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## People Profile: Nancy Butkovich

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## Nancy J. Butkovich

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**Name:** Nancy J. Butkovich

**Education:** B.S. Geology, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. M.L.S. University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.


**First professional librarian position:** Science & Technology Reference Librarian, Sterling C. Evans Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

**Professional career and activities:** Currently: Head, Physical Sciences Library, **The Pennsylvania State University**, University Park, PA.

Active in the Science & Technology Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ALA).

**Favorite books:** J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings trilogy*; John Steinbeck: *The Moon is Down*; Elie Wiesel: *Night*; Homer: *The Iliad*; William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*.

**Philosophy:** I like Polonius's line in *Hamlet* as an ideal: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

**How/Where do I see the industry in five years:** I think that we'll be much more dependent on electronic resources. Take the journal for example. Libraries are already dropping print subscriptions for space and financial reasons, and users are expressing a preference for electronic versions. I think that before many more years have passed, many publishers will no longer even offer print subscriptions as an option. Other formats, some already in existence or others that haven't been invented yet, will take over the function of the journal. Although I think that the library will continue to exist as a physical place, particularly with some disciplines, our future existence will depend on how we adapt and define ourselves as an electronic place. If we are proactive in populating this new place with resources and services, we can shape users expectations of the future library. 

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the lack of transparency for the scholarly community to review these decisions and to

make independent judgments about whether or not an article should be pulled is still unacceptable.


One can imagine the debates going on within the Elsevier hierarchy, and librarians should be sympathetic to their concerns. The peer review process is well known to be far from error-proof. It is almost certainly unavoidable, in the current state of publishing, to insure that one does not unwittingly publish material that infringes someone else's copyright, whether through the intentional duplication of publication by unscrupulous authors, or the unintentional "salami science" of ambitious scholars who ought to, but simply don't, know better. The easiest thing to do when one is alerted to such cases is pull the article and hope that the incident escapes wide notice.

But this is precisely the wrong thing to do. Although my own belief is still that under no circumstances should an article be removed, since we can now adequately document its history and errors, I am willing to concede that in the current uncertain environment, and to allow corporate lawyers a measure of sleep at night, there may be cases where an article may be removed, at least until a final adjudication of cause can be arrived at. But in such circumstances, there still needs to be a full accounting of the reasoning. In a post responding to the appearance of the revised policy, I suggested:

In cases where the article has been removed because of the concern of copyright violation I'd go so far as to want to see a message like, "We have recently been made aware that the article published here may have been copied in whole or in part from [citation to the original article]. Consequently, we have removed the article until such time as it can be determined that no copyright infringement has occurred." Something similarly specific for other cases of "legal reasons" would also be desirable. My question to the publishers, then, is do you feel that this level of detail would expose you to too much risk?<sup>6</sup>

I've yet to see a reply from any publishers.

One final thing needs to be said. Elsevier Science has been the primary focus of this discussion, in part because of the Human Immunology incident, and in part because it was through searching Science Direct that evidence of withdrawn articles could be found. But this is not an Elsevier problem. The evidence is very clear, in fact, that Elsevier has been trying hard to come up with appropriate policies and procedures to deal with these problems, and whether one agrees with their current statement or not, they are surely to be commended for their willingness to engage with the scholarly community on this issue. By virtue of their dominance of the market, it is appropriate that they take a leadership role, and we have heard very little from the rest of the publishing community.

We are at a perilous moment in history — talk to any archivist about the difficulties of writing biography or history that covers the last two decades of the 20th century. This includes the history of science. The technology, and our responses to it, are moving more rapidly than careful thought would allow. It is absolutely essential that scientific editors and publishers develop clear and acceptable guidelines that can adequately provide a safe harbor from unwarranted legal actions, while insuring that the scholarly community has complete access to the history of our various disciplines. 

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