

# MLIS 7650 Information and Ethics

Summer 2015

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## Course Approach:

I believe our professional ethics constantly evolve. We will focus on three areas where I believe changes have occurred. For this course, we address three general areas: stewardship and service, freedom of expression and censorship, and new ethical concerns of a more recent etiology.

I argue that stewardship has long been the purpose of the library and librarian. By the 1930s and under the leadership of SR Ranganathan and John Cotton Dana, service came to replace or compete with stewardship. Second, we explore two challenges to freedom of expression that have a basis in religious, ethical, cultural, and moral values. These are religious issues and materials deemed harmful to children. And third, new technologies and new cultural values as well as the globalization of the discipline, new ethical concerns have emerged. Some of these new concerns have their roots in older standards. Others are new.

In the last fifty years, a number of works have been challenged as sacrilegious. These include *The Last Temptation of Christ* by Nikos Kazantzakis. The Kazantzakis work suggested both the humanity and the human fallibility of Jesus. Salman Rushdie published his novel *Satanic Verses* in 1988. This work has been interpreted as blasphemous by some. In 1988 a fatwa or death sentence was announced against Rushdie by the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini. In 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* published a series of cartoons critical of the Prophet Mohammed. These cartoons led to demonstrations in many parts of the Muslim world, to acts of terrorism, and to threats against the newspaper and the cartoonists. In another instance, the satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* has published many cartoons and articles critical of any institutions, including those Christian, Islamic, and Jewish institutions and icons. In January 2015, the editorial offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris were attacked by Islamic fundamentalists leaving twelve employees of the magazine dead.

Since the advent of the Web in the mid-1990s, “harmful to children” has been employed to justify various forms of censorship, particularly of online pornography. Management of pornography and obscenity has long been a concern for libraries. Through the end of the nineteenth century, librarians interpreted their function to insure that collections were free of “riff raff;” that the collection was wholesome. In historical terms, it is only recently (last 100 years or so) that it has been accepted that public library collections should include popular fiction. Perhaps the standards that define the acceptable in

libraries have been relaxed, both social and more specifically library standards are evolving.

The purpose of this course is to focus on those evolving standards. The student should come to appreciate that our sense of freedom of expression in librarianship has evolved and is continuing to do so. The two areas of concern are important to librarians and to the practice of their responsibilities. We will focus on discussing our ethical, legal, and professional concerns. In so doing, we will by necessity consider other aspects of our professional ethics.

One important note: This course is not intended to dictate answers to these concerns. Its purpose is to help the student, the information professional to address potential conundrums in her/his practice.

### **Text**

Wallace Koehler. *Ethics and Values in Librarianship: A History* in press. Selected chapters are made available through the courseware. Remember, this material is copyrighted. It is to be used only within the context of this course.

### **Course Resource:**

Toni Samek. *Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide*. Oxford: Chandos, 2007

Dr. Samek's book is an important LIS ethics resource. While it is not assigned as a required text to be purchased, it would be an important resource for any professional library.

### **On-Line Resources:**

American Library Association Code of Ethics  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.htm>

American Library Association Library Bill of Rights  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm>

### **Required Readings:**

Gorman, Michael, New libraries, old values. *The Australian Library Journal*.  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00049670.1999.10755870>

Amitai Etzioni, On Protecting Children From Speech *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 79, 1 (2003): available: <http://www2.gwu.edu/~ccps/etzioni/A315.pdf>

Lee Fink, "Librarianship needs a new code of professional ethics" *American Libraries* 1991, 22: 84

Wallace Koehler and J. Michael Pemberton, "A Search for Core Values: Towards a Model Code of Ethics for Information Professionals," *Journal of Information Ethics* 9 (1 Spring) 2000: 26-54.

Paul Sturges, "Limits To Freedom Of Expression? Considerations Arising From The Danish Cartoons Affair" *IFLA Journal* 32 (2006) 181-188: available <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/publications/sturges/cartoons.pdf>

### **Assignments:**

Please note, due dates for papers and discussions are provided in the course calendar.

Please be aware that attention to writing, spelling, grammar, etc. is important. Poor attention to these issues will be reflected in grades.

#### *A. One Term Paper – grade weight 40%*

A term paper is required at the end of the semester. It is to address one or more of the course subjects described above. Please discuss your proposed subject with the teacher at the very beginning of the semester. Please remember, time is limited.

The paper is to be a well-developed argument, hopefully an interesting proto- manuscript to be sculpted for publication. It is to be fully documented and in an appropriate citation style. I would suggest you consider examining a journal of choice that might be an appropriate venue for your article. Use the writing and citation style required by that journal. APA and Chicago are commonly used.

There is no specific length. Your paper needs to be as long as it needs to be to make your argument. A guideline might be twenty to thirty double-spaced pages, times roman 12 point. Use parenthetical citations please. Please advise which journal style you are using as a model.

Some journals you might consider

*History of Ideas*

*Information Ethics*

*Libraries & Culture*

*Library History*

## ***B. Extensive Discussions***

This course is set up as a graduate discussion seminar. Experience indicates that this format is problematic but not impossible in an online format. Each discussion set represents 20% of the grade – resulting in 60%. These discussions are to be posted in the course shell.

The first third of the course, we will focus on the role of stewardship and service has played in information practice.

For the second third of the semester, we will focus on the conflict between freedom of expression and other rights.

For the final third, we will address more recent ethical considerations that have been identified over the past fifty to one hundred years or so.

Discussion guidance is provided in the courseware. All students are expected to participate actively in all discussions.

Written discussions are graded. Because the approach is a seminar format, students are encouraged to engage in debate and, if appropriate, make more than one posting during each discussion.

## **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:      Understand and appreciate the basic ethical tenets of the LIS field(s)

(2) Understand and appreciate the historical evolution of information professional ethics

(3) Analyze in the abstract and in the particular ethical conflicts and provide guidance to the resolution of the conflict    Also to demonstrate these skills through their work and subsequent practice

## **University Calendar**

We follow the University calendar for course start and end date and for indicated holidays.

Due dates and other requirements are provided in the D2L calendar.

## **Grades**

Paper 40%,

Discussions 20% each. There are three assigned discussions. Each is weighted equally.

A= 91-100 B=81-90 C=71-80 D=61-70 F= 0-60

### **Student Ethics, Rights and Responsibilities**

The MLIS Program and Valdosta State University take a dim view of plagiarism.

For a definition, see

[http://www.valdosta.edu/~cbarnbau/personal/teaching\\_MISC/plagiarism.htm](http://www.valdosta.edu/~cbarnbau/personal/teaching_MISC/plagiarism.htm)

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As students you have certain rights and responsibilities. You should make yourselves aware of them. The following provides links to relevant VSU policy:

- Access Office for Students with Disabilities. See <https://www.valdosta.edu/student/disability/access-office-for-students-with-disabilities.php>

If you have a disability that impacts your ability to perform in this course, please notify the Access Office and me so we may accommodate you.

- Academic Dishonesty, <http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/academic-affairs/academic-dishonesty.php>
- Equal Opportunity Statement. <http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/faculty-senate/handbook/employment-policies/equal-opportunity-statement.php>
- MLIS Policy on Interlibrary Loan Requests for Textbooks  
<http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/education/master-of-library-and-information-science/documents/MLISPolicyonILLRequestsforTextbooks.pdf>
- Student Code of Conduct <http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/student-affairs/student-conduct-office/documents/student-handbook.pdf>
- Sexual Harassment. <http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/finance-admin/human-resources/policy/sexual-harrassment.php>