Preservation, Professionalism, Service, Social Responsibility, and Sustainability. Since that time, the Core Values statement has been a primary point of reference in discussing and invoking LIS professional values, often with the focal point of analyzing professional practice vis-à-vis one or more values. The ALA Core Values, however, have also been criticized as overly idealistic, too aspirational, excessively pragmatic, or contributing to effects of vocational awe. Either as a guiding light or as point of criticism, the Core Values are an important point of reference in understanding ethical practice in LIS. This area is fertile ground for further inquiry. Future research in this area can provide greater dimension to the topic of professional values and ethics.

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