



Professional ethics in library and information science: with special reference to special library of a film institute

Anuradha Vajire
Librarian,
Film & Television Institute of India,
Pune
Email: anu.vajire@gmail.com

Abstract

Professional Ethics is a standard which is expected to be followed in every profession. It has nothing to do with morality, but it describes guidelines for the professional conduct. As expected in other professions, Librarian and Information Specialists too are expected to perform their duties in ethical manner. Libraries have to deal with the people directly therefore they are supposed to have higher standards of honesty and integrity. Different library associations at international level like ALA, IFLA have explained their perspectives regarding Professional Ethics which are generally accepted at macro level, but when it comes to micro level or any individual library, it has to be adopted after considering different aspects like language, type of users and their requirements, nature of institute etc. Similarly, If “Five Laws of Library Science” are scrupulously followed by all the library professionals, professional ethics will automatically be followed. In fact, these five laws can be considered as a best practices to be followed in the library profession. This paper starts with the term professional ethics, and how it is applicable to library profession in print and digital environment, and will end with explaining various aspects which are required to be considered while observing professional ethics in the libraries of film institutes.

Keywords: Professional ethics, Ethical principles, LIS profession, Film institute library

1. Introduction

The concept Professional ethics is a combination of two terms Professional + Ethics. As the concept starts with the term Professional, it is essential to know this term first. As defined in Cambridge Dictionary Professional (as a noun) is “a person who has a job that needs skill, education, or training”. Or in other sense, it is a person who has specific knowledge and experience of specific field and area. The other word Ethics which originates from the “Greek word Ethikos” that means “custom or tradition”. When we combine both the terms together it gives sense of an expectation that professional person would behave in a certain way, knowing the good, bad aspects of the profession to do certain things. As expected in other

professions, Librarian and Information Specialists are too expected to perform their duties in ethical manner. Libraries deal with the people directly and therefore are supposed to have higher standards of honesty and integrity. With the changing nature of collection from print to digital, role of a librarian has also changed.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been held in the past on the concept of “Professional Ethics” in general and also with specific focus on the “Professionalism in librarianship”. Various types of ethics, and different international standards like IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations), ALA (American Library Association) have been discussed by Munighal (2018). Apart from standards, need for professionalism has also been discussed in the paper. Singh and Mishra (2017) reflects on professional codes provided at national level (The Joint Council of Library Associations in India). Dahwa and Thambiah (1994) have discussed emergence of librarianship in Nigeria and also focuses on growth and development of Nigerian Library Association.

Unethical practices followed by the library professionals have been explained by Sen (2017). Examples of same paper being published in different journals have been given in this paper. Posner (2012) discusses various ethical theories and discusses ethical challenges.

3. Definition

According to Oxford Learner’s English Dictionary professional ethics is mentioned as “Work ethics”, and defined as, “a person’s attitude to work, especially the idea that hard work is a good habit and should be rewarded”. According to Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary “work ethics is the belief that work is valuable as an activity and is morally good”. Merriam Webster dictionary has defined ethics as, “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad or right and wrong or with moral duty and obligation”.

If all the definitions are considered, Professional Ethics can be defined as a standard which is expected to be followed in every profession. Professional ethics have got nothing to do with morality directly, but it describes guidelines for the professional way of conduct.

4. Need for Professional Ethics:

As mentioned earlier, Professional Ethics are not directly related to morality, but the need for professional ethics can be explained by comparing the same with morality.

- Morality mainly deals with traditional values of something, whereas professional ethics are required to explain expectations from an individual in professional life.
- Morality explains mainly which is not to be done in certain situation, whereas professional ethics are required to explain exactly what is to be done in certain situation.
- Morality deals with results of wrong actions whereas professional ethics are necessary to explain outcomes of correct action.
- Morality is based on one's understanding and thinking regarding expectations from others to behave in a certain way, but professional ethics are required to give specific and clear guidelines on expectations.

5. Professional ethics and library profession:

As professional ethics has gained popularity in all the professions, it is required for the library professionals to adopt these. Now librarian and information specialists are also expected to perform their duties in ethical manner. Libraries have to deal with the people directly therefore they are supposed to have honesty and integrity at high level.

Those who find it interesting to help others and to provide effective services in this technological, digital information environment, must enter into this profession.

Professional ethics for the library professionals has been described in a different way by different people as given below:

According to Froehlich (1997) "it is an obligation of library and information professionals to themselves, to their organizations, and to the larger environment within which information professionals work which includes:

- social responsibility
- obligations between professionals and clients and third parties
- obligations between professionals and system
- obligations to the profession
- obligations to community or cultural standards"

According to Koehler and Pemberton (2000), "information professionals' code of ethics has six major elements which are related to the concern with the rights and privileges of patrons" these are;

- selection
- access
- professional practice and relationships
- responsibilities to employers

- social responsibilities
- legal responsibilities

6. “Ethical principles for library and information science professionals given by IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), 2019”



Image 1

Code of ethics for library and information science professionals given by IFLA

6.1. Access to information

This is considered to be main objective of the library profession; to provide an access to the information available in various formats as and when required by the users. This access should be provided at least efforts and minimum cost involved. It is also required to publicize the collection and services of the library to make the users aware about existence and availability of resources and services.

6.2 Responsibilities towards individuals and society

While providing access to the information and resources libraries are required to make sure that access is provided to all the users and its not denied to specific user or group of users. Information should be provided irrespective of age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender identity, heritage, education, income, marital status, origin, race, religion or sexual orientation. Also, librarians



should respect all languages equally. Information Literacy should be promoted to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and create, use and communicate information.

6.3. Privacy, secrecy and transparency

Librarians are expected to respect privacy, and the protection of personal data shared between individuals and institutions. Similarly, librarians are expected to support and participate in transparency so that the workings of government, administration and business are opened to the scrutiny of the general public.

6.4. Open access and intellectual property

Librarians should support open access, open source, and open licenses with an aim to provide fair, swift, economical and effective access to information for users. Librarians are expected to obey copyright and other intellectual property rights. But at the same time librarians should keep copyright terms limited and ensure that information fallen in the public domain remains public and free.

6.5 Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills

Librarians are expected to maintain neutrality and an unbiased stance regarding collection, access, and service. It results in the most balanced collection and the most balanced access to information. Policies for selection, organization, preservation, provision, and dissemination of information should be publicized.

6.6. Colleague and employer/employee relationship

Librarians should oppose discrimination in any aspect of employment because of age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender, marital status, origin, race, religion or sexual orientation.

Librarians and other information workers promote equal payment and benefits for men and women holding comparable jobs. Librarians and other information workers are expected to share their professional experience with colleagues help and guide new professionals to enter in the profession and develop their skills.

7. American Library Association (ALA) Code of ethics(2020): Code of Ethics

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.

Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed, and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

1. 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.
2. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
3. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
4. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
5. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
6. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
7. 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.
8. 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.

Adopted at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; and January 22, 2008.

Image 2 Professional Ethics by ALA

ALA has divided professional ethics into statements like “highest level of service, principles intellectual property, privacy and confidentiality, rights of welfare of employees, avoiding personal interests, fair representation of the institute’s aims and lastly maintaining and enhancing knowledge and skills”.

If summarised, core elements of librarianship where Professional Ethics exists, can be explained as given below

Table 1
Core areas of professional ethics in librarianship





8. Code of professional ethics in India

In India importance of professional ethics has been discussed earlier by few library professionals such as, Megnanand, R.L.Mittal, Amitabha Chatterjee, P.S.G. Kumar, A.K. Mukherjee etc. In India, mainly Five laws of library science as explained by Ranganathan(1931) are considered as ethical code of conduct for the library professionals.

Following are five laws of library science and its consideration as professional ethics.

8.1. Books are for use

It clearly says, books are meant for use, for reading, for referring. Keeping books in locked cupboard with a fear that it may get stolen cannot justify the main purpose of the library. It is a main responsibility of a librarian to make all the resources available for use by its users. Use may depend on the type of book, like reference book can not be issued out but it must be made available to get referred in the library.

Professional ethics: To make books useable and available to the users of the library.

8.2. Every reader his/her book

In this law word (must get) is hidden, but it reflects another important function of the library. After making available all the resources of the library to its users, it is responsibility of the librarian that all the users must get the book or resource he/she is looking for. There should not be any restrictions on the users based on language preference, gender, social or economic background etc.

Professional ethics: Librarian must treat all the users equally.

8.3. Every book its reader

In this law too, words (must find) are hidden. This law talks about equality from the book's point of view and not from reader's point of view. It says librarian must treat all the books equally when it comes to cataloguing, shelf arrangement, location etc. It's a responsibility of the librarian to see that all the books reach to the user who needs that book. This law talks about the equality of the books which are available in the library. Library resources should be arranged in way that it does not reflect biases of the librarian.

For e.g. Displaying books written in specific language at the catchy location of the library just to show the importance of that language

Professional Ethics: Librarian must treat all the books equally.

8.4. Save the time of the reader

This law reflects on efficient library service. Books should be arranged in such a way that it becomes easy for the user to locate any book easily and quickly. Many library management tools like web OPAC, indexing, abstracting etc. help in organising library systematically.

Professional Ethics: To value time available and efforts required by the users.

8.5. Library is a growing organism

This law talks about growth of the library in terms of its collection, staff, services, physical space etc. Librarian needs to consider all these elements and foresee changing role of library and librarian. During last few decades, due to technological development, information has been exploded to the great extent. Libraries are converting into knowledge centres.

Professional ethics: to encourage professional growth of a library as a whole, and not just to focus on own professional development.

Each law has certain implications, few are repetitive for two or more laws. If we consider them together, following are the core implications of all five laws. As shown in the table below each implication reflects one or more core element of Professional Ethics.

Table 2
Interrelated implications of law and core elements of professional ethics

Implications of law	Core element of professional ethic
Balanced Growth	Collection development
Book Selection	Collection development, Users
Preserving Valuable Books	Services, Access to information
Cataloguing	Library services, Access to information
Classification	Library services, Access to information
Documentation Service	Library services, Access to information
Accessibility	Access to information
Extension Service	Library services, Users
Issue and Return	Library services, Users
Library Building and Furniture	Collection development, Users
Library Hours	Library services, Users
Library Staff	Library services, Users
Library Techniques	Library services
Location	Users
Modernization	Library services, Access to information, Users
Obligations of Library Staff	Users
Obligations of the Library Authority	Users
Obligations of the Reader	Users

Obligations of the State	Users
Open Access	Library services, Access to information, Users
Publicity	Library services, Access to information, Users
Reference Service	Library services, Access to information, Users
Shelf Arrangement	Access to information, Users
Stack-Room Guides	Access to information, Users

If all these laws are properly followed by all the library professionals, professional ethics will automatically be followed. In fact, these five laws can be considered as a best practices to be followed in the library profession.

9. Digital environment: New perspective in professional ethics of librarianship

Technology has made it easier to share information through digital platform, however it has increased the risk authenticity, reliability, and accessibility. Responsibility to share information or make it accessible to users, has increased for the librarians in case of digital resources. The most important area where professional ethics of librarianship arises is “IPR & Copyright”. It is very essential to give due consideration to the existing copyright law of the country in case of resource sharing at national level and to consider copyright laws of other countries when resource sharing takes place beyond geographical boundaries.

Similarly, while circulating digital content to its users, if the document is openly accessible on the internet, librarians are expected to verify the authenticity of the document, whereas in case of digital content which is subscribed by the libraries, it is required to consider terms and conditions mentioned in the agreement given by the publisher of the resource while subscribing the same.

10. Professional ethics for the libraries at Film Institutes

Libraries or resource centres at film schools or institutes come under the category special libraries which deals with film studies and related subjects like cinematography, sound engineering, art direction, acting, screenplay writing, editing etc. Libraries here are very specialised in nature, at the same time deal with diversified subject areas right from arts till technology.

Core areas of Professional ethics in librarianship which have been discussed above applies to film institute libraries with special reference to the points mentioned below:

10.1. Collection development

Film studies as a subject deals with both science and art films. It considers cinema from different learning approaches. Cinema or films is never restricted to language, religion, countries or specific group of people based on socio economic status. It is an art which needs freedom of expression. Same freedom and equality should reflect through the library collection. Library collection should not be limited to specific language, region of cinema. Similarly different art forms to be considered while developing collection. Library must include both technical and non technical books. Equality needs to be maintained to the maximum extent. For eg. Having maximum books on so called “Bollywood” but ignoring world cinema or regional cinema, this can not be considered as a good practice of the library

Another important thing to be observed while developing library collection is to consider academic requirements of the institute dealing with gender, sexuality, nudity etc. and not choosing a book based on morality.

For. eg Book titled as “Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video published by Columbia University Press” If any such similar title falls under the academic requirement, must be purchased by the library.

10.2. Library services

Apart from regular library services, few services are required to be provided in the library such as viewing booths along with headphones to be provided to watch films or short films, documentaries etc. While providing such facility it is necessary to display clear instructions for both audio and visuals with a purpose of not disturbing other users of the library. It is again necessary for the librarian to give such facility in the library without creating sense of guilty while watching certain content if such content is seen in academic context.

10.3. Access to information

At any film institute it is required to treat library as a central repository for the different types of audio-visual collection. Such collection may be available in various formats of storage like Beta, Digi Beta, DV CAMs, VHS, Mini DVs etc.

Best possible efforts are required to be made by the librarian to digitise different audio-visual formats and make them accessible to the library users. However, while digitising such material due consideration is required to given to copyright and IPR.



10.4. Library Users

Again, as mentioned in library collection, users must be given freedom of recommending titles for the library purchase is to be given based on academic requirements and not based on morality.

It is very important not to judge any user of the library based on choice of books he/ she chooses to read or films to watch.

11. Conclusion

Library professionals play a vital role in today's information society. There is tremendous number of information, which is available on the internet, but this information may not be an authentic one. Here the importance of library professional comes into picture. Librarians are expected to satisfy user's information need through the authentic resources, whatever is the nature of resources (online, print etc). This information is required to be provided at the earliest and at ease. All these expectations make professional code of conduct an integral part in information retrieval because unless proper code of conduct is followed an authentic information cannot be provided. Keeping in view nature of the institute and its academic requirements, it is required for the librarian to observe professional ethics to the maximum extent. It's a time to reconsider five laws of library science according to today's changing technological and information exploded era and to keep libraries indispensable in "google" world.

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