

From the President

Janet Freeman, President

As I thought about writing this column and the subject of this issue, I decided it would be helpful to look up the words "information" and "ethics" in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1961).

information: something received or obtained through informing as knowledge communicated by others or obtained from investigation, study, or instruction

ethics: the discipline dealing with what is good and bad or right and wrong or with moral duty and obligation

In the *Encyclopedia of Computer Science and Engineering*, second edition (New York: Van Nostrand, 1983), information is defined as "data which is used in decision making."

Taken together, the two words "information ethics" more than double their meaning, especially when considered in the context of libraries and information services. The articles in this *North Carolina Libraries* will stimulate your thinking about issues with more urgency than perhaps you have considered them in the past.

The world of information, as we all know, is changing rapidly and dramatically. Of necessity, the way we think about information and the way we deal with information **must change**. Preschoolers enter kindergarten having been exposed to more information than most of us baby boomers saw before we were adolescents. The "average" public library patron may rightfully expect

access to technical or specialized information formerly available only to the scientific community.

So while we are considering definitions, let's look at the term "paradigm shift". In his videotape *The Business of Paradigms*, futurist Joel Arthur Barker defines "paradigm" as any set of rules and regulations which establishes boundaries. These rules tell us how to be successful by solving problems within these boundaries.

Barker says that a paradigm shift is a new way of thinking about old problems. It usually occurs when the established "rules of the game" do not provide effective solutions to our problems.

Paradigm shift is one of those terms I thought I understood but did not think had anything to do with me. It was for the consideration of philosophers, historians and social scientists. I was wrong. I believe that we, as library and information specialists, are living in the midst of a paradigm shift in our field. Think about it.

During my career I have experienced a change (a shift, if you will) in the way bibliographic information is made available. We have moved from using catalog cards written in "library hand" to magnetic tape loaded on an online system. (And no, I am not 110 years old.) The ways we can search these bibliographic records are limited only by our imaginations. Change is coming increasingly quickly, and we must be prepared to deal with it creatively and enthusiastically.

We must also struggle with the impli-

cations of the ways information is made available ... or not made available. Who owns information? How and by whom is it organized? Who has access to it?

Read on. Consider the issues, and apply them to your own life, work, and relationships. I believe you will be challenged by the contents of this issue.

The work of the North Carolina Library Association goes on, in small steps and in giant leaps. Many of you are involved in planning for the 1993 Biennial Conference to be held October 19-22 at the Benton Convention Center in Winston-Salem. This will be our fiftieth conference and from all indications, it will be a gala affair.

In a time of economic difficulty, I hope that you will make it your personal priority to attend the conference. It is an excellent opportunity to hear nationally known speakers, participate in outstanding events, visit vendor booths, and enjoy meeting new and old friends from across the state.

Also you have received volume 1, number 1 of *NCLA NEWS*, the newsletter of our Association. It will come to you quarterly and contain brief announcements of up-coming events, news items, and interesting information about NCLA. A quick scan of it gives you an excellent overview of the activities and news of the North Carolina Library Association. This is yet another means the NCLA Executive Board is using to communicate with you more effectively.

Errata . . .

NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES regrets the omission of the following information in the "About the Authors" feature of the "Preservation of Popular Culture" issue, Winter 1992:

Linda P. Gross

Education: B.A. University of Pennsylvania; M.A. University of Pennsylvania; M.S.L.S. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Position: Head of Technical Services, Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center (Nashville).

Lula Avent

Education: B.A. North Carolina Central University; M.L.S. North Carolina Central University.

Position: Cataloger, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Errors are regretted for the following biographies:

Diane Kessler: M.S.L.S. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Thomas Henricks: Professor and Chair, Dept. of Sociology, Elon College.

North Carolina Library Association Awards

The 1992-93 Membership Committee requests your recommendations for persons you consider worthy to receive the Honorary Membership Award, the Life Membership Award and the North Carolina Distinguished Service Award. Suggestions should be accompanied by a biographical sketch, including contributions to libraries or librarianship. These suggestions should be sent to the Committee Chairperson by June 14, 1993.

The NCLA by-laws provide for the Membership Committee to seek suggestions from all members and to recommend names for these honors to the Executive Board or to the conference.

Criteria for selection are as follows:

Honorary Memberships may be given to non-librarians in the state who have rendered important services to the library interests of North Carolina. Honorary memberships should be given at a time considered appropriate in relation to the contribution made.

Life Memberships may be given to librarians who have served as members of the North Carolina Library Association and who have made noteworthy contributions to librarianship in the state. These memberships are limited to librarians who have retired.

The Distinguished Service Award may be given to a professional librarian or in memory of a deceased professional librarian. Criteria include distinguished professional library services to North Carolina, significant service or other professional contributions provided during either a short or long span of time, and service resulting in a regional or national impact on librarianship in general.

Contributions of all groups should have been beyond the local level.

Please send your recommendations to:

Helen Tugwell, Co-Chair
Membership Committee
Guilford County Schools
120 Franklin Blvd.
Greensboro, NC 27401

Over to You . . .

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Harry Tuchmayer's "Counter Point" column in the Fall, 1992 issue makes a great deal of sense. I wholeheartedly agree with him that telecommunications isn't solving the problem of information access in libraries.

The availability of electronic indexes and CD-ROMs is no reason to abandon traditional printed indexes which have proved useful in the past e.g., *Reader's Guide*, *Social Sciences Index*, and *Business Periodicals Index*. For a patron seeking citations to only two or three articles on abortion, child abuse, or AIDS, a printed index is probably a better choice than an electronic one.

Contemporary librarians should seek to keep abreast of the latest technology affecting libraries, but they should by no means neglect traditional reference tools simply because they come in a printed format. Microform has been used in libraries for decades, but it has not replaced the printed page and is not likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

Sincerely yours,
Alva Stewart
Reference Librarian
NC A. & T. University

Nominees Sought for Technical Services Awards

The Executive Committee of the Resources and Technical Services Section is seeking the names of promising and practicing librarians for its Student and Significant Contribution Awards. The two awards will be presented during the RTSS business meeting at the NCLA Biennial Conference.

The Student Award is open to students actively enrolled in library education in North Carolina as of July 1, 1993. Recent graduates who are North Carolina librarians are also eligible. Nominees must show a potential for contributing to technical services and must intend to pursue a technical services career. Self-nomination is permissible.

The Significant Contribution Award is open to North Carolina librarians who have made an important contribution in technical services, either to their institutions or to the profession in general. At least part of the nominees' current work must involve an aspect of technical services. Applicants must be nominated by a current member of NCLA.

Nomination deadline for both awards is August 31, 1993.

To submit nominations for either award, please contact:
Michael Ingram, Chair, RTSS Executive Committee
Smith Library, High Point University
University Station, Montlieu Ave.
High Point, NC 27262

STATEMENT ON PROFESSIONAL ETHICS, 1981

Introduction

Since 1939, the American Library Association has recognized the importance of codifying and making known to the public and the profession the principles which guide librarians in action. This latest revision of the CODE OF ETHICS reflects changes in the nature of the profession and in its social and institutional environment. It should be revised and augmented as necessary.

Librarians significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, librarians are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

Librarians are dependent upon one another for the bibliographical resources that enable us to provide information services, and have obligations for maintaining the highest level of personal integrity and competence.

Code of Ethics

- I. Librarians must provide the highest level of service through appropriate and usefully organized collections, fair and equitable circulation and service policies, and skillful, accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests for assistance.
- II. Librarians must resist all efforts by groups or individuals to censor library materials.
- III. Librarians must protect each user's right to privacy with respect to information sought or received, and materials consulted, borrowed, or acquired.
- IV. Librarians must adhere to the principles of due process and equality of opportunity in peer relationships and personnel actions.
- V. Librarians must distinguish clearly in their actions and statements between their personal philosophies and attitudes and those of an institution or professional body.
- VI. Librarians must avoid situations in which personal interests might be served or financial benefits gained at the expense of library users, colleagues, or the employing institution.

Question: *Why information ethics?*

Answer: *Because librarians possess valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences badly needed in a world of people who must come to terms with the power of information in their lives.*

As librarians, we have a head start. We know that free access to information preserves democratic ideas, that information resources must be managed with care, and that the human spirit depends upon remembering the past, sharing the present in community, and dreaming about the future.

In this issue which focuses on various ethical issues faced by librarians and other information professionals, the notion of responsibility unifies the whole. As professionals, we are responsible to those we serve and to each other. As citizens, we are committed to using our special knowledge for the good of society. And as members of the worldwide human family, we take responsibility to preserve and protect human dignity.

In the past twenty or more years, rapid innovation in information technologies has brought many changes in libraries, in business, government, education, and in our personal lives. New problems and variations of old ones now confront both information professionals and the public. Who will own, control, and have access to vital information? How will an individual's privacy be balanced against a societal need to have, for example, personal health information? Will privacy become obsolete?

Will ordinary citizens have access to expensive databases or will fees exclude many who need or want the services these resources could provide?

Foreword ...

by Martha M. Smith,
Guest Editor

Will the library be able to afford these services, or will those who have funds gain access at home and bypass the library altogether? Will librarians forsake neutrality and take part in supporting universal access which, like telephone service in the beginning, was limited to those who could pay large fees.

How will information policy be shaped at the local, national, and international levels? Will librarians and their professional organizations provide expert advice and testimony? Who will champion the rights of the information consumer? Who will defend public libraries and public access to information?

As information issues have outgrown the boundaries of professional ethics, many have pondered the problems. In the first article, I have sketched the background for information ethics. Like medical ethics in the fifties and sixties and environmental ethics in the seventies and eighties, information ethics is growing out of a critical need for society to answer very real and very troublesome problems.

For this issue, North Carolina's Mr. Intellectual Freedom, Gene Lanier, has taken off that cap temporarily in order to report on his years as a member of the ALA Committee on Professional Ethics. In any organization, codes of ethics are difficult to articulate, but most recently ALA has struggled with how to address the impact of new technologies on the Code. There are so many potential issues. For example, should the charging of fees for database searching be an ethical issue for reference librarians and budget administrators?

Characterizing the reference desk as on the "front-lines of the information battlefield," Susan Rathbun, a student in the ILS program at UNC-CH, describes many of the practical problems which the Code addresses. She asks how the Code can be used effectively when librarians face the conflicting pulls of intellectual freedom and social responsibility. Not only are there ethical problems, but legal ones as well. Would it, therefore, be appropriate for librarians to seek "librarian-client privilege" status?

Also exploring legal issues, Jennifer McLean and Lee Finks report on a survey of North Carolina public reference librarians. Through a questionnaire, librarians were asked to evaluate the appropriateness of answers to various legal questions. The survey found librarians "confused and divided on the proper approaches to answering legal questions." The research concluded that this issue needs further discussion and is an important issue for further research. Are librarians sometimes taking on more responsibility than they should and possibly practicing law without a license?

"Preserving our nation's documentary heritage" is the area of critical responsibility addressed by Don Lennon's article on the role of the archivist. He reviews the beginnings and recent refining of the archivists' code of ethics.

In answer to questions posed by the editor, four representatives of our programs in library and information science reflect on the role of ethics in the education of new professionals as well as in continuing education. Dr. Larry Auld; Dr. Barbara Moran; Dr. Kitty Smith, Dr. James Carmichael, and Dr. Beatrice Kovaks; and Dr. Ben Speller conclude that the challenges today are greater largely because the scope of the field has expanded and the work settings are so much more diverse than they were just a few years ago.

Also in this issue is my favorite teaching tool, "The Ethics Quiz." Designed to be used with first semester Information and Library Science students, this somewhat humorous, somewhat maddening exercise has provoked debate, discontent, and distress whenever it has been used. The most frequent comment I get is, "There are no right answers." Thus, I consider it a success. With each question is an indication if the issue is covered in the ALA Code of Ethics or in the Library Bill of Rights. Use it in your staff meetings and let me know what happens. Almost every situation comes from the library literature or from personal experiences of mine or of anonymous colleagues. The quiz is slanted toward traditional library settings, so I would appreciate examples from the information or computer science arena.

Finally, this month's Point/Counterpoint is on the ALA Code. Lee Finks and Harry Tuchmayer argue the pros and cons. They illustrate that codes have their place as long as they are part of the discussion and not the only authority.

As Rafael Capurro explains in describing the work of Michael Foucault on ethics in a technological society, rule-based ethics are still necessary but they should be accompanied by self-based ethics. Self-based ethics remind us that it is our responsibility to see that information and information technologies enhance choices and enlarge our human potential to shape individual lives. The challenge is no less than making sure that data is transformed into useful information which can be used by persons to create the knowledge and understanding they need to gain wisdom about themselves and their world.

