
Professionalism in Librarianship: Shifting the Focus from Malpractice to Good Practice

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ABSTRACT

MUCH OF THE PREVIOUS DISCUSSION IN LIBRARY LITERATURE about professional standards concerns librarian malpractice risks. After explaining why these risks have not materialized, this article examines the role of professional standards in fostering good practice in librarianship. Components of good practice include professional knowledge, core competencies, and professional values.

INTRODUCTION

Do librarians face significant liability risks in providing information services to their patrons? Yes, in theory, if measured against library literature devoted to information professionals' *potential* liability—but hardly at all, if one considers that, in today's litigious society, there have been no reported court decisions in which a librarian was sued for a service-related occurrence. The purpose of this article is not to close the door on the liability question but to refocus that question toward a more productive inquiry into what constitutes good practice in librarianship. Malpractice liability for any professional sanctions a departure from the profession's standard of acceptable practice. Thus, discussions about malpractice cannot proceed until at least these minimal standards of practice are shared widely among members of the profession.

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We argue that legally acceptable boundaries of behavior should not solely define library practices. Rather than setting a liability-avoiding threshold, librarians should articulate principles and practices ensuring that members of the profession function at the highest level. Librarians' struggle for continuing professional viability in the information marketplace has brought librarianship to a critical phase in which efforts to redefine and reinvent the profession have taken hold in various professional associations and in libraries of all kinds. One indication of this trend is the effort of several professional organizations to develop "core competencies."¹ Core competencies may be a catalyst for developing standards of care for librarians, but standards of care are only part of what constitutes good practice. The lesson from professional malpractice cases is that professional standards typically set minimum legal requirements and do not inspire members to achieve higher performance levels than what is legally required. In shifting the inquiry from malpractice to good practice, we do not dismiss the importance of professional standards in the legal sense, but the good practice concept we seek requires a more broad-based inquiry into the professional groundings of librarianship.

The first part of this article explains why librarian liability has not materialized. Although courts have not ruled on whether librarians have a duty of care in serving their users, it is important to understand how courts decide whether a particular occupation is a "profession" for malpractice purposes. The second part of this article explores the potential and limitations of professional standards and non-enforceable ethical codes for ensuring good information practice. The third part of this article examines the professional groundings of librarianship. The core criteria distinguishing professional work from the work of other occupations—professional knowledge, skills, and shared values—offer a blueprint for good practice. The article concludes with a discussion of the librarian's critical educational role in the digital age and an example of a successful reinvention of a library illustrating principles and applications of good practice in librarianship today.

LIBRARIAN LIABILITY THEORIES

In 1975, Alan Angoff posed the classic library malpractice hypothetical. A library was sued for providing a patron with a book containing inaccurate information about how to build a patio. The patio collapsed, and the patron sued the library for personal injuries and property damage. Holding the library liable for faulty information in a book would put librarians in the impossible position of having to verify every fact in a book before recommending it to a patron (Dragich, 1989, p. 265). In an actual faulty information case involving a defamation claim against a video rental store, the court stated that "one who merely plays a secondary role in disseminating information published by another, as in the case of li-

braries . . . , could not be held liable for defamation unless it knew or had reason to believe the information was libelous” (p. 270). By analogy, where the faulty information originates outside the library, as it does in Angoff’s hypothetical example, the library is not liable unless it has reason to know or suspect that the information is faulty. Any claim the patron may have in Angoff’s hypothetical case is against the author or the publisher, not the library. The attenuated relationship between a librarian and the source of the information negates a key element of malpractice liability—i.e., duty. It is the duty of authors and publishers to verify the accuracy of information they produce. Librarians are intermediaries whose connections to the faulty information are too remote to create a legal duty to patrons under these circumstances.

Despite the absence of real-life lawsuits against librarians, information liability remains a popular topic in library literature.² Potential claims against librarians for ordinary negligence or for professional malpractice (also called professional negligence) are the primary legal theories raised in the literature. An examination of how courts have applied these theories to other professional groups may shed some light on why the dreaded onslaught of litigation against librarians has not materialized.

Plaintiffs in *ordinary negligence* actions must demonstrate that the defendant owed the plaintiff a legal duty and that the defendant’s conduct (or failure to act) breached the duty (Fleischer, 1999, p. 172). The duty derives from a relationship between the parties that imposes a legal obligation on one person for the benefit of another (Healey, 1995, p. 524). The breach must be the cause of actual harm suffered by the plaintiff. Causation and duty are tied together by a single question: was the defendant under a duty to protect the plaintiff against the event that did in fact occur (Keeton, Dobbs, Keeton, & Owen, 1984, p. 274)? Unlike professional malpractice cases where courts typically defer to industry custom and practice as defining the standard of care, courts measure ordinary negligence defendants against a hypothetical reasonable person in determining whether the defendant has met the appropriate standard of care.

Healey (1995) frames the elements of a successful ordinary negligence claim against a librarian: “[S]uch a claim would have to show that the librarian had a specific duty of care toward the patron, that the librarian failed to conform his or her conduct to the duty, that the patron suffered harm, and that the librarian’s negligence was the reasonable, proximate cause of the harm” (p. 532). In a general public library setting, establishing a duty of care would be difficult considering that “librarians are information intermediaries who neither guarantee the information they supply nor hold themselves out as subject experts” (p. 532). Librarians who claim subject expertise must use their expertise in ways that are appropriate to their roles as librarians. For example, in law libraries, reference librarians (many of whom hold law degrees) must not offer legal advice or

interpretations of legal materials. Medical librarians likewise must not diagnose illnesses.

To prevail in a *professional malpractice* action, the plaintiff must prove the professional failed to possess and apply the knowledge, skill, and ability that a reasonably careful professional in the field would exercise under the circumstances, causing harm to the plaintiff (Polelle, 1999, p. 206). Malpractice differs from ordinary negligence by applying a heightened standard of care. While ordinary negligence actions hold actors to the standard of a "reasonable man," malpractice holds professionals to the standard of care based on the use of skill and knowledge ordinarily possessed by members of the same profession (Fleischer, 1999, p. 172). This heightened standard protects consumers from substandard care of unqualified practitioners by holding all practitioners to the standard of a qualified practitioner.

The professional's burden of being held to a heightened standard of care is tempered in many respects. Unlike ordinary negligence actions in which courts determine the applicable standard of care based on the individual facts, the applicable standard of care in a professional malpractice action is derived from industry custom. Thus, professionals enjoy the "privilege of setting the legal standard by which they will be judged," similar to a peer review system (Polelle, 1999, p. 206). Plaintiffs in professional malpractice actions must provide an expert witness—a member of the profession—to testify regarding the defendant's departure from the relevant standards of professional conduct. Finally, professional malpractice suits typically must be filed within a shorter period of time after the alleged malpractice than an ordinary negligence claim.

Given the tactical advantages afforded professionals, it is not surprising that many occupations seek "professional" status for malpractice purposes. Courts have not clearly defined who is a professional and who is not. Some courts strictly limit the definition of a professional to those occupations recognized as such by the common law (lawyers and physicians). Some courts go to the other extreme and include as professions all occupations licensed by the state. Other courts weigh various indications of professionalism (Polelle, 1999, p. 218). A New York Court of Appeals case provides a representative approach:

A profession is not [merely] a business. It is distinguished by [1] the requirements of extensive formal training and learning, [2] admission to practice by qualifying licensure, [3] code of ethics imposing standards qualitatively and extensively beyond those that prevail or are tolerated in the marketplace, [4] a system for discipline of its members for a violation of the code of ethics, [5] duties to subordinate financial reward to social responsibility, and, notably, an obligation on its members, even in non-professional matters, to conduct themselves as members of a learned, disciplined and honorable occupation. (Glaser & Lewis, 1995, p. 575)

Although not tested in the courts, librarianship seems to satisfy the first, third, and fifth criteria, but it would almost certainly fall short in failing to satisfy the second and fourth factors of the New York test. Determinations of other occupations' status as "professions" for malpractice purposes have been inconsistent. Groups for which courts have refused to recognize an action for malpractice include educators and clergy. Other groups besides attorneys and physicians which courts recognize as being subject to malpractice claims, include accountants, dentists, psychologists, architects, and engineers.

Healey's (1995) comparison of teachers and librarians in this context is instructive (pp. 529-30). He posits that malpractice claims would more likely succeed against teachers than against librarians. The licensing of teachers supplies fairly concrete standards against which negligent activity can be measured. Malpractice claims have actually been brought against teachers in court, though so far without success. Although a flood of litigation against teachers was predicted during the 1970s (as it was also for librarians in the 1980s), the courts have refused to recognize an action for educational malpractice. In most cases, the teacher-student relationship is closer and more sustained than librarian-patron encounters, which are mostly transitory. The teacher-student relationship also carries with it greater expectations of a measurable and identifiable outcome than does the librarian-patron relationship. Healey (1995) writes that "to the extent that the comparison is accurate, the uniform refusal of courts across America to refuse to recognize a tort of educational malpractice makes the idea of librarian malpractice as a viable tort claim that much more unlikely" (p. 530).

Polle (1999) argues that the elusiveness of a unified definition of "professional" "creates the risk of capriciousness as more groups seek the protection afforded by professional status" (p. 205). Courts typically accord psychologists and insurance brokers professional status without explicit reasons for doing so. Some courts have conferred professional status on architects because they hold themselves out to the public as experts in their field, possessing specialized knowledge and intensive preparation for the rendering of a public service. But, as Polle notes, "the same could be said of airline pilots, precision machinists, electricians, carpenters, blacksmiths or plumbers, all of whom are assumed . . . to be members of a 'skilled trade' and not 'professionals'" (p. 217). Moreover, "if one uses the criterion of specialized knowledge alone, it is certainly counterintuitive to conclude, as one court did, that an airplane pilot is not a professional. Piloting a plane arguably requires at least the same degree of specialized knowledge and training as performing surgery" (p. 228). Social workers are treated as professionals by some courts but not by others (p. 214).

With court determinations resting on so many different factors, emerging professions are at a loss to predict what they need to do to achieve

professional status in the eyes of the law. In order to improve consistency and fairness in this process, Polelle urges that “[a]n occupation’s self-imposed obligation of a credible and enforced fiduciary code of ethics should be the major, if not sole, criterion of what constitutes a profession for malpractice purposes” (p. 228). He argues that an occupation’s willingness to embrace and require its members to conform to superior ethical obligations affords the public greater protection than educational requirements or specialized knowledge alone in most situations (p. 228). The criterion of an *enforceable* ethical code obligation—something librarianship lacks—provides a meaningful distinction between a profession and an occupation for purposes of regulating malpractice litigation.

In the absence of any actual library negligence cases, it is worth examining how pharmacists have fared under ordinary negligence rules. Long thought of as mere technicians responsible only for accuracy and efficiency in dispensing drugs, the modern pharmacist’s practice is no longer confined to pill counting (Fleischer, 1999, p. 169). In the 1990s, Congress “expand[ed] pharmacy practice to include an obligation to screen prescriptions, keep patient history records, and offer to discuss medications with Medicaid patients” (pp. 169-70). The leading pharmacy chains advertise their pharmacists’ role in screening multiple prescriptions for contraindication and preventing potential side effects (p. 170). The pharmacy industry’s willingness to take on greater responsibilities for patient care is evidenced in industry standards distinguishing among the various tasks of the practice of pharmacy and requiring specific conduct for each (p. 171). These standards require pharmacists to become more directly involved in patient care, contrary to past practice in which the pharmacist’s exercising of professional judgment was discouraged as intruding on the physician-patient relationship. Civil litigation involving pharmacists has risen dramatically over the past twenty years (Fleischer, 1999, p. 165). Most courts have been slow to embrace the expanding role of pharmacists and continue to apply an ordinary standard of care without deferring to industry practice. In other words, courts so far seem to deny pharmacists the benefits of professional status for malpractice purposes. Some courts continue to set the standard of care under an outdated view that pharmacists are accountable for clerical accuracy only. For example, in Illinois, negligence law imposes no duty upon the pharmacist to warn the customer, or to notify the physician, that a drug is being prescribed in dangerous amounts, that the customer is over-medicated, or that the various drugs as prescribed could cause adverse reactions (p. 176). The physician’s traditional burden of sole accountability for health care decisions may explain why some courts still refuse to hold pharmacists to a greater duty of care than in the past. Courts that are more willing to expand pharmacists’ liability take the approach that pharmacists must apply their skill and knowledge to prevent unnecessary injury to customers. “Application

of expanded liability arises from courts' recognition that intervention by pharmacists, particularly in situations in which a prescription contains an obvious error, may prevent injuries, and that this measure of protection outweighs other policy concerns, such as preserving the patient-physician relationship" (p. 180).

The willingness of some courts to bend a little from the traditional view of pharmacist liability to recognize a heightened responsibility when there is an "obvious error" is comparable to the notion that disseminators, rather than originators, of information are liable for providing faulty information only if they have reason to know that the information is bad. Granted, the basis for comparing librarians and pharmacists in the litigation context is limited in some respects. First, there are no reported librarian malpractice or negligence cases. Second, the nature of pharmacists' and librarians' relationships with potential plaintiffs is different. Librarians assist their patrons by connecting them with information without assuming responsibility for outcomes, whereas pharmacists, especially in their newer roles, assume some responsibility for the safety and welfare of their customers as intermediaries between patient and physician. But pharmacists, like librarians, occupy an intermediate position in the delivery chain. For that reason, pharmacists may offer the best model for assessing librarians' potential malpractice liability.

Like pharmacy customers, library users probably have a better understanding and acceptance of librarians' intermediary role in providing access to information than librarians give them credit for. If library users believed that librarians were accountable for providing inaccurate information, almost surely there would have been some test cases by now. Nevertheless, as librarianship continues to evolve in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex information environment, it needs to develop appropriate professional standards to guide its practitioners in their daily conduct, and to solidify a leadership role among competing information professionals.

SETTING THE BAR FOR PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Professions' prerogatives in setting standards against which their practitioners' conduct will be judged has been identified as a major benefit of obtaining professional status for malpractice purposes. One of the hallmarks of a profession is that it depends on a specialized body of knowledge. As the corpus of knowledge grows, members of a profession commit general principles to memory and conduct research when necessary to inform themselves about specialized or unusual cases. Thus, we next inquire: How ambitious are the standards for information-seeking activities in other professions? This analysis may shed some light on the potential, as well as the limitations, of professional standards for advancing good practice in librarianship. Consider the ethical standards by which lawyers'

research practices are judged. Ethical regulations for lawyers are contained in the Model Rules of Professional Conduct. State bar associations typically enforce the Model Rules. Model Rule 1.1, Competence, mandates that: "A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation. Legal knowledge includes both familiarity with well-settled principles of law and the ability to discover those additional rules of law which, although not commonly known, may be readily found by standard research techniques" (MacLachlan, 2000, p. 613). Disciplinary Rule 6-101, Failing to Act Competently, is the enforcement mechanism for Model Rule 1.1. It states that a lawyer shall not handle a legal matter without preparation adequate in the circumstances. Adequate preparation includes the duty to conduct *legal research* to discover the rules of law that are not commonly known (MacLachlan, 2000, p. 613).

Interestingly, among the thousands³ of state ethics opinions, there does not appear to be a single ethics case directly applicable to a lawyer's legal research (MacLachlan, 2000, p. 616). The failure of lawyers' research practices to appear in state bar association disciplinary proceedings suggests that lawyers' information-seeking practices receive little scrutiny among peers. One has to look to legal research malpractice cases in the courts for guidance about lawyers' legal research standards. The seminal case in this area is a California Supreme Court decision, *Smith v. Lewis*, in which an attorney handling a divorce failed to assert the plaintiff's community property interests in her husband's military pension. The attorney had handled many similar cases in the past in which he had asserted such community property rights; he was sued for legal malpractice for not doing so in this case. The court measured the attorney's conduct against "such skill, prudence, and diligence as lawyers of *ordinary* skill and capacity commonly possess and exercise" (MacLachlan, 2000, p. 617). Interestingly, this is one of the few cases in which a court has illustrated this standard in the context of the nature of the research required. Affirming the lower court's judgment that the attorney had failed to perform adequate research, the California Supreme Court in *Smith v. Lewis* cited chapters and sections of what it called "major authoritative reference works, which attorneys routinely consult for a brief and reliable exposition of the law. These sources, while recognizably broad and shallow in the manner of their general subject treatments, present the same, initial, low threshold of adequacy in research as does the 'common and ordinary skill and capacity' standards of professional competency" (MacLachlan, 2000, p. 617).

Despite these seemingly low standards, lawyers' legal research skills are frequently criticized. Many articles about legal education have pointed to law school graduates' deficiencies in performing legal research. Stories of poor research habits within the profession are legion. Lawyers have

been somewhat insulated from public scrutiny in this aspect of their practice primarily because of the highly specialized nature of print and online legal materials and their relative inaccessibility to the public. Although courts have rebuked lawyers on occasion for failing to use some of the features of the online systems, there are only a couple of court decisions which directly address computer use with respect to the adequacy of a lawyer's research.⁴ One reason for the paucity of cases may be that the cost of online legal databases is beyond the reach of many practitioners, and thus these online services are not considered tools that lawyers of ordinary skill regularly use.

The increasing sophistication of both professionals and their clients as information seekers and consumers may cause a reevaluation of lax standards of research competence. MacLachlan (2000) suggests, for example, that the Internet is likely to raise the bar on the minimum standards of research competence for lawyers. Unlike proprietary online databases, the Internet is widely available to the public and provides access to a growing body of legal information previously available only to lawyers and expert navigators of legal knowledge. MacLachlan (2000) writes:

The ready access and availability to legal and government information on the Internet though has absolutely changed how the American public receives its information, and the legal profession can no longer function from the premise of limited public access to that information In the face of these changes, the traditional standard of ordinary care and skill in legal research cannot prevail against a future challenge by an intelligent layman with more information readily available from the Internet than [his] lawyer can find in his standard reference sources Unless lawyers rise to the challenge and the opportunity of the Information Age, the profession will lose control over the standards by which legal services are evaluated and the Internet will have transformed the minimal standard of professional competence in legal research from that of the ordinary lawyer to the higher standard of the "intelligent layman." (pp. 646-47)

The point is not that the Internet is a comprehensive source of information for any field. It is far from that. But MacLachlan (2000) deftly illustrates just how lax lawyers' research standards have been if the layperson's newfound access to legal information on the Internet requires a significant segment of the legal profession to "reorient itself in response to a new communications environment" (p. 647).

The competence standard for lawyers in the Model Rules sets the bar at a minimum level of acceptable performance. Ethical principles in the corresponding ALA Code of Ethics, by contrast, aim for maximum rather than minimum service standards. "We provide the *highest* level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests" (American Library Association, 1995).

The ALA Code embodies aspirational virtues rather than commands. Though this type of ethics code sets the bar higher, it is non-enforceable on its members. Thus, its ability to direct professional conduct is inherently limited to self-governance and voluntary enforcement within the workplace.

The core competencies recently promulgated by several library organizations may represent a partial response to the non-enforceability problem of the Code of Ethics. These standards attempt to describe in somewhat greater detail the standards of practice for librarians. As such, they are an important first step toward defining good practice. But the core competencies suffer from the problems of both the Model Rules for lawyers and the ALA Code of Ethics: they set *minimum* standards, and they lack an *enforcement* mechanism.

Without an enforcement mechanism, a rule-based set of professional standards is not practical or even appropriate for librarians. The next section looks at the relationship among professional knowledge, skills and competencies, and shared values and their collective role in fostering good practices in librarianship.

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDINGS OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The real battle for professional recognition for librarians is being waged in the information marketplace. Librarians have never been terribly successful at communicating to the public what they do or why they consider their duties professional in nature (Danner, 1998, p. 315). The permeation of computers throughout the workplace further clouds the perception of librarians' roles, often resulting in competition with other information professionals within and outside of the organization. The growth of networked information systems and the popularity of end-user searching threatens to diminish, or even eliminate, the librarians' traditional intermediary role in the information-seeking process (p. 316). Librarians must clearly articulate their roles and must define—for themselves and for those they hope to serve—reasonable standards of good practice.

In "Redefining a Profession," Richard Danner combs the literature of the professions for insights into the nature of the current relationship between librarians and technologists and predicts continuing convergence of both groups' responsibilities and practices. Danner explains why librarians are positioned to assume a leadership role among information professionals and to largely shape their own future rather than having it determined by market forces. Danner's examination of the professional groundings of librarianship in knowledge, skills or competencies, and values provides a blueprint for good practice in librarianship.

Professional Knowledge

Professional knowledge is the intellectual component of professional work and is essential for any group wishing to be recognized as a profes-

sion (Danner, 1998, p. 326). According to William Sullivan, professions are typically characterized by "specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired by formal education and apprenticeship" (quoted in Danner, 1998, p. 326). Danner quotes the work of Andrew Abbot in this context:

For Abbott, the characteristic of "abstraction" is what sets the professions apart from other occupational groups. As he points out, "control of an occupation lies in control of the abstractions that generate the practical techniques." The techniques may be delegated to others, but "only a knowledge system governed by abstractions can redefine its problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers, and seize new problems Abstraction enables survival in the competitive system of professions. (p. 327)

The legal profession illustrates how a profession draws on its knowledge base to respond to new problems and to reinvent its practices to remain competitive, for example, the shift from sovereign industrial economies to an information-based global economy requires adapting traditional legal doctrines to new situations. In some instances, established contract and intellectual property rules will be sufficient to govern electronic commerce disputes but, in others, the law will have to develop new sets of rules. The knowledge base of the legal profession, embodied in the writings of judges, legal scholars, and practitioners, collectively forms a rich theoretical and practical reservoir of knowledge that has guided the legal system through many changes. The common law system, with its core fields of contracts, torts, civil procedure, and property, provides the theoretical base in law to create new fields of legal knowledge as needed. As market conditions change, lawyers whose specialties wane in demand have the knowledge base to draw on in order to develop new specialties.

Danner (1997) questions whether "librarianship ha[s] a critical base in theory [to meet] the challenges that widespread diffusion of information technology and access to information pose for users of information and for librarianship as a profession . . ." (p. 327). He cites several writers who suggest that the profession lacks the theoretical underpinnings to direct library education into the next century or to marshal a coherent "vision of who we are and where we are going as a profession" (quoted in Danner, 1998, p. 328). In the absence of a richly developed traditional knowledge base, an alternative, and perhaps more practice-driven, approach is to "identif[y] specific elements of the knowledge that characterizes and distinguishes the librarian's work" (p. 328).

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Special Committee on the Renaissance of Law Librarianship "discusse[d] professional knowledge within the context of the mission of law librarianship: 'to serve the information needs of the legal profession and the legal information

needs of the public' " (Danner, 1998, p. 328). Eight essential elements to the knowledge base of the profession are listed:

Law librarians must (1) have a solid grounding in the liberal arts; (2) understand the legal system and legal profession; (3) be well informed about information and library science theory; (4) be knowledgeable about legal resources and legal research; (5) be well informed about commercial, governmental, and nonprofit information providers, including Internet sources; (6) be knowledgeable about information technologies; (7) be well versed in the culture and likely future of the organization in which they work; and (8) be well versed in management and administration. (p. 329)

Many of these characteristics are driven by the legal context, but most apply with minor alterations to any branch of librarianship. Lawyers are primarily engaged in problem solving. A liberal arts perspective helps law librarians recognize larger societal issues and trends affecting the law. Understanding the legal system and legal profession provides insight into the lawyer's purpose. Knowledge of legal resources and legal research is essential for understanding how lawyers use legal information in their work. For the library to remain relevant and vibrant, management and administrative decisions must be made in the context of the larger organization's culture and future goals. Librarians in other settings must be equally attuned to the needs of their user populations.

Skills or Competencies

Skills or competencies are the practical applications of professional knowledge (Danner, 1998, p. 326). They are, of course, essential for meeting the needs of employers and clients but are more ephemeral than knowledge (p. 332). A one day training course on PowerPoint may be sufficient for obtaining the skills necessary to create basic classroom presentations, but a year from now another course may be necessary to learn how to use a new presentation software package. A library administrator responsible for planning for educational technology does not necessarily have to possess expert skills in operating different versions of presentation software but needs sufficient professional knowledge to keep the library's educational support functions apace as faculty needs for classroom technology applications evolve.

Basic core competencies may be used to assure a common base-line skill level across library departments. This can be especially helpful for assuring that all library staff members, regardless of their areas of specialization, are familiar with the core functions of an integrated library system. Green and Schweitzberger (1999) have taken this approach in "Designing Training for Core Competencies for Library Staff." The objectives stated are "to provide a common knowledge base for all library staff, in order for library staff to understand the integrated and interrelated elements of the III [Innopac] system." Competencies are listed under sev-

eral categories including Public Searching, Staff Mode Searching, Staff Mode Information, and Printing/Downloading. Within each category, several specific skills are identified (Green & Schweitzberger, 1999).

Library associations are also active proponents and creators of core competencies. Core competencies at the association level tend to define competencies more broadly than individual libraries do and to identify both professional and personal competencies. "Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century" prepared by the Special Libraries Association (SLA) "defines competencies broadly as the 'interplay of knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes required to do a job effectively'" (Danner, 1998, p. 333). Professional competencies "relate to the special librarian's knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research, and the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services." Personal competencies "represent a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently; be good communicators; focus on continuing learning throughout their careers; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new world of work" (Special Committee on Competencies for Special Librarians, 1996).

Draft AALL Core Competencies of Law Librarianship issued in May 2000 encompass library management, reference, research and patron services, information technology, collection care and management, and teaching. AALL recommends that individual librarians use the competencies to identify continuing education and professional growth opportunities. It also recommends that employers use the competencies to make hiring, evaluation, and promotion decisions and that the association use the competencies to ensure that its educational programming advances the skills or knowledge necessary for law librarians' current and future work (American Association of Law Libraries, 2000).

Shared Values

Shared values encompass the "idea that professional work is done not only for profit, but for socially beneficial purposes" (Danner, 1998, p. 326). In 1999, the Congress for Professional Education recommended to the ALA that it:

clarify the core values (credo) of the profession. 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. (Congress for Professional Education, 1999)

Subsequently, an ALA Core Values Task Force was formed to draft a statement on core values for the profession. The current draft, "Librarianship

and Information Service: A Statement on Core Values, 5th Draft (28 April 2000)," was scheduled to be submitted for approval by the ALA Council at the 2000 Annual Conference. The Task Force, while recognizing the diverse skills and roles of individual librarians and other members of the information profession, attempts to promote a unitary profession through identification of the following core values: (1) connection of people to ideas; (2) assurance of free and open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works; (3) commitment to literacy and learning; (4) respect for the individuality and the diversity of all people; (5) freedom for all people to form, to hold, and to express their own beliefs; (6) preservation of the human record; (7) excellence in professional service to our communities; and (8) formation of partnerships to advance these values (American Library Association Core Values Task Force, 2000). Such values underscore fundamental human elements relating to information needs and practices.

Danner recommends that librarians examine the relationship between professional skills and values expressed in a report of the ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession, known as the MacCrate Report. The legal profession shares librarians' problem of maintaining a unitary profession in an era of increasing specialization and division of labor among its members (Danner, 1998, p. 335). The MacCrate Report resolves the problem "by linking a comprehensive skills list to 'fundamental values of the profession,' which 'inform and shape the lawyer's use of professional skills'" (p. 335). Similarly, Danner (1998) asserts for librarianship that "while there may be value in compiling comprehensive lists of professional skills, it is not necessary to insist that all librarians possess the full set as long as the skills they do possess are underpinned by a shared set of values" (p. 335).

The MacCrate Report identifies four fundamental values of the legal profession: (1) provision of competent representation; (2) striving to promote justice, fairness, and morality; (3) striving to improve the profession; and (4) professional self-development. Danner notes that a recent ABA president has defined professionalism in law largely in terms of values. "For him the defining elements of professionalism are fidelity to ethics and integrity; service with competence, dedication, and independence; education as a means for growth and replenishment; civility and respect for authority; and commitment to improving the justice system and advancing the rule of law" (Danner, 1998, pp. 335-36).

Professionalism in librarianship should also be defined largely in terms of values. Librarianship has a rich and diverse heritage of professional values from which it can draw strength in meeting current challenges. Generalists can ponder Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science: "Books are for use"; "Every reader his (or her) book"; "Every book its reader"; "Save the time of the reader"; and "The library is a growing organism" (quoted in Danner, 1998, p. 336). Similarly, Cohen (1971) provides six

principles for law librarianship as standards against which to test the profession's performance. These standards require that law librarians: (1) know and carry out the purposes and policies of the organization in which the library operates; (2) know their users and their work; (3) teach legal bibliography and research methods; (4) provide access to information through administrative or bibliographic techniques; (5) employ critical judgment in developing and organizing collections; and (6) recognize a duty to advance their art and profession.

On the whole, Ranganathan's and Cohen's statements have stood the test of time. As such, they describe truly *fundamental* values. These values serve both to anchor librarianship to its traditional emphasis on service and free access to information and to facilitate its adaptation to new settings. Common fundamental values also attract new librarians to the profession. In 1998, *American Libraries* interviewed several librarians in their twenties and noted that "early positive experiences with libraries and librarians drew them into the profession . . . [T]heir faith in traditional library values and services is strong" ("Looking Ahead," 1998, p. 38).

In March 1999, AALL membership approved a revised set of AALL Ethical Principles. These principles are "premised on several basic tenets including the notion that ready and open access to legal information promotes citizen participation in a democracy and that legal information needs are best served by professionals who believe that meeting these needs is a noble calling" (American Association of Law Libraries, 1999). The principles are organized under the categories of "Service," "Business Relationships," and "Professional Responsibilities." Not surprisingly, some of these principles have much in common with the legal profession's value statements mentioned earlier. Others relate to the advancement of the profession. Professional self-development is addressed by the statement that "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."

Codes of ethics inform the public about the professional values of a group and provide ethical principles that guide practitioners in their daily work. The ALA Code of Ethics states as much: "As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees and library staffs" (American Library Association, 1995).

PRACTICING GOOD LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE INFORMATION AGE

Good librarianship is rooted in client-centered service values and attitudes. Technology and market forces have changed the relationship

between librarians and information users. Information vendors' direct marketing to end-users and the rise of the Internet (and proprietary databases) threaten the librarians' traditional role of serving as an intermediary between information and the end-user (Miller, 2000, p. 6). The initial promise of direct access to seemingly unlimited electronic information, however, is often overstated. "Many of the claims made for the digital revolution have turned out to be false, and the reason is almost invariably that their makers have failed to understand the true complexity of the world in which the revolution is taking place" ("Predictions," 2000, p. 4). Such claims, typically made about electronic resources eliminating the need for print resources, often fail to recognize the limits of what is available online and the limitations of online search mechanisms for obtaining relevant information. A recent clash between Management and Agricultural Economics faculty members at Purdue University over the continuing availability of print resources in their library illustrates the division (and at times divisiveness) in modern information-seeking practices. Management faculty argue that they have access to everything they need electronically and that their students don't use the books, "nor do we want them to." Agricultural economics faculty view removing the stacks as a "scholarly disaster." "We expect [students] to go back in history to see what's been said on the topic. But that's impossible to do with electronic resources because few older books have been digitized" (Kiernan, 2000). These two faculties, which share common library space, disagree about the survival of print in the digital revolution. The Agricultural Economics group uses Web technology and is involved in distance education but maintains that they and their students "need more than just digital resources . . . everything is not going electronic." Management faculty reply that "electronic scholarship is here to stay . . . They're going to have access sooner or later, to all the books that have ever been written . . . This is the library of the future" (Kiernan, 2000). Such differing perceptions about information resources and information needs in the digital age challenge certain fundamental values in librarianship. Ranganathan's second law, "Every reader his (or her) book," is clearly at risk not only at Purdue but in any library in which hard choices must be made about allocating information resources.

How do librarians reconnect with end-users in this environment? Researchers initially empowered by the widespread availability of digital information are easily overwhelmed by the "problems inherent in any information system—disorientation, navigation inefficiency, and cognitive overload" (D.S. Brandt quoted in Danner, 1998, p. 347). Librarians have assumed increasing educational responsibilities for teaching users how to search effectively for information online and for advocating clients' interests with information producers. It is commonplace now for reference librarian positions to require teaching skills and for larger libraries to have

educational or instructional services librarians in addition to traditional reference librarians. Teaching end-users how to search databases and how to critically evaluate online information for accuracy and relevancy follows the tradition of bibliographic instruction. Librarians have long understood the complexities of the information-seeking process.

The prevalence of computers in education raises fundamental questions about modern educational methods and makes the librarian's information-seeking expertise pivotal to good educational practice. In a recent commentary in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, an English professor writes: "We have changed our ideas about what constitutes the core of a good education. Learning how to learn has become the most fundamental skill that an educated person needs to master, and the instrument that enables learning in almost every field is the computer" (Kuriloff, 2000, p. A72). The author identifies educational benefits associated with open-ended searching on the Internet, such as learning how to navigate its nonlinear structure, but is concerned, as librarians are, about over-reliance on the Internet. "Although undirected exploration of the Internet . . . is informative, it does not constitute a good education. Students left to learn on their own may accept as truth the kind of unexamined thinking that proliferates on the Internet. We need to guide them, to teach them to think critically and analyze information" (p. A72). Librarians are accustomed to seeing beyond the bells and whistles of technology and to evaluating the quality, reliability, and application of information in appropriate contexts. Good practice in the digital age requires librarians to teach end-users effective database selection and search techniques but also to recognize the limitations of electronic research and to verify the authenticity of online sources.

Librarians have also been traditionally well-versed in building indexes and other finding tools. Commentators identify tool building as a critical function for librarians in the information age. "The real intermediation of the future will be the capacity to develop user interfaces" (Sada, 1999, p. 28). "If librarians truly are experts in the human elements of the information-seeking process, as well as in the content of information, we need to become more involved in tool building in order to be sure that content is accessible in ways that are meaningful to users" (Danner, 1998, p. 351).

In a recent issue of *Computers in Libraries*, with the theme of "Reinventing Librarianship: Focus on the End-User," corporate librarians Peggy Bass Bridges and Suzette Morgan (2000) describe a new service model implemented at Harcourt, Inc.'s Resource & Information Center that provides library services to over 10,000 employees (p. 27). The model is predicated on empowering end-users and provides a good example of how relationships between librarians and end-users have evolved in the information age.

As of five years ago, the information center was a traditional corporate library that was responsible for managing corporate archives, providing

electronic clipping and document delivery, ordering books and journals for employees, and answering research questions. Today the Resource & Information Center provides the same services and also manages over thirty end-user databases, a table-of-contents delivery service, and a directory of 1,500 Web sites (Bridges & Morgan, 2000, p. 27). Databases are made available to employees through a site on the corporate intranet managed by the librarians. The librarians describe their role as information facilitators and partners in the information retrieval process. As architects of user interfaces, these librarians offer guidance for hands-on training, Web building techniques, and marketing information services within the organization. These are important building blocks of good practice in librarianship today.

Too often technologists ignore the human elements that contribute to successful online information retrieval and push for purely technological solutions to information retrieval obstacles. According to Danner, they "too readily dismiss the importance of 'human factors' in interface design, revealing both too much faith in the abilities of intelligent interfaces to overcome the difficulties and complexities of the information-seeking process and too little understanding of the actual needs of human information seekers, who require context to be successful in their quest" (Danner, 1998, pp. 347-48). Bridges and Morgan's (2000) understanding of their relationship to their clients prioritizes context and foreshadows their success in reinventing their library. "In this information retrieval partnership, we must understand our end-users as individual researchers. We need to know what kind of information they seek, be familiar with the products and services they produce, and design library services that fit their needs" (p. 28).

"Reinventing" is a term that is often thrown around loosely in the business world. At its worst, it is an ill-conceived management ploy smacking of desperation and lacking substance. In the right situation, reinventing an organization is a necessary response to changing conditions. Reinvention should be predicated on meeting actual needs, embracing shared values, and maintaining a commitment to developing new skills and ongoing learning. Bridges and Morgan (2000) set an example for good practice in librarianship in the information age:

We have learned that reinventing our library is more than subscribing to online products and dispensing passwords. It is a process of expanding our skills to become designers, writers, public speakers, trainers, and marketers. It's a process of learning communication methods that match a virtual world. As end-users become our partners, we must recognize the inherent gaps in the information-exchange process and view them as opportunities to add more pieces to the information retrieval puzzle With apparently no end to this puzzle, we are less limited by our funding than by our imaginations. (p. 31)

CONCLUSION

Despite frequent warnings in the library literature, malpractice suits against librarians have not materialized. Good practice should be the standard against which librarians' professionalism is measured. For librarians, the heart of good practice lies in maintaining the core values of librarianship while adapting to continually changing information environments.

NOTES

- ¹ Core competencies of the Special Libraries Association and draft core competencies of the American Association of Law Libraries are discussed in Part III of this article under "Professional Groundings of Librarianship."
- ² For a collection of articles published on the topic, see Special Libraries Association. (1992). *Malpractice Issues in Librarianship: An SLA Information Kit*. Washington, DC: Special Libraries Association.
- ³ Conduct for which lawyers have been typically disciplined includes conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality, violations of lawyer advertising and soliciting rules, fraud, and improper fee arrangements.
- ⁴ *Golden Eagle Distributing v. Burroughs*, 103 F.R.D. 124 (N.D., 1984); *Massey v. Prince George's County*, 918 F. Supp. 905 (D. Md. 1996).

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