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Volume 46 | Issue 3

Article 5

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2003

## Confronting The Challenge Of Information Literacy

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### Recommended Citation

Baker, Steven L. (2003) "Confronting The Challenge Of Information Literacy," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 46: Iss. 3, Article 5.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1807>

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# CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGE OF INFORMATION LITERACY

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Confronting the challenges to any academic institution posed by the revolution in information resources since the appearance of the Internet can be a daunting task. Providing the financial and human resources required to provide reliable and secure access can alone be a major hurdle. The specialized equipment needed to effectively incorporate the new resources into student learning environments present an additional burden. The need to collaboratively manage the systems and adapt staffing patterns to the new resources can challenge the skills of the best administrators. The patterns of information seeking behavior exhibited by students in today's richly diverse information environment can frustrate the assumptions that both faculty and librarian have long held about the research process. For those colleges who have made significant strides in addressing these challenges the last one may be the most important from a pedagogical perspective.

## UNDERSTANDING STUDENT INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Some important new studies have recently emerged that give us a base line for understanding student information seeking behavior in this new environment.<sup>1</sup> These studies suggest that Internet search engines are likely to be the resource of first resort for students conducting research. However, they also demonstrate that this only begins a process that for the vast

majority ultimately leads back to the library. A recent study conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 73% of college students reported using the Internet more than the library. The report of this finding in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* created quite a ripple through the academy. However, this is only part of the story as results from two other new reports demonstrate. The *OCLC White Paper on the Information Habits of College Students* sheds light on just what kind of Internet use is going on when students conduct research for class assignments. This study reveals that the top two student choices for web resources are search engines (i.e. Google or Alta Vista) and web portals (i.e. Yahoo or AOL) but these are followed closely by course-specific and campus library websites. The report finds that while 96% of students use search engines for at least some assignments 83% also use the campus library website and 89% also

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use library print resources. Students are not abandoning the library for the Internet. Rather, they seem to be broadening their appetite for information wherever it is readily available.

A more comprehensive study that

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*This paper was  
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points in this direction was recently completed by Amy Friedlander for the Council on Library and Information Resources. This study found that 51.6% of undergraduates relied all or most of the time on print resources for their assignments while 49.2% relied on electronic materials. This suggests that undergraduates are not as dependent on the Internet for their research as the Pew study seems to imply. In addition, Friedlander found that faculty and graduate students are even more omnivorous in their research needs. The study concludes that "most faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates seem to prefer a hybrid information environment in which information in electronic form does not supplant information in print but adds to the range of equipment, resources, and services available to teachers and students." The trends revealed in these studies should be carefully analyzed by all campus academic and information resource leaders as they engage in strategic planning.

#### NAVIGATING THE POST-GUTENBERG INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

In today's post-Gutenberg information environment many of the old editorial, publishing, reviewing, and access mechanisms which guaranteed the quality of information resources are in disarray. A new flood of error, opinion, speculation, and misinformation has draped itself in the consumer trappings of power and truth. To compound the problem, all too often the high quality information available in this new environment is hidden within the "deep web" where the ease and convenience of Google cannot penetrate.<sup>2</sup> In an effort to meet this challenge of information literacy some institutions of higher education are adopting specific educational standards

or outcomes in this area.<sup>3</sup> While these efforts may use terminology that varies according to the institution's emphasis (i.e. information competency, information literacy, information technology fluency, etc.) the aim is to address the need for developing a more information literate student. In response to the challenge of information literacy institutions must become more intentional about ensuring our students are skilled in the basic competencies that equip them to be life-long learners. While today's college students invariably start their research with the Internet it typically doesn't end there. Rather, an Internet search is just the beginning of a process that ultimately leads back to the library for the vast majority of students. It isn't too

*While today's college students invariably start their research with the Internet it typically doesn't end there. Rather, an Internet search is just the beginning of a process that ultimately leads back to the library for the vast majority of students.*

difficult to understand why that might be the case. In this complex information environment students need the direction of competent individuals who can offer good coaching on the skills of identifying, selecting, evaluating, and applying information effectively to solve problems. They need to discover the intrinsic worth of becoming life-long learners. This is information literacy.

#### DEFINING AND ASSESSING INFORMATION LITERACY STANDARDS

Institutions that are restructuring teaching and curriculum along principles of engaged learning need to carefully define the competencies of information literacy and how they will be assessed. A simple working defini-

tion is "the ability to find, evaluate, use, and communicate information in all of its various formats."<sup>4</sup> A very ambitious definition by Jeremy Shapiro and Shelley Hughes characterizes "information literacy as a new liberal art" that gives structure and coherence to the content of a whole curriculum.<sup>5</sup> A more realistic yet comprehensive definition that many institutions are following is a model statement developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries which outlines five core competencies.

- The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
- The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
- The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
- The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.<sup>6</sup>

It is readily apparent from this definition that the focus information literacy should not be just on mechanics and process. Rather, it should explore the intellectual skills necessary for a higher quality of research: skills of critical thought, perceptive analysis, and reflective application.

There are a growing number of colleges and universities who are



developing formal competency standards for information literacy.<sup>7</sup> As important as standards are without effective assessment tools there is no accountability. For this reason institu-

with *Today's Technology* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2002) [www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP\\_College\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP_College_Report.pdf); and "How Academic Librarians Can

[www.csupomona.edu/~library/InfoComp/definition.html](http://www.csupomona.edu/~library/InfoComp/definition.html)

<sup>5</sup> Shapiro and Hughes.

<sup>6</sup> *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. ACRL. January 18, 2000. [www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardlo.html](http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardlo.html)

<sup>7</sup> For some illustrative examples see CSU Information Competence Project [gothic.lib.calpoly.edu/infocomp/](http://gothic.lib.calpoly.edu/infocomp/); SUNY Information Literacy [olis.sysadm.suny.edu/projects/ILI/iliover.htm](http://olis.sysadm.suny.edu/projects/ILI/iliover.htm); and University of Washington Uwired [www.washington.edu/uwired/about\\_site/](http://www.washington.edu/uwired/about_site/)

<sup>8</sup> See *Information Competence Assessment*. California State University. Council on Library Resources and Information Technology. Information Competence Work Group. June 1999. [www.csupomona.edu/~library/InfoComp/](http://www.csupomona.edu/~library/InfoComp/) and *Assessment of Information and Technology Literacy*. University of Washington. October 22, 2001. [depts.washington.edu/infolit/index.html](http://depts.washington.edu/infolit/index.html) ♣

*In this complex information environment students need the direction of competent individuals who can offer good coaching on the skills of identifying, selecting, evaluating, and applying information effectively to solve problems.*

tions are giving great emphasis to the development of such tools. Some leading institutions have developed assessment models that stand as examples of best practice.<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Dunn of California State Polytechnic University at Pomona has developed a web based assessment tool for freshman and transfers. The university system of Washington has appointed a task force that is developing rubrics for the assessment of information and technology literacy across the whole state.

## CONCLUSION

In today's dynamic information environment it is imperative that institutions plan strategically for the pedagogical shift that is occurring. They must gain a clearer understanding of student information seeking behavior. Armed with this knowledge they will be better prepared to intentionally infuse their educational programs with outcomes that ensure students are acquiring the competencies necessary for effective identification, selection,

Influence Students' Web-Based Information Choices," *OCLC White Paper on the Information Habits of College Students* (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2002) [www2.oclc.org/oclc/pdf/printondemand/informationhabits.pdf](http://www2.oclc.org/oclc/pdf/printondemand/informationhabits.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See "Web Characterization." OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc., Office of Research. [wcp.oclc.org](http://wcp.oclc.org).

<sup>3</sup> See *Being Fluent with Information Technology*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999; Patricia Senn Breivik, *Student Learning in the Information Age*. Phoenix: American Council on Education, 1998; Christine Bruce. *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy*. Adelaide: Auslib Press, 1997; Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shelley K. Hughes. "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art." *Educom Review* 31(Mar/Apr 1996) [www.educause.edu/pub/er/review/reviewarticles/31231.html](http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/review/reviewarticles/31231.html); and Susanne Woods. "Information Literacy and the Liberal Arts Education," *Technological Change and the Transformation of the College Library*, CIC, September 2002. [www.cic.org/conferences\\_events/workshop/library/susan\\_woods.asp](http://www.cic.org/conferences_events/workshop/library/susan_woods.asp).

<sup>4</sup> Work Group on Information Competence, Commission on Learning Resources and Instructional Technology, California State University. *Information Competence in the CSU: A Report*. Dec. 1995.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Amy Friendlander, *Dimensions and Use of the Scholarly Information Environment* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2002) [www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub110/contents.html](http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub110/contents.html); Steve Jones, *The Internet Goes to College: How Students are Living in the Future*

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(Ingolfsland, continued from page 89.)

- *Donelson (1987)*

In 1987, Donelson, Professor of English at Arizona State, wrote an article to answer some of the arguments used by those he called censors. The first argument on Donelson's list was that libraries did not contain a balanced collection representing all points of view (Donelson 1987, 209). It was interesting to note that the perception that libraries did not fairly represent evangelical views was so widespread that it was the first one on Donelson's list. It was also significant that even to raise the question of balance in libraries was enough to qualify the questioner as being a censor in Donelson's mind.

At first Donelson attempted to skirt the issue by implying that no library had a balanced collection except the Library of Congress. If balance was a matter of owning nearly every significant book published on every topic, then Donelson was probably correct. The issue, however, was that a large subsection of the population believed that its views were excluded from libraries. Donelson had, therefore, completely missed the point.

Donelson quibbled over the meaning of words: *important*, *all*, and *issues*, arguing that these were relative terms. For example, Donelson pointed out that in a debate with a creationist advocate who argued that *all* points of view were not represented, Donelson asked the creationist advocate if she wanted to include the views of non-Christian religions on creationism. Her response was a dirty look. What the creationist evidently meant by all viewpoints was *her* viewpoint.

Just because some individuals, such as the creationist in Donelson's debate, wanted only books containing a particular idea did not excuse libraries from violating the *Library Bill of Rights* with regard to the exclusion of religious perspectives. It was after all the official statements of the American Library Association that had called for all viewpoints to be represented.

Actually, Donelson recognized that point and quoted Judith Krug who answered a similar attack by Phyllis Schlafly. Krug said that libraries that were guilty of Schlafly's charge needed to comply with ALA policy on the issue (Donelson 1987, 209).

- *Gorman (1987)*

In 1987 Gorman responded to the allegations that libraries censored conservative religious books. Gorman used a list of 62 items that the Moral Majority had produced to show that librarians censor conservative religious materials. Of the 62 items, only 37 were books, the others were periodicals, pamphlets, or booklets. Gorman studied only the books, since pamphlet and booklets were usually found in a vertical file index and not in the card catalog.

Of the 37 books, only 26 were listed in *Books in Print* and therefore, were not readily available for purchase. Of the 26 titles in print, 14 were from small alternative presses (Gorman 1987, 5). Gorman found that 30 of the 37 books on the Moral Majority list—80%—had been reviewed at least once.

Gorman then checked the list against the holdings of 4 libraries in Georgia. Of the 4 libraries, 1 had 24% of the Moral Majority titles, 1 had 46%, 1 had 57% and 1 had 73%. Gorman concluded that the allegations of Falwell and Thomas were exaggerated (Gorman 1987, 7).

Gorman was correct in pointing out that for the Moral Majority to examine library bias by checking library card catalogs for pamphlets and booklets showed ignorance of how libraries worked and, therefore, invalidated the conclusions of the Moral Majority study.

Gorman was also correct that without some kind of comparison, the fact that a library had 24% or even 73% of the books on the Moral Majority list was not helpful in determining bias or censorship. For example, it was possible that the library with only 24% of the books on the Moral Majority list did not contain any comparable non-

conservative books. If so, that could have actually been an indication of bias in favor of conservative books. While that was not probable, the fact remained that the reader did not have useful information without comparison.

- *Charles (1989)*

Another charge of censorship against the library profession came from Staci Charles, who developed Thomas' arguments against publishers even further. She pointed out that authors such as Stephen Lawhead, Gilbert Morris, Frank Peretti, Michael R. Phillips, Gary Smalley, John Trent and Bodie Thoene often out-sold the best-sellers but had not been reviewed in major sources nor appeared on best seller lists. According to Charles (1989, 58), books with a Christian worldview were classified as specialty books and were ignored, regardless of the subject matter of the book. Charles' allegations provided even more reason for further study on the relationship between book reviews and perceived library censorship.

- *Manley (1990)*

Another charge from within the library establishment came from library director Will Manley. Though Manley appeared to approach the problem from an entirely different perspective than Thomas, Manley arrived at some very similar conclusions. Manley argued that the censorship battle was largely won and that society was filled with freedom of expression (Manley 1990 122). He offered common language usage, racy advertisements and video rental stores as examples.

The last thorny issue, according to Manley, concerned public and school libraries where there were still limits to intellectual freedom. The problem was that librarians had not been willing to admit that librarians were, in fact, censors. Manley charged the profession with hypocrisy in that librarians presented themselves as defenders of intellectual freedom while systematically censoring material in the libraries



in which they worked. Manley argued that such censorship was necessary for public and school libraries but pointed out that access to such censored materials was available through other means. Manley concluded that there was a large gap between professional rhetoric and professional reality (Manley 1990, 123-125).

- *Carlson (1991)*

Carlson's charge was essentially that religion and God had been systematically excluded from the nation's libraries and classrooms (Carlson 1991, 14). Carlson placed the blame not on librarians but on those who did the reviewing. Carlson provided a random selection of 45 out of 150 books selected by various reviewers as the best young adult novels for 1988. No Christian publishers were represented in spite of the fact that many Christian novels were best-sellers. Janette Oke novels had sold 7.5 million, and a couple of Frank Peretti novels had sold more than 2.5 million (Carlson 1991, 29-30).

Carlson stated that there was a mind-set among library science teachers that accepted the voice of women and minorities when they demanded representation in libraries, but labeled Christians as censors when they asked for adequate representation in libraries (Carlson 1991, 33).

Carlson commended the *Library Bill of Rights* for calling for diversity and balance, but she pointed out that since the *Library Bill of Rights* was filtered through real people, it was not surprising to find imbalance in library collections (Carlson 1991, 111).

Carlson then shared the story of Staci Charles, who participated in an internet lecture for librarians in Kansas. Charles charged that the only evidence of censorship she saw was on the part of the American Library Association and various book lists that ignored Christian or conservative views. The response from the librarians at the lecture was purely anger (Carlson 1991, 152-153).

- *Donovan (1995)*

In September 1995 Charles Donovan of the Family Research Council debated American Library Association president Betty Turock on C-Span (*Christian* 1996, 40-41). Donovan stated that in a study he conducted many libraries had a poor representation of 100 selected classics. Donovan argued that it was poor use of public funds to purchase *Playboy* and Madonna's *Sex* at the expense of recognized classics (Special 1995, 983). While Donovan's study was disputed, the perception appeared to be strong that American libraries were biased in collection development practices.

- *Pratt (1995)*

In 1995 Allan Pratt argued that he was skeptical of official statements regarding balanced collections. He would believe the party line, he said, when he saw books by Holocaust deniers or tapes by G. Gordon Liddy on the shelves. His point was that no library had a balanced collection and that all collections were biased. Pratt argued that rather than continuing the efforts to deny such bias, librarians should take a stand and make their collections reflect that stand (Pratt 1995, 44).

- *Harmeyer (1995)*

One of the few empirical studies was conducted by Dave Harmeyer. Taking his queue from Fiske and others who charged the library profession with censorship, Harmeyer sought to determine whether evidence existed that Fiske's findings continued to be true in the 1990s. Using the controversial topic of abortion, Harmeyer selected 8 titles he expected to find in public and academic library collections (Harmeyer 1995, 105). The books were rated on a scale from very pro-life to very pro-choice by judges chosen for their pro-life and pro-choice views. The books were then checked against the holdings of 460 California libraries using OCLC and the results were tested at a level of .01 significance using a chi-square test. Both of Harmeyer's null hypotheses<sup>19</sup>

were rejected indicating selection bias on the part of academic, public and religious libraries, though the libraries connected with religious institutions appeared to be closer in compliance to the *Library Bill of Rights* than did their secular counterparts (Harmeyer 1995, 109).<sup>20</sup> Harmeyer's work showing bias in libraries over the topic of abortion was further confirmed in a 1996 dissertation by Quinn (Quinn 1996 vii, 205).

- *Quinn (1996)*

Johnny Franklin Quinn was concerned about diversity in libraries and chose to use the topic of abortion as a test case because recent findings had shown that pro-abortion titles were held more widely than anti-abortion titles in American libraries. He surveyed 26 small to medium sized libraries in Indiana and analyzed numerous variables to determine the relationship between the variables and the degree of censorship with regard to abortion. Quinn found that the higher the level of education of the selection librarian, the less favorable the librarian was to censorship. The longer the library was open per week, the higher the diversity level of the collection on abortion was likely to be. One of the major findings of the study was that overall, the libraries Quinn studied contained significantly more pro-choice titles than pro-life titles (Quinn 1996, 204-206).

While the current study and other studies were helpful in showing that bias did exist, they were less helpful in determining if that bias was a religious bias against evangelicals or if it was an issue related bias. Most of the anti-abortion titles Quinn checked were published by religious publishers, but some of the pro-abortion titles checked by Quinn were also published by religious publishers. (Quinn 1996, 172)

- *Reid (1999)*

Reid criticized Focus on the Family for pointing out that the American Library Association continued to hold Banned Books Week, even though no



books had recently been banned. Reid asserted that there were some on the American Library Association Social Responsibilities Roundtable who believed that the emphasis on banned books diverted energy from the real problems of censorship by librarians and librarian reliance on mainstream publishers to the exclusion of other presses. Reid continued by asserting that some librarians argued that right-wing literature should not be purchased at all (Reid 1999, 60). Fifteen years earlier Falwell (1983) and Thomas (1984) raised the problem of censorship by librarians. If Reid was correct, it evidently continued to be a problem in 1999.

• *Ingolfsland (1999)*

My own dissertation raised the question of whether there was significant religious bias in state college and university libraries. The historical study of Jesus of Nazareth was chosen as a test case. Four hypotheses were developed to determine if significant difference existed between the mean number of Evangelical Jesus books and the mean number of non-evangelical Jesus books in state library collections.

To test the hypotheses some of the most prominent Jesus scholars in America were polled to determine the 20 best Evangelical and non-evangelical Jesus books suitable for college libraries published between 1988-1997. The books were checked against the holdings of randomly selected state colleges and university libraries. The results were tested using an independent test.

The study provided evidence that both Evangelical and non-evangelical Jesus books were under-represented in state college and university libraries. The study also provided evidence that there was a correlation between the number of book reviews Jesus books received and inclusion in libraries. Finally, the study generally confirmed previous findings by Harmeyer (1995) and Quinn (1996) which found bias against conservative or evangelical perspectives in libraries.

## CENSORSHIP OR SELECTION

While a review of the literature seems to provide significant evidence that conservative and religious views were neglected in American libraries, the question remains as to whether censorship is involved.

Hunter narrowly defined censorship as the use of state or legal means to restrict free speech (Hunter 1991, 246). Technically, Hunter was correct, but the library profession generally uses a broader definition. Censorship, as usually conceived in the library profession, was defined by Reichman as the "...removal, suppression, or restricted circulation...." of various kinds of materials (Reichman 1993, 2). Some librarians expanded the concept of censorship to include materials merely challenged, regardless of whether the material had actually been removed or restricted (*School Censorship* 1996, 16; *Special Report* 1995, 983; Morgan 1995, 36).

Since nearly all of the allegations of censorship discussed above concerned not the removal of books but the failure to select certain books, the question was whether the failure to select material constituted censorship. The answer found in the literature review seemed to be affirmative. Both Serebnick (1978, 9) and Bump (1980), who devoted an entire doctoral dissertation to the issue of censorship before actual book selection, asserted that censorship did occur in some cases when books were not selected. Manley was quite blunt in stating that librarians called their censorship "selection" (Manley October 1997 112ff). Even the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* supported the idea that censorship occurred in some cases when material was deliberately not selected for libraries (*Intellectual* 1996, 49).

If the failure to select books could sometimes constitute censorship, what determined whether failure to select was in fact censorship? In what became a classic article on censorship, Lester Asheim outlined the distinction between censorship and selection

(Asheim 1953, 67). According to Asheim, selection assumes the idea of liberty of thought (Asheim 1953, 67) and a selector—as opposed to a censor—is one who attempts to promote rather than inhibit reading and to provide multiple points of view rather than limiting them (Asheim 1953, 67). This raises the question: Is there reason to suspect an anti-conservative or anti-religious bias in the library profession as a whole—a bias that would limit rather than promote conservative or religious points of view? Unfortunately, the answer is yes.

## SUSPICIONS OF ANTI-CONSERVATIVE OR ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIAS

• *Individual Bias*

LeRoy Merritt, giant in the library profession, once charged that people who protested the absence of religious books often did so, not because they wanted to read the material, but because they wanted other people to read it. He advised that unless there was evidence that the patron actually wanted to read the material it should not be purchased or even accepted as donation (Goldberg 1995, 778; Merritt 1970, 15-16).

Aside from the fact that this advice is directly contrary to the whole concept of providing fair representation of all views, what Merritt did not know was that many of the religious books omitted from libraries would later out-sell those on the best-seller lists (Thomas 1983 98, 104-105; Charles 1989, 58). The issue, therefore, was not just a few people attempting to foist their view on others, as Merritt believed. The issue was the perception that libraries systematically excluded religious literature in general, and Evangelical literature in particular, on a wide scale. In light of the additional fact that Fiske found public demand to be a major factor for library selection (Fiske 1960, 16), it was bewildering that some religious books which out-sold the best-sellers were not widely available in American libraries. Yet, in



light of Merritt's negative attitude toward religious books, as well as the fact that Merritt was an influential voice in American Library history, it was not surprising to find anti-religious bias in libraries.

The perception of anti-religious bias in libraries was strengthened by the statements of Richard Gardner in *Library Collections: Their Origin, Selection and Development* (1981) which was a standard textbook used in graduate library science programs. Gardner pointed out that religion and politics created problems in collection development just as they did in everyday life. According to Gardner, material on religion and politics tended to be polemical, biased and contained propaganda. The result, wrote Gardner, was that many libraries avoided religious and political books (Gardner 1981, 194).

The fact that many libraries avoided religion was in fact an amazing admission coming from a professor of library science and founding editor of *CHOICE*, which was a major source of library book reviews. Was the reason for the avoidance of religion really, as Gardner suggested, that religious material was polemical and had problems of bias? If librarians were to shy away from all polemical and biased books, there would be very few, if any, books in libraries.

Since Gardner's book was widely used as a textbook in graduate programs in library science, it was not surprising to find his negative attitudes reflected among American librarians. While Gardner's selection advice was to seek out material containing the best factual information representing all sides, the reader was left wondering if the effect of Gardner's negative statements toward religion on library students was not a disposition to avoid religious topics like the plague.

Bias against conservative Christians also came through in the pages of the *Library Journal*, one of the most influential journals in the library profession. For example, Sanford Berman (1985, 33) warned librarians of

the dangers of Creationists—Christians fundamentalists who believed in a literal creation—who tried to force their views on schools and attempted to pack libraries with creationist materials. Berman warned that the well-financed "creationist crusade" (Berman, 1985, 33) was instead a deliberate effort to legitimize fundamentalist Christian dogma leading ultimately to a theocratic state. As such, creationism was to be seen as a danger to good science, religious pluralism, separation of church and state, intellectual freedom and even democracy itself (Berman, 1985, 33).

In his response to Berman and Berry, Ingolfslund (1986, 12) pointed out that it was amazing to hear Berman and Berry express support for intellectual freedom while at the same time attempting to suppress a view contrary to their own. Ingolfslund also pointed out that contrary to the claims of Berman and Berry who charged that Creationists were attempting to pack libraries with creationist material, one was hard pressed to find much of anything that presented creationism in a positive light in most libraries (Ingolfslund, 1986, 12).

That bias in the library profession against conservative views was illustrated more recently when the *Library Journal* (Hightower, 110) reported a lecture during which an audience of librarians responded with applause when the speaker characterized Dr. Laura Schlessinger's concerns as "whining" and asked if the librarians wouldn't like to buy Dr. Laura for what she was worth and sell her for what she thought she was worth.

When the pages of *Library Journal* warned that it was in the best interests of intellectual freedom to watch out for dangerous Christian fundamentalists and their attempts to pack libraries, and proponents of conservative views like Dr. Schlessinger are ridiculed, the suspicion of anti-conservative bias was hard to avoid.

#### • Official Bias

It could be argued, however, that

the above statements were only private opinions and not the official position of the American Library Association. While the American Library Association did not make any specific statements to the effect that it was biased against evangelical Christians, some of its statements provided evidence to support that conclusion.

The American Library Association *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, for example, devoted an entire chapter to opposing pressure groups, or more specifically, evangelical pressure groups (*Intellectual* 1996, 244-254). The chapter explained that the overwhelming majority of complaints about library materials came from Christian groups and that there existed no left wing organizational phenomena comparable to the right wing Christian groups (*Intellectual* 1996, 245). The fact that the writer did not recognize the American Library Association, The American Civil Liberties Union or People for the American Way as left wing groups hinted at the fundamental bias and/or misunderstanding in the presentation.

The suspicion of bias or misunderstanding was strengthened when the phenomena of increasing Christian pressure groups was explained as being a fear of the unknown, lack of control, longing for the simpler life and a simplistic view that the Bible should be interpreted literally (*Intellectual* 1996, 246). Bias was further confirmed when the last chapters of the *Information Freedom Manual* were devoted to the forming and supporting of groups to combat right wing groups which were labeled censors, all the while denying that similar left wing groups existed.

The chapter on combating pressure groups listed evangelical pressure groups by name: Christian Coalition,<sup>21</sup> Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for American, the Eagle Forum, and others (*Intellectual* 1996, 247-249). The chapter ended with a discussion on the perspectives and views of these groups as well as expectations for the future. When the *Intellectual Freedom*



*Manual*, the virtual bible for librarian intellectual freedom concerns, specifically earmarked evangelical groups by name, there seemed little doubt about the existence of anti-Christian bias in the library establishment.

Most of the statements above from the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* were relatively subtle but there were occasions when anti-Christian bias seemed shrill. One such example was an article in the American Library Association's journal, *American Libraries*, in which evangelical groups were singled out by name and right-wing conservatives were denounced as "...the forces of extremism, bigotry, and fear..." (Lee 1996, 51-52). Another example was when the editor-in-chief of the *Library Journal*, one of America's foremost library professional periodicals, referred to his adversaries as "...Christian zealots and other extremists...." and as the "...prudes of America's virulent religious right" (Berry 1998, 6).

An example of anti-conservative bias came through clearly in a 1997 meeting of the Intellectual Freedom Roundtable. The roundtable leadership invited panelists to discuss whether pornography should be filtered from public libraries. Amazingly, the Intellectual Freedom Roundtable failed to invite anyone to participate who favored filtering the internet in libraries (Manley Nov. 1997, 112). Suspicion of bias is certainly justified when no one who disagreed with the party line was invited to the discussion.

The publication of anti-conservative and anti-religious cartoons in the June/July 1999 issue of *American Libraries* were among the recent examples of bias. One of the cartoons implied that the real motive behind Dr. Laura Schlessinger's opposition to libraries was her desire to sell more books, rather than her opposition to the American Library Association's position on pornography (American Libraries 1999, 9). The other was a cartoon about religious conservatives returning to their roots of bullying

librarians (American Libraries 1999, 57). When cartoons like these were published by the official journal of the American Library Association, suspicion of anti-religious or anti-conservative bias in the library establishment seemed hard to avoid. When the possibility of anti-religious bias was combined with studies that provided evidence of bias in library collections, the charge of censorship seems hard to avoid.

## CONCLUSION

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the library profession as a whole strongly condemned censorship in any form. The evidence, however, suggests that there is a significant gap between official library profession position and actual practice. Publicly funded libraries appear to have seriously under-represented conservative and religious views in their libraries. The ALA mandate for librarians to deliberately search for under-represented views eliminates the excuse that librarians were simply not aware of such views. These factors, combined with the significant presence of viciously anti-conservative and anti-religious rhetoric in official library publications make the charge of censorship against the library profession hard to avoid.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation."... "Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval" (Intellectual 1996).

<sup>2</sup> The current *Library Bill of Rights* and official interpretations were found in the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* (1996) and on the American Library Association Web page ([www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)).

<sup>3</sup> "This procedure is not to be used as a convenient means to remove materials presumed to be controversial or disapproved of by segments of the community" and "The American Library Association opposes such silent

censorship..." (Intellectual 1996).

<sup>4</sup> "Some examples of censorship may include removing or not selecting materials because they are considered by some as racist or sexist; not purchasing conservative religious materials..." (Intellectual 1996).

<sup>5</sup> "It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those which are unorthodox or unpopular with the majority" (Intellectual 1996).

<sup>6</sup> "It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to determine the acceptability of a book on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author" (Intellectual 1996, 139, 147).

<sup>7</sup> "It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression" (Intellectual 1996, 139, 147).

<sup>8</sup> "We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions." And "We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources" (American 1995, 2).

<sup>9</sup> "We celebrate and preserve our democratic society by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas, so that all individuals have the opportunity to become lifelong learners—informed, literate, educated, and culturally enriched" (Symons 1998, 1).

<sup>10</sup> "The development of library collections should transcend the personal values of the selector. In the interests of research and learning, it is appropriate that collections contain materials *representing* a variety of perspectives on subjects that may be considered controversial" (Intellectual 1999, 470).

<sup>11</sup> The *Library Bill of Rights*, *Freedom to Read Statement*, *Freedom*



to View Statement, and the Intellectual Freedom Statement.

<sup>12</sup> One illustration of the point that librarians seemed to think of selection policies more as weapons than as a selection tool was found in the *Selection Policies: A Guide to Updating and Writing*. Michigan : Michigan Association for Media in Education, 1978. The very first page after the table of contents was the *Checklist for Survival against Censorship*. Another example was Rolland (1975, 1-2) whose whole thesis was that selection policies aid librarians in handling complaints about materials. Yet another example was Gardner (1981, 221-222) who acknowledged that the primary purpose of collection development policies in the 50s and 60s was to defend against censorship. Gardner claimed that the practice had since changed.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, Merritt even suggested having two selection policy statements: A concise one for use with the public and a more detailed one for guidance of the library staff (Merritt 1970, 26).

<sup>14</sup> The point was not to negate the importance of a selection policy, only to point out that in the minds of many librarians the sole, or at least primary purpose appeared to be a defense against challenges to their selection decisions. Henry Baron, an English Professor at Calvin College provided a positive example of selection principles in "Dirty Books In Christian Schools." While his argumentation for the need on an English department selection policy was also defensive in nature, the impression left by the book was that he had seriously attempted to provide principles for the formulation of a selection policy to guide the selection of books with literary value, rather than simply a policy to protect against the censor (Barron 1970, 19-31).

<sup>15</sup> Once a book was added to a library collection, librarians were committed to retaining it at all costs. Reid admitted the hypocrisy of librarians who provided the public with forms on which to request removal of a book from the library, while "insisting

to each other that such requests must virtually never be complied with (Reid 1999, 60).

<sup>16</sup> In a 1998 *Library Journal* Article Elizabeth Plantz observed that the Muslim population in America had reached nearly five million and yet information on Islam was notably absent from most libraries. She noted that it would never occur to most Muslims to go to the library for information on Islam so they turn to their Mosques instead. Plantz' point was well taken but it was interesting to note by contrast that the evangelical population in America dwarfs the Muslim population, yet it would not occur to most evangelicals to go to a library for evangelical material either. Instead they must resort to their church libraries or Christian bookstores (Plantz 1998, 59).

<sup>17</sup> Since Hupp was directly challenging Thomas' book, Hupp's article was reviewed here rather than in chronological sequence.

<sup>18</sup> OCLC was a corporation providing computerized cataloging and reference services to libraries worldwide. As of May 1999 OCLC had over 41 million cataloging records and 34,000 participating libraries.

<sup>19</sup> No1 "There is no significant difference between the number of representative pro-choice books and pro-life books selected by California academic and public librarians. No2, "There is no significant difference between the number of representative pro-choice books and pro-life books selected by California librarians at religious-affiliated institutions (Harmeyer 1995, 102).

<sup>20</sup> "...California academic and public libraries were more than three times as likely to report holding the sample pro-choice books than the pro-life books." "Religious-affiliated libraries were about 1.5 times as likely to report owning the pro-life sample of books as they were the pro-choice titles." (Harmeyer 1995, 109).

<sup>21</sup> The Christian Coalition was a private political action group and was

not to be confused with the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, now known as the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

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