



ETHICS EDITORIAL

By Dr. Lesley S. J. Farmer

As natural and political disasters surround and affect us, the issue of “right response” becomes an important consideration. What is the ethical way for librarians to deal with the Patriot Act? How do we help our academic library friends who have been devastated by hurricane Katrina? How do we service the hurricane “refugees” who are entering our academic halls? How should we react to the Google digitalization initiative? How do we handle plagiarism? Many issues seem to be bombarding us from different directions.

Librarians often serve as the ethics police in the university. We pay increasingly high subscription rates to online databases to insure that authors get their fair share of royalties. We caution students to cite the sources of their research accurately and completely. We have signs about copyright compliance on the photocopier machines. We provide reserves and e-reserves so students can access materials for their study under “fair use.” We are developing online mechanisms to offer digital content to the academic community in a way that preserves intellectual freedom AND intellectual property rights.

At the same time, we need to think pro-actively rather than just reactively. That is part of our responsibility within the profession. I recently received my American Library Association renewal membership card, which was attached to the library Bill of Rights. What am I doing to safeguard the intellectual rights of my students and library users? Since I teach both face-to-face and online students, I try to make sure that their learning experiences are equitable and that they have the same intellectual and physical access to the information they need. I also craft their learning activities so that they elicit students’ individual experiences and perspectives, thus alleviating worries about plagiarism. I also address issues of professional ethics in my courses.

Benjamin Harris makes a convincing case for academic librarians to play a leading role in instructing students in recognizing their intellectual inspirations. Laura Forrest asserts that academic librarians have an ethical responsibility to work collaboratively with student affairs professionals to help students succeed. In this issue, Ann Wade and Chris Bober note the ethical codes of librarians in the U.S. and elsewhere. They also provide a rich list of online papers and web sites on ethical issues, including intellectual property.

Thomas Jefferson said: “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.” In this age of polarization, librarians play a key role in enabling their constituencies to access the information they need and to help them to make informed and ethical decisions. As academic librarians, we have a special responsibility to help our campus members to address ethical issues – and act ethically.

This issue may be the last print one for *Education Libraries*; further issues are likely to be disseminated strictly in digital form. Three reasons underlie this decision: timeliness, cost savings, and effective use of technology as a means to foster a community of practice. As we pursue this medium, we hope to offer more images and links to deepen the professional experience. Stay tuned.