



## Educating Librarians in Intellectual Freedom

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IT IS TRUE, of course, that most early American librarians—believers in the logic of the Enlightenment—personally abhorred book censorship, and that some supported this conviction with appropriate words and deeds. But the profession's putatively strong commitment to the right to read and to the wider concept of intellectual freedom is nevertheless largely a twentieth century development, beginning in earnest in the late twenties as a belated response to the excesses of the vice societies and, specifically, the notorious "Clean Books" crusade of 1923-25. Revulsion against the Nazi book burnings in May, 1933, and the more heinous barbarisms of the forties strengthened the library community's dedication to the intellectual freedom idea, as the Library Bill of Rights, a codification of principles issued during that period, attests. The repressive spirit of McCarthyism in the fifties likewise evoked a reaffirmation of the commitment (for example, endorsement of the eloquent Freedom to Read statement in 1953), although the Fiske report,<sup>1</sup> a sociologist's study of book selection habits of California public and school librarians published in 1959, raised some disquieting questions about adherence to that commitment in actual practice. Finally, the sixties—years of political protest and social disorder—further sensitized and broadened the profession's concern for intellectual freedom and civil liberties, the decade ending with vociferous demands by many librarians and ad hoc groups that the American Library Association develop an effective legal support fund and other concrete instruments for promoting and protecting the practice of intellectual freedom among librarians.

Historically, library school curricula mirror the profession's evolving concern with intellectual freedom principles and censorship problems. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that available historical

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data (which are sparse), coupled with the general trends noted above, tend to support this conclusion. It is a matter of record that during the early years of 1887-1923 (from establishment of Dewey's school at Columbia to instigation of ALA accreditation of library training programs), library education consisted principally of mastering practical skills rather than studying professional theory and methods, and that as a result little if any attention was focused on intellectual freedom or censorship issues.<sup>2</sup> But after this period, no substantive information exists about curricular trends until Dorothy Bendix delivered her paper, "Teaching the Concept of Intellectual Freedom: The State of the Art,"<sup>3</sup> at the 1967 annual meeting of the Association of American Library Schools, based on questionnaire research which revealed considerable emphasis on intellectual freedom and censorship in accredited library school curricula, particularly in book selection courses.

Some reasonable assumptions, nonetheless, can be made about teaching intellectual freedom in the library schools between the early twenties and the mid-sixties. It seems likely, for instance, that as practitioners slowly expanded the scope of their public services and began building increasingly sophisticated book collections for an increasingly better educated clientele (which naturally led to increased contact with the censor), the library schools gradually revised their curricula to encompass material of a more theoretical nature, including consideration of the librarian's responsibility to support the emerging right-to-read principle and to resist external censorship. It is also probable that well before publication of the Fiske report most, if not all, ALA accredited programs were offering instruction which at least superficially treated intellectual freedom and censorship issues somewhere in the curriculum, most likely in book selection courses or the introduction-to-librarianship type of course.

Although the depth of coverage and caliber of instruction undoubtedly varied (perhaps markedly) among the schools, library educators apparently devoted only minimal thought to how or what to teach in the area of intellectual freedom and censorship during this period. Not only is there an absence of literature concerning subject content and teaching methods, but no evidence exists that any school offered (or even contemplated) a separate course on the subject, required or elective. Presumably instruction centered primarily on the provisions of the Library Bill of Rights (and analogous documents), obvious legal restrictions on the circulation of printed material, and extralegal activities of organized pressure groups which frequently

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harassed public librarians. Moreover, all indications point to the conclusion that, prior to Fiske's investigation, the library schools considered intellectual freedom and censorship questions as simply an adjunct to the study of public library book selection problems; that curricula did not include discussion of self-censorship phenomena or a knowledgeable introduction to intellectual freedom principles in the broadest sense; and that instruction was largely exhortatory and, for the most part, ineffectual. Indeed, this narrow, casual, simplistic approach to the complicated, interdisciplinary subject of intellectual freedom and censorship did not prepare the average library school graduate to champion, let alone understand, the principles enunciated in the Library Bill of Rights and in similar codifications endorsed by his professional associations. When the history of the education of librarians in intellectual freedom is viewed in this light, it seems strange today that the Fiske report so profoundly shocked the professional leadership when it appeared in 1959.

Perhaps the most remarkable trend in contemporary library education is the fact that the Fiske report did not immediately revolutionize the teaching of intellectual freedom. This is not to say that results of Fiske's report were entirely novel or unexpected. Her principal conclusion—that librarians often engage in clandestine self-censorship practices while concurrently professing strong freedom-to-read convictions—was anticipated at least a decade earlier when Oliver Garceau, another social scientist, observed that, "The censorship of library holdings does not often become a public issue, largely because it is an intramural activity. As a member himself of the white collar middle class that uses his library, the librarian has a green thumb for cultivating those books that will be popular and an equal knack for weeding out what will be considered dangerous."<sup>4</sup>

A few years later, Lester Asheim explored the dynamics of this phenomenon in his landmark essay "Not Censorship but Selection."<sup>5</sup> The Fiske report, however, was based not on speculation but on empirical data collected by reputable scientific procedures, and, although the data were limited to one geographical area of the country, the report could not be ignored as merely an educated guess or dismissed as polemical opinion. Yet the Fiske report did not stimulate a major reassessment of library school curricula and teaching methods in the area of intellectual freedom and censorship at the time, and even now—more than a decade after the report was issued—curricular innovations are the exception rather than the rule.

But if Fiske's monumental study did not have an immediate or radical impact on library school curricula, it did generate some modestly encouraging developments during the sixties, as Ervin J. Gaines has pointed out in his historical survey of the censorship scene for the years 1957-67: "Her report . . . strengthened the determination of more liberal librarians to push the issue harder than ever. The content of library school courses began to include larger doses of discussion about librarians' responsibilities, and the open-mindedness of the younger professionals was often in marked contrast to the excessive caution of their elders."<sup>6</sup> Fiske's investigation also inspired a number of book selection questionnaire surveys by Eric Moon<sup>7</sup> and others which offered supportive data for her conclusions, and by 1967, Dorothy Bendix could report that materials selection courses in the schools were placing more emphasis on intellectual freedom and censorship than on any other single subject.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Bendix conducted a much needed survey in 1966 for the Association of American Library Schools to determine how and what the accredited schools were teaching in the intellectual freedom and censorship area.<sup>9</sup> (The results of this questionnaire survey were reported to the association in 1967, as noted above.)

The Bendix study—limited to an analysis of content and methods in sixty-five required courses given in thirty-six schools (of the then thirty-eight accredited schools)—indicated that, although curricular emphasis on intellectual freedom and censorship is impressive, the depth and quality of instruction leave much to be desired. For example, not only did the study reveal "that self-censorship was mentioned by only six, or less than 8 per cent of the instructors"<sup>10</sup> who responded, but reading assignments "most frequently are characterized by a liberal point of view."<sup>11</sup> The study also indicates prevalent use of the lecture method in teaching intellectual freedom, although (encouragingly) a large number of instructors reported using discussion and case study methods as well.

Generally speaking, analysis of the Bendix data leads to the unwelcome and disturbing conclusion that, in terms of both substance and methodology, the teaching of intellectual freedom and censorship in the library schools has not changed significantly since the pre-Fiske era, inasmuch as most library educators still apparently view the study of intellectual freedom from the narrow right-to-read perspective and continue to treat censorship as principally an external phenomenon which manifests itself in extralegal activity which affects only public

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library selection policies and procedures. Conversely, there appears to be little recognition that, if they are to be understood on any but the most superficial level, intellectual freedom and censorship issues entail multidisciplinary study involving a wide spectrum of interrelated legal, political, economic, social, psychological, historical, philosophical, and aesthetic questions, and that the whole subject obviously requires more than cursory attention in the library school curriculum if graduates are to develop both an appreciation for the intellectual freedom idea and the determination to resist the censor, whoever he might be.

While the increased use of class discussion and case studies is a heartening trend, there is good reason to believe that much instruction continues to be admonitory and preachy—and, as a result, ineffectual. But the mere fact that the Association of American Library Schools invited Bendix to undertake such a questionnaire survey is a good indicator that some concerned library educators are prepared to grapple seriously with the difficult question of how to teach the concept of intellectual freedom more effectively. There is in fact some scattered evidence around the country that this process has already begun.

At the present time, several innovative teaching experiments stand out among the nascent efforts to improve instruction in intellectual freedom. At the University of Minnesota Library School, David K. Berninghausen, director of the school and former chairman of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, has recently begun using actual case studies in combination with Mill's classic essay, *On Liberty*, to teach intellectual freedom principles to beginning students in a unique and creative way, apparently with good results. In his article "Teaching a Commitment to Intellectual Freedom"<sup>12</sup> (based on a paper prepared for the Association of American Library Schools annual meeting in 1967), Berninghausen discusses his approach, offering a prototype case study which raises several complex problems involving religious liberty, freedom of choice, librarians' moral and professional responsibilities, and Mill's argumentation.

Quite obviously, the issues generated by Berninghausen's cases are not confined simply to the traditional public library book selection problem and the what-to-do-when-the-censor-comes type of situation. In this connection, he points to the need for librarians to develop "an appreciation of the nature and significance of free scholarship"<sup>13</sup> and suggests instances when free scientific inquiry has been subverted in academic libraries. Berninghausen asserts that, "If library educators

are to teach a commitment to intellectual freedom, then they need to study and teach the communications process in detail,"<sup>14</sup> which is a large order. But his intelligent, imaginative application of the case study method does enhance the possibility that such a goal can be achieved in library school curricula, even if it does not reduce the magnitude of the task.

At Simmons College, School of Library Science, this author<sup>15</sup> developed and teaches "Intellectual Freedom and Censorship," the first full-semester course on the subject offered by any library school in the country. Added to the Simmons curriculum in 1968, the course—a four-credit elective open to students with degree candidacy or post-graduate standing—is fully described in Moon's *Book Selection and Censorship in the Sixties*. Briefly, the course emphasizes reading and discussion, with titles like Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, Barrett's *Irrational Man*, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, Konvitz's *Expanding Liberties*, and Boyer's *Purity in Print* forming an integral part of the syllabus. In addition, several fictional works—Brecht's *Galileo*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*—are read as "case studies." Perhaps the most important and challenging feature of this course is its deliberately interdisciplinary approach to the study of intellectual freedom principles and censorship problems. The syllabus is so constructed that the student progressively explores legal, extralegal, and internal censorship phenomena while concurrently analyzing the political, social, psychological, and philosophical mechanisms of freedom.

It should be pointed out that "Intellectual Freedom and Censorship" is not a library science course *per se*. In fact, libraries are rarely mentioned until the final class meeting, when the librarian's place in the freedom/censorship scheme of things is considered. This course is an exciting and rewarding one to teach, and thus far Simmons students have responded with enthusiasm. LeRoy Merritt's recent comment that, "However any of us might wish to vary the content and the method, I would hope that we could not but agree that such an elective course warrants a place in all of our curricula,"<sup>16</sup> is both gratifying and significant.

At the Graduate School of Library Service of the University of California, Los Angeles, a "Seminar in Intellectual Freedom" was first offered in the spring of 1969. In this seminar, limited to ten students, each member is responsible for investigating a particular topic, reading in some detail on it, and reporting orally and leading discussion on the subject at one session of the seminar. Everett T.

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Moore, Assistant University Librarian at UCLA, and Lecturer in the School, who gives the seminar, assumes that all members will have an understanding of the general principles of intellectual freedom and a ready acquaintance with current issues of censorship and repression—an assumption he acknowledges may not always be justified, but which may serve to stimulate more intensive reading in the subject than might otherwise be engendered.

Topics that have generated particularly good discussions have included "Church and State in America: How Truly Separate?" "Freedom of the Press: What Safeguards? Who Controls the Media?" "Efforts of the Courts to Define Obscenity," and "Scientific Research and National Security: How Free Can Scientists Be?" Moore remarks that student criticisms of the seminar have suggested that more lecture content by the instructor would be desirable, but he points out that this is not the nature of a seminar and that he is concerned mainly that his students should read extensively and deeply about such matters as the historical and constitutional bases for the concepts of freedom; civil liberties and civil rights; academic freedom; and the restraints on freedom of speech, the press, and the arts. Development of critical powers of analysis concerning the problems that beset our society today is his principal objective. The seminar, he believes, may at least offer a helpful introduction to the subject.

Finally, at the School of Library Science, University of Southern California, another distinctive curricular experiment began in the fall of 1969, when the school instituted a course entitled "Intellectual Freedom and Censorship." Although analogous to the Simmons course in breadth of content and purpose, the USC course differs markedly in structure and procedure. Specifically, the course is part of a unique intellectual freedom consortium established last year at the University which offers four related courses sponsored by different departments: "Colloquium on Literary Censorship" (department of comparative literature); "Censorship in the Performing Arts" (division of cinema); "Contemporary Problems in the Freedom of Speech" (speech department); and the school of library science course, which is taught by Edward Hess, a lecturer in the school. Last fall, soon after the joint teaching venture had begun, Hess described the experiment in this manner:

We meet jointly for five of approximately fifteen sessions, hearing from a political scientist, a lawyer, a minister, a sociologist, and an as yet undefined panel. Three of the joint meetings have been held

so far, and while they have been stimulating, I'm not sure of their ultimate value at this point.

The remaining sessions of the library school course are my responsibility. My general approach . . . has been to search for ideas which might possibly be developed into operational statements for more meaningful materials selection policies than are prevalent today. We consider, among other things, the four theories of the press (with emphasis on the libertarian and social responsibility theories), the sociology of literature, and the concept of the public interest and its possible implications for the professional.

On a more concrete level, we are attempting to determine as accurately as possible the existing criteria for obscenity as established by the Supreme Court. With this as background, each student is reading a pornographic "classic" of his choice which has been passed on the basis of these criteria, and is then reading a current novel of his choice containing purported pornography, trying to apply the legal criteria to see if these criteria can be operational in any realistic sense. Also in the legal area, we are studying recent California legislation concerned with pornography, attempting to assess its probable impact on library practice.<sup>17</sup>

Hess concludes by remarking that, "Although the students seem interested, I cannot yet say whether or not I consider the course to be successful. . . . It is much too early to attempt a searching evaluation."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the final conclusion reached at USC about this consortium approach to teaching intellectual freedom, the curricular potential for library education is notable.

Each of these instructional experiments in educating librarians in intellectual freedom is interesting and doubtless valuable at Minnesota, Simmons, UCLA and USC respectively, but whether they together indicate a trend for future curricular development in the library schools generally is by no means certain. In his paper on teaching intellectual freedom given in 1968 at the University of Illinois Conference on Library School Teaching Methods: Courses in the Selection of Adult Materials, LeRoy Merritt stated that curricula in intellectual freedom have developed and are currently developing "not so much according to curricular plan, as according to interest and predilections of the instructors concerned."<sup>18</sup> The four innovative approaches described above would seem to confirm this observation, although the attitude and interests of the library school dean also appear to be an important determinant. At Minnesota, the dean himself is the innovator; at Simmons, this author received encouragement directly and by example



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from his dean, Kenneth R. Shaffer, who has written various case studies concerning censorship in the book selection area; and at USC, the new course on intellectual freedom clearly owes much to Dean Martha Boaz's wide-ranging interest in censorship problems. Thus it might be concluded that if a viable trend toward improving and expanding the teaching of intellectual freedom does materialize, it will require administrative leadership as well as interested faculty members.

But viewed from another perspective, it is possible to say with some conviction that the Simmons, UCLA and USC courses, together with Berninghausen's approach at Minnesota, do constitute a small but growing trend in the teaching of intellectual freedom which could expand quite rapidly in the near future. Fiske's data have been verified and her conclusions have been almost universally accepted as valid by the professional library community; however, more important is the fact that young librarians (like young people everywhere) are rebelling against the hypocrisy and equivocation which Fiske exposed. In addition, there is a growing intuitive sense among many professionals of the centrality of intellectual freedom in the library complex: data banks and the right to privacy, copyright privileges and the access to information, academic freedom and student dissent, the mass media and brainwashing, police power and underground films, government secrecy and the Freedom of Information Act, libel laws and press freedom, unionization and professional neutrality, majority power and minority rights, the psychological urge to conform, and the philosophical question of choice are all issues of enormous complexity which involve librarians and intellectual freedom in one respect or another.

The combined force of these relatively recent developments—verification and general acceptance of Fiske's conclusions about self-censorship tendencies among librarians, emergence of an articulate group of young librarians who apparently value principle above expediency, and recognition of the central position of intellectual freedom in the expanding world of librarianship—could result in more and better teaching of intellectual freedom in the library schools during the next several years if library educators are at all responsive to contemporary professional trends. From this perspective, the curricular innovations at Simmons, UCLA, USC, and Minnesota are clearly indicative of future trends in the teaching of intellectual freedom.

Some years ago in his essay "Wordsworth in the Tropics," Aldous Huxley questioned whether the poet had really understood Nature because he did not know the jungle, where the natural elements are

often brutal and inhospitable rather than soothing and agreeable. The same observation might be made about library educators who have traditionally equated studying intellectual freedom with reading the Library Bill of Rights and articles on how to resist the censor: intellectual freedom is acknowledged as a lofty concept, but the approach is insular and excessively romantic. Conditions for changing and expanding the education of librarians in intellectual freedom are favorable, and several useful prototypes for curricular reform exist. By and large, the outlook for the seventies is encouraging.

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