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Biz of Acq — Stewardship, Partnership, Self-Understanding: An Exploration of Values in Acquisitions Work

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Column Editor's Note: *Acquisitions librarians have expressed their ethical principles in formal professional statements and in numerous articles in the library science literature. Yet little published work has been devoted to the values or ideals that make up these principles. Moreover, librarians' professional choices and relationships may be affected by values that come from sources other than the profession. In this month's column, I try to enumerate some of the personal and professional values that acquisitions librarians bring to their work, in the hope of stimulating reflection and dialogue about the variety of values that affect our professional practice. — RR*

Introduction

Acquisitions librarians have developed a significant literature on the ethics of their profes-

sion, and have produced eloquent and useful statements of ethical principles. Yet less seems to have been written about the values—the general moral, social, and political ideals—that ground the ethical principles of acquisitions librarianship. Values inform not only particular professional choices, but also the multitude of relationships from which our professional life is woven. The values that motivate and guide us in our working lives come in part from professional statements of ethics, but also from other sources: local institutional policies, religious faith traditions and other spiritual sources, families, military institutions, political organizations, philosophical and political traditions. Exploring our values not only helps us better understand the bases of our ethical principles, but also gives us insight into dimensions of our professional experience beyond the realm of ethics. For example, exploring our values could teach us more about ourselves and our co-

workers as “whole persons,” and about possible effects of our behaviors and beliefs outside the limits of our profession.

This article attempts to explore, in a preliminary way, the range of values that one can discern in the principles and practices of acquisitions librarians. These values appear in several sources: professional statements of ethics,¹ the library science literature about the ethics of acquisitions,² and responses to an informal survey posted to two Internet mailing lists for acquisitions librarians.³ The values have been arranged by area of activity: acquisitions librarians' relationship to their library and host institution; internal business and management practices; relationship to coworkers; relationship to colleagues at other institutions and the profession; relationship to vendors; relationship to self; and relationship to community, society, and the wider world. Preceding the presentation of these cat-

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egories is a brief account of respondents' reasons for discussing these values.

This enumeration of values does not claim, by any means, to be complete. Yet even with its limitations, this enumeration seems to hint at the richness of the "inner life" of this segment of the profession, the variety and breadth of principles that mediate our relationships and guide our choices.

Why Discuss the Values of Acquisitions Librarians?

Survey respondents provided two reasons for discussing personal and professional values as they affect acquisitions librarianship. First, values affect most of our professional choices and relationships by influencing our motives. Discussing values could help us to understand, evaluate, and perhaps change some of our values and motives, and hence alter some of our workplace choices and relationships for the better. Such change could lead to improvements in quality of life at work, and, because we devote so much of our time and energy to work, to personal growth, as well. Second, the discussion of values could serve to educate those new to acquisitions work about some of the principles of our profession.

Acquisitions Librarians' Relationship to Their Own Library and Host Organization

The *ALA/ALCTS/AS* "Statement on Principles and Standards of Acquisitions Practice" takes as its first principle a commitment to the "objectives and policies" of one's own library.⁴ One's institution and its mission have priority over other interests. This value leads to the avoidance of conflicts of interest—including the avoidance of gifts and gratuities—that could lead one to place personal interests above those of one's own library. Similar to this value is the commitment, expressed in the *ALA* and *AALL* statements, to distinguish one's personal convictions from one's institutional and professional duties, so as neither to neglect one's duties at the library nor to misrepresent one's own views as those of the institution.⁵ **Mary C. Bushing** writes of "respect" for one's own organization, while **Rosann Bazirjian** and **Barbara J. Winters** each speak of "loyalty" to one's own institution.⁶ **Kenneth G. Peterson** and **John Secor** point out the importance of honesty in relations with one's own institution, particularly in clearly representing the fiscal condition both of the library and of vendors the library uses.⁷ Several survey respondents echo these values. One respondent identified one's own accountability to the host institution as a key value, as well.

Stewardship appears to be a central value for acquisitions librarians. In relationship to one's own library, **Cynthia Aninao** writes that stewardship means "taking care of [the re-

sources] [with] which you've been entrusted for the present and for those who come after us."⁸ Stewardship involves getting the best value in trade for the library, engaging in informed fiscal planning, and conscientiously monitoring the current budget to prevent overencumbering and over-spending. The wise use of personnel resources may also make up part of stewardship.⁹ Yet stewardship appears to entail more than this: it seems to involve a sense of ethical responsibility for the wise and careful use of the library's, and the host institution's, resources. **Aninao** notes that the concept of stewardship appears to derive from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.¹⁰ This key value for today's acquisitions professionals, then, has its roots in a faith tradition.

Relationship to Internal Business and Management Practices

Values are also vital to how acquisitions librarians "run the shop." The *ALA/ALCTS Statement* enjoins us to build efficiency and practicality into local practices. The *ALA/ALCTS Guidelines* and the *AALL Principles* highlight preservation as a value to incorporate into our acquisitions procedures.¹¹ Acquisitions professionals value the use of standards and guidelines, and the creation of written local procedures and policies, to facilitate efficiency and consistency of work. **Winters** underlines the importance of communicating with other departments to develop acquisitions procedures and policies that are fully integrated with those of other units. Moreover, making the library's objectives paramount compels us to orient acquisitions procedures and policies toward serving the institutional mission, which nearly always involves providing a high level of service to users. In planning and organizing work, **Winters** identifies several important values. Respect for the well-being and safety of personnel should take high priority. Librarians need humility and honesty in order to be open to learning from all staff members. Respect for law, professional competence, and loyalty to one's institution inform attention to good record-keeping and compliance with institutional rules.¹² The *ALA* and *AALL* statements urge us to respect intellectual property rights in acquisitions and licensing activities, and the *AALL* statement also defends the rights of users of intellectual property.¹³ **Winters** asserts that flexibility should characterize our planning, so that acquisitions work arrangements can adapt to individuals' needs and changes in technology. Organizing work may mean balancing the value of stewardship—in the efficient use of personnel—with the values of fairness and objectivity—in "remaining as impartial as possible to staff personalities and idiosyncrasies." Communication is a value in conducting work with employees: staff members deserve clear directions, and rational reasons for such directions.¹⁴

Relationship to Co-Workers

The *ALA Code of Ethics* offers a number of values to shape our relationships with

co-workers, and employees in particular. These include respect, fairness, good faith, concern for employees' rights, concern for employees' welfare and well-being, and encouragement of co-workers' professional development.¹⁵ **Jack Montgomery** offers additional values for supervisory relationships. "Collegiality" appears to be a broad value that encompasses encouragement of professional development. **Montgomery** promotes "teamwork" and "hard work" as well. Closely related to respect is "good will" towards employees, which **Montgomery** names "the most critical value a supervisor can develop." **Montgomery** believes that acquisitions librarians can cultivate a "tone" or "social atmosphere" of relationships in the workplace, and that this quality can be as vital as any other factor to the successful functioning of the unit.¹⁶ Another survey respondent offered the supervisory values of "humanity," "kindness," and "accountability for all." **Kenneth G. Peterson** states that respect for employees dictates recognition of their accomplishments, milestones, and skills.¹⁷ **Winters** contributes several more supervisory values: confidentiality in personnel matters, objectivity in personnel evaluation and promotion decisions, provision of equal opportunity in professional development and promotion, and equitable treatment in performance evaluation. Respect for law directs us to safeguard employees' rights. It also, in conjunction with the value of stewardship, requires the librarian not to overlook employees' improprieties.¹⁸ Of neglected values in our relationships with colleagues, one respondent identified fairness towards support staff, including librarians' failure to recognize employees' advanced knowledge and skills, and the constraints imposed by employees' lack of alternative employment options. One respondent stressed tolerance as an important relational value. **Montgomery** lamented that we commonly ignore our, and our co-workers', emotions and "emotional intelligence," which he considers vital aspects of our personalities.¹⁹

Relationship to Colleagues at Other Institutions, and to the Profession

Ethical statements describe our relationships with colleagues and the profession in terms of cooperation, collegiality, respect, and support of professional development.²⁰ Related to these is the *ALCTS Guidelines'* praise of standards and professional guidelines: the creation of standards embodies cooperative work, and results in solutions that can aid colleagues at hundreds or thousands of libraries.²¹ One respondent mentions additional values in dealing with colleagues. Communication is itself a value, and other values characterize collegial communication: free sharing of information, objectivity, humility and honesty (in admitting personal biases), and confidentiality (especially when

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discussing vendors or personnel matters). The **ALA** and **AALL statements'** value of "professional excellence" implies the librarians' fostering the profession as she or he acquires professional knowledge and skills.²² **Peterson** posits the value of "professional integrity," which entails: commitment to professional values such as intellectual freedom; pursuing faculty status and involvement in scholarly research only if warranted by the librarians' duties and intellectual interests; and the willingness of the host institution to support the librarian in professional development along the librarians' chosen path.²³

Relationship to Vendors and Publishers

Since acquisitions librarians devote so much time to managing vendor relations, we are not surprised to find the lion's share of acquisitions' ethical literature concerned with business relationships. The **ALA/ALCTS Statement** provides the following values to guide us in business transactions: a commitment to business ethics, a respect for law—the literature emphasizes in particular respect for sales transactions as contracts, while the **ALA/ALCTS Guidelines** further commit us to honor all contractual obligations—competence (especially knowledge of business prac-

tices), fairness, equitable treatment of vendors, objectivity in transactions, honesty and truth, respect for confidentiality of trade secrets, and punctuality and courtesy when meeting with sales representatives.²⁴ Competence seems to relate directly to the value of self-education. Many obligations for libraries flow from the values of respect for law and contract, including: prompt payment of invoices, fulfillment of order volume and mix promises, etc. These obligations also broach the value of stewardship, as libraries' ability to pay for ordered materials depends on careful monitoring of encumbrances and expenditures.²⁵

Three new values seem to have emerged in the literature from the fiscal gauntlet of the 1980s and 1990s, values that several survey respondents noted, as well: partnership, mutuality, and trust. Commentators invite us to conceive of relations between libraries and vendors not as a competition between antagonists, but as a partnership between allies with some common goals: in particular, providing quality service to benefit library users. The relationship of partnership entails the value of mutuality: recognizing that the well-being of the library and the vendor are interdependent, and being willing to identify with the needs and concerns of the other party. This value implies, for example, that librarians must adopt reasonable expectations of vendors' ability to offer discounts and services,

and must understand vendors' need for profitability in an environment of very slim profit margins. **R.L. Presley** holds that both parties must trust each other for the partnership to succeed.²⁶ Two respondents lamented librarians' neglect of fairness, partnership, and mutuality toward vendors.

Relationship to Self

As we noted above, attainment of competence and professional excellence implies the value of self-education and self-training, for example in acquisitions functions, business practices, and the structure of the information industries.²⁷ Yet other kinds of self-development are also valued by acquisitions librarians. In his discussion of the value "respect for others," **Kenneth G. Peterson** contends that respect and understanding of co-workers depends on the librarian's cultivation of "self-respect" and "self-understanding," "to recognize personal strengths and limitations."²⁸ **Montgomery** concurs. "We need," he writes, "to, as managers and people, cultivate our 'sense of stillness' that allows us to be more openly and consciously aware of ourselves, our thoughts, our motivations, [and] agendas before we bring them to action."²⁹ **Aninao** holds that the concept of stewardship involves wise use of one's personal resources, as well as those of one's institution and employees.³⁰ Integrity appears as a central value for acqui-

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tions librarians: **Peterson's** "professional integrity" suggests self-honesty regarding one's genuine motives and interests; **Peterson's** and **Montgomery's** descriptions of "self-understanding" imply the attempt to match one's inner truth with one's outer behaviors and circumstances.³¹ Other respondents offered the following additional personal values: tolerance, a sense of humor, patience, a strong will, and determination.

Relationship to Community, Society, and the Wider World

Perhaps the most obvious public values of librarianship are political. Both the **ALA** and **AALL** statements ground the profession in our political system's requirement of an informed citizenry: democracy necessitates intellectual freedom, hence the crucial political function of the acquisitions librarian, in constructing and preserving information collections.³² Other values, too, affect the world beyond the profession. As her library is publicly funded, **Aninao** conceives of her stewardship as spanning a public trust, as well as the resources of the host institution.³³ **Bushing** claims that respect for people and institutions can pervade an individual's personal and other relationships, and therefore ripple through one's community.³⁴ **Montgomery** agrees: he appears to view all existence as a spiritually interrelated "web of life," with each entity influencing the others. Librarians' embodiment of positive values in the workplace can potentially project those values throughout the society and the world, and even into the cosmos. This rippling effect may have a temporal or eschatological dimension, as well. "What we value, say, and do," **Montgomery** writes, "will determine, to an extent, our fate, physically, mentally and spiritually."³⁵

Conclusion

Professional statements of ethical principles, articles in the library science literature, and responses to an informal survey show that acquisitions librarians bring to their work a remarkable array of personal and professional values. This exploratory paper has attempted to enumerate some of these values, in the hopes of fostering discussion and reflection on the ideals that affect our professional choices and relationships.

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Endnotes

¹ American Library Association, Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, Acquisitions Section, *Statement on Principles and Standards of Acquisitions Practice* (visited Apr. 21, 2000) <<http://www.ala.org/alcts/publications/ethics/aethics.html>> [hereinafter *ALA/ALCTS Statement*]; *Guidelines for ALCTS Members to Supplement the American Library Association Code of Ethics* (visited Apr. 21, 2000) <<http://www.ala.org/alcts/publications/ethics/ethics.html>> [hereinafter *ALA/ALCTS Guidelines*]; *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association* (visited Apr. 21, 2000) <<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/ethics.html>> [hereinafter *ALA Code*]; American Association of Law Libraries, *Ethical Principles*, in 1999-2000 *AALL Directory and Handbook* 379, (visited Apr. 21, 2000) <<http://www.aallnet.org/about/policy/ethics.asp>> [hereinafter *AALL Principles*].

² Rosann Bazirjian, "The Ethics of Library Discards," in *Legal and Ethical Issues In Acquisitions* 135 (Katina Strauch & Bruce Strauch, eds., 1990); Mary C. Bushing, "Acquisitions Ethics: The Evolution of Models for Hard Times," 17 *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory* 47 (1993); James R. Coffey, "Contracts and Ethics in Library Acquisitions: The Expressed and the Implied," in *Legal and Ethical Issues In Acquisitions* 95 (Katina Strauch & Bruce Strauch, eds., 1990); Donna Goehner, "Vendor-Library Relations: The Ethics of Working with Vendors," in *Understanding the Business of Library Acquisitions* 137 (Karen A. Schmidt, ed., 1990); Corrie Marsh, "Payment Ethics: Librarians as Consumers," in *Understanding the Business of Library Acquisitions* 299 (Karen A. Schmidt, ed., 1990); Kenneth G. Peterson, "Ethics in Academic Librarianship: The Need for Values," 9 *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 132 (1983); R.L. Presley, "Firing an Old Friend, Painful Decisions: The Ethics Between Librarians and Vendors," 17 *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory* 53 (1993); John R. Secor, "A Growing Crisis of Business Ethics: The Gathering Stormclouds," *Serials Librarian*, Oct.-Nov. 1987, at 67; Barbara J. Winters, "Ethics in Acquisitions Management," in *Understanding the Business of Library Acquisitions* 335 (2d ed., Karen A. Schmidt, ed., 1999).

³ The informal survey was sent to the LAWACQ <LAW-ACQ@LISTSERV.UC.EDU> and ACQNET-L <acqnet-l@listserv.appstate.edu> Internet mailing lists on Apr. 13, 2000. The survey gave as examples the following values: "integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, commitment (to institutional goals, to ethical practices, to intellectual freedom, to professional relationships, to colleagues, to professional development/self-education, etc.), tolerance (for error, for diversity of views/approaches), collegiality, teamwork, persistence, courtesy, respect, compassion." The survey asked for librarians' "views about the personal and professional values that are important to acquisitions work," and posed the following questions: "What values do you think are most important to your work in acquisitions—e.g. in your relationships with colleagues, vendors, and sales representatives; in your financial duties; in your relationships with support staff; in your relationships with your library or host institution? What values do you see neglected to some extent in our work? What are the sources for the values that inform our work: e.g., professional associations (ALA/AALL codes of ethics, intellectual freedom principles, etc.), religious faith traditions, political or philosophical traditions/systems, family cultures, etc. If you think it's important for us to talk about the values that inform our work, why is it important for us to have

this discussion?" Thirteen individuals responded to the survey: 2 employed by vendors; 9 academic librarians, 1 librarian from a state library, and 1 from a public library system.

⁴ *ALA/ALCTS Statement*, supra note 1.

⁵ *ALA Code*, *AALL Principles*, supra note 1.

⁶ Bushing, supra note 2, at 49; Bazirjian, supra note 2, at 142; Winters, supra note 2, at 337.

⁷ Peterson, supra note 2, at 133; Secor, supra note 2, at 82.

⁸ Cynthia Aninao, Request for Input: Values in Acquisitions Work (Fwd), LAW-ACQ, Apr. 17, 2000 <LAW-ACQ@LISTSERV.UC.EDU>.

⁹ *ALA/ALCTS Statement*, supra note 1; Secor, supra note 2, at 83; Goehner, supra note 2, at 146-147; Winters, supra note 2, at 337.

¹⁰ "Actually, 'stewardship' is a concept that comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition and is mentioned in the Bible—Genesis 43:19 and 44:4; Kings I 15:18 and 16:9; Isaiah 22:15—mention a steward as taking care of the affairs of a master's household. Luke 12:42, and Ephesians 3:2 reflect the *New Testament* concept of stewardship over one's time, talents, possessions, and self." Cynthia Aninao, Re: Request for Input: Values in Acquisitions Work (Fwd), LAW-ACQ, Apr. 17, 2000 <LAW-ACQ@LISTSERV.UC.EDU>.

¹¹ *ALA/ALCTS Statement*, supra note 1; *ALA/ALCTS Guidelines*, supra note 1; *AALL Principles*, supra note 1.

¹² Winters, supra note 2, at 338-339, 336-337.

¹³ *ALA Code*, *AALL Principles*, supra note 1.

¹⁴ Winter, supra note 2, at 337, 339.

¹⁵ *ALA Code*, supra note 1.

¹⁶ E-mail message from Jack Montgomery to the author, Apr. 17, 2000.

¹⁷ Peterson, supra note 2, at 136-137.

¹⁸ Winters, supra note 2, at 339-340.

¹⁹ Montgomery, supra note 16.

²⁰ *ALA/ALCTS Statement*, *ALA/ALCTS Guidelines*, *ALA Code*, *AALL Principles*, supra note 1.

²¹ *ALA/ALCTS Guidelines*, supra note 1.

²² *ALA Code*, *AALL Principles*, supra note 1.

²³ Peterson, supra note 2, at 134-135.

²⁴ *ALA/ALCTS Statement*, *ALA/ALCTS Guidelines*, supra note 1.

²⁵ Secor, supra note 2, at 83; Goehner, supra note 2, at 146-147.

²⁶ Secor, supra note 2, at 83; Goehner, supra note 2, at 148-151; Winters, supra note 2, at 341; Presley, supra note 2, at 56, 59.

²⁷ *ALA/ALCTS Statement*, *ALA Code*, *AALL Principles*, supra note 1; Coffey, supra note 2, at 103.

²⁸ Peterson, supra note 2, at 136.

²⁹ Montgomery, supra note 16.

³⁰ Aninao, supra note 10.

³¹ Peterson, supra note 2, at 134-135; Montgomery, supra note 16.

³² *ALA Code*, *AALL Principles*, supra note 1.

³³ "Since I work in a publicly-funded library, I look upon my job as stewardship of a public trust in addition to having the responsibility for using the law school's funds wisely," Aninao, supra note 10.

³⁴ Bushing, supra note 2, at 49.

³⁵ Montgomery, supra note 16.