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Final Essay #1

When I contemplate the past decade of my career working in libraries, both public and academic, combined with my current professional responsibilities and course of study, the two ALA core values that speak to my passions are preservation and access. As with all of the ALA core values, they are interrelated; one impacts the other, informs the next, and provides a framework of ethics for the profession. However, the values are aspirational. The power lies within the interpretations placed on them by us, the purveyors of librarianship. My experiences in community archival work over the past four years have challenged my notions on societal equity and power distribution in ways that I was not expecting. Graduate school is providing me with the theoretical underpinnings behind these growing realizations, arming me with a greater understanding of how I can form my interpretations of the core values and contribute impactfully to preservation and access for my community and beyond.

Archives hold power. All power is privileged. The Archive decides what to preserve, what is "important." However, as Schwartz and Cook (2002) posit, when power is recognized, it can be questioned, and therefore be made accountable. Accountability is a good thing. We must strive to address the exclusions that lead to distortions, omissions, erasures, and silences in archival and historical records. I see access as one of the first steps to address the issue. Foster's (2016) discussion on higher learning reexamining their efforts in building a more inclusive culture with surrounding communities resonated with me, as did the statement that it is "imperative for librarians and archivist to be less passive and more engaged" (p. 353). Greater access can take the form of participatory archiving, which brings the community into the appraisal process of materials, shifting the power of description to those with the lived experience and vested interest. This ties into Sheffield's (2016) declaration on the importance of building collections representative of the diversity of society, and that "social justice work underscores the evidential value of records in our care" (p. 573).

Additionally, what constitutes preservation must be continually examined. As in Sheffield's (2016) discussion of Ferguson's insistence that acquiring a minority collection into an

archive can represent an institution's "progressive credentials," but it does not challenge the institution's preexisting ingrained power structures (p. 580). Those power structures are the root cause of archival privileging that led to the historical exclusion of minority collections in the first place. This can be addressed through participatory archiving, which relies on digitization and empowering a community to preserve their history themselves. With the community's permission, the archive may retain a digital surrogate of the materials to provide greater access through an accessible platform. Through experience, I understand the import of Sheffield's sentiment about stewardship not implying institutional custody but ensuring the community can protect their records with the assistance of institutional resources and expertise (p. 581). Archival power can be realigned through participatory practices, generating greater access and preservation by building inclusive communal relationships, relinquishing description authority to the community, and being stewards rather than collectors of collections.

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Final Essay #2

       The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines neutrality as the quality or state of not supporting either side in an argument, fight, war, etc.: the quality or state of being neutral. Neutrality has been long touted as a tenant of librarianship from its inception. Augst (2007), referencing Geller, posits that the "norm of neutrality" in professional librarianship functioned as a means to justify protection for the library from partisan control (p. 152). However, as Lankes (2015) alludes, librarianship's claim of neutrality is an illusion. Libraries, as social institutions, have always been shaped by social and political influences. You cannot deny the ties that bind libraries to American history, segregation, and discrimination. Librarians must confront an uncomfortable history to understand their total lack of neutrality. Libraries, as social institutions, are grounded in the community they serve; and the fact of the matter is, no community is neutral.

       Libraries cannot deny their implicit culpability in perpetuating the social problems of America in the late-19th through the mid-20th centuries. As MacCann (1989) discusses, the history of American libraries evidences unequal library service across demographics, illustrating how this was carried out with "conscious intent" and how librarians are responsible for the "problematization" of their domain (p. 97). The lack of commitment from the American Library Association (ALA) to take a forcible stance against the desegregation of libraries after *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954 is inexcusable. Poole (2018) calls attention to how this stance trickled down into state library associations, with the profession hiding behind the excuse of gradualism. One could argue that a claim of neutrality is just the perpetuation of the status quo, which in this case, was an excuse for not admitting to being on a particular side of a social problem. The "separate but equal" inequality that the country formalized post-Civil War shaped library practices, and librarianship's participation eliminated any claim to neutrality. Despite gains made over the past 60 years, librarianship remains a predominantly white profession. According to the ALA (2012), their membership is 88.7% white. On the surface, this does not

support the self-expressed commitment to the core value of diversity or allow for much space to claim neutrality in social issues.

As Lankes hypothesizes, since neutrality is an illusion, libraries need to stop hiding behind "a false flag of neutrality" (p. 154). We must utilize the trust our communities place in us to take a stand on issues. We must advocate building a better community through active engagement with communities on social and political issues. Thankfully, advocacy has become a norm amongst the profession, strengthened by the addition of social responsibility to the ALA core values in 2004. It is imperative that librarians engage with social and political issues, much as Matz (2008) outlines in the librarian-led fight against the USA PATRIOT Act. Libraries can foster change. However, this can only be achieved after dropping the neutrality charade and tackling the issues that, not only affect our communities but ourselves as well.

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Final Essay #3

       As we have discussed throughout the semester, librarianship is a multi-faceted professional field concerned with knowledge creation. This fact is reflected in the American Library Association's Core Values of Librarianship, as we strive to provide access to a diversity of informational sources, equally and equitably, to all members of the communities we serve. With time, this task has become increasingly complicated, and as Wiegand (1989) points out, this has resulted in successes and failures throughout librarianship's development. No longer are libraries a singular place for the storage of information for a specific group of end-users. The digital turn and the resulting impact on information access have required the Library Information Science (LIS) field to focus on information within varied social and cultural contexts, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality (Sweeny & Estabrook, 2017). These social and cultural considerations have implications for LIS as Sweeny & Estabrook posit, they require the profession to remain flexible "to meet the changing role of information in society" (p. 2768).

       This flexibility is paramount to libraries staying relevant in the exponentially increasing complex information landscape. To serve the diverse communities in which every institution is now globally interwoven, Lankes (2015) states that libraries must evolve with their environments and be amendable to identifying and utilizing tools created outside of librarianship. Librarianship is, as Lankes suggests, measured by *why* we perform our mission not *how* (p. 15). The tools utilized by librarians to facilitate knowledge management and creation have been ever-changing. These tools have evolved to better navigate the technological and theoretical advancements in retrieving information and its representation. Information Science, the "I" & "S" in LIS, is focused on the aforementioned representation and retrieval of information; how to understand its function, its uses, and how to design systems that foster accessibility and usability.

       Here lies the challenge posed in the question prompt, what is the role of information services in regard to the needs of diverse communities in a global society? Lankes states that to

bring diverse groups together, we must organize information in a way that makes sense to our local communities, but also facilitates global shareability (p. 80). However, organizing information cannot be achieved within a universally understood method. Considerations that must be taken into account include the understanding that terminologies are affected by differing languages and ethnic groups and different learning styles exist and are influenced by their cultural contexts. This is why Sweeny & Estabrook claim that LIS is "user-focused," that librarians must consider the "social, technical, and cultural systems that structure recorded knowledge" during the process of facilitating access and useability to the communities who need it (p.2768). Librarianship must rely on the inclusion of other disciplines to inform these considerations, bringing cultural, ethnic, and gender studies perspectives into our practice. I believe that the role of the librarian in the global environment will be the continuation of examining the considerations that affect information cultures, behaviors, and uses. By using the power of communication and conversation, libraries will continue to better facilitate access to information, fostering knowledge creation.

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Final Reflection

This course has been engaging, presenting a wide range of historical and contemporary concepts that have shaped and affected librarianship. It is hard to choose just one on which to focus, but I will devote this short reflection to the historical foundations of librarianship. While reading many of the articles, I found myself having two thoughts: being surprised that I had not given much contemplation to the foundations of libraries, their troubled past, and how nuanced and layered these historical issues were, and are as they still play out today. I am always thankful when presented with the opportunity to pause, reconsider, and question the programmed assumptions that my privilege provides me. Wiegand's (1989) discussion on the ideology of reading, what is "good" or "bad" reading, and how it shapes authority in a given society was striking. Even though I was very aware of the stereotypical librarian image, Garrison's (1972) article on the feminization of the profession illuminated the gender discriminating intent behind the cliché. Learning of the ever-present dualities found in the history of libraries, such as the exploitation of women in the profession presented as an example of the liberal freedoms of America, should not have surprised me, but still, the plethora presented was, none the less, surprising. MacCann's (1989) discussion of the conscious intent in creating the inequalities within libraries was illuminative. Even though I was well aware of the inequality faced by Blacks regarding access, the lengths that the profession and its organizations went to in sustaining Black's underclass status was surprising. Additionally, MacCann's description of the immigrant experience in Americanization by libraries was a narrative I had not previously considered. These readings inspired me to investigate Black female librarianship history through my reading responses. Additionally, I have begun reading Cheryl Knott's *Not Free, Not for All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* to learn more fully this chapter of American librarianship.

Moving forward, through the SLIS program, with an Archival Studies concentration, and continuing my community archival and curatorial work in my professional career, I will build upon the concepts I was able to digest in this course. Being dedicated to participatory practices

in archives, the concepts learned will make me a stronger advocate for traditionally

marginalized communities by better understanding the roles the organization I represent has

played in that marginalization. This will help me dismantle power structures to allow a

paradigm shift in engagements with the communities I am striving to serve.

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