Subtle Censors:
Collection Development in Academic Libraries

by *Mae Rodney*

"Intellectual freedom is the right of people to hold any belief whatever on any subject, and express such belief or ideas in whatever way the person believes appropriate... the second component of intellectual freedom is the right of unrestricted access to all information and ideas regardless of the medium of communication used."[1]

Facilitating free access to all information is primary to the mission of any library, especially an academic library. The basic purpose — to provide sufficient information for making informed decisions — is imbedded in academic library mission statements and collection development policies. Often, the parent organization's mission statement is the guide for the library's mission. These statements are the foundation for the objectives and specific policies included in collection development policies. Secular or state supported college/university libraries may have very general missions — the collection will support the curriculum, faculty research requirements, and general reading needs of the university community; whereas, smaller colleges or denomination-supported institutions may have more definite missions — support the curriculum and faculty research. The general purpose of mission statements should be to guide the collection development process toward clearly appropriate titles while avoiding questionable additions.

In a comprehensive academic environment, intellectual freedom is demonstrated by almost unlimited access to information, from the pros and cons of assisted suicide, to the availability of a variety of resources relevant to the controversy over *Daddy's Roommate*, to almost unlimited access to various formats. The objective — building collections that educate — is accomplished by collecting current, varied, and relevant resources on contemporary issues. Broader-based mission statements direct librarians to provide for the general reading interests of the university community. A very unusual opportunity, however, may arise when a questionable title is requested. Do librarians avoid purchasing that specific title because funds are not available?

In academic environments where the mission is specific — build and maintain a collection relevant to the curriculum — the issue of censorship may be clouded by adhering to a strict interpretation of the mission statement. Librarians must decide how "hot" topics such as the religious right or left, sexually explicit literature, or directions for the making of bombs will be addressed. When is it censorship? When is it building a collection that reflects the curriculum?

Libraries with limited budgets must review carefully every title added to the collection since a tight, useful collection is the goal. Budgets rather than policies ought to limit the quantity and variety of resources in academic libraries. Are there instances when the "budget" becomes a means of censorship?

Collection development methodologies further document librarians' belief that the library empowers patrons by providing sufficient balanced information for patrons to make their own decisions and possibly to improve their social conditions.[2] Democratic selection methods should be used to cover

Since budgets can prohibit acquiring extensive collections, and since hidden agenda may preclude the purchase of specific controversial materials, many libraries have embraced resource sharing to extend patron access to information.

adequately all aspects of the curriculum, including recommendations from subject bibliographers, selection committees, and faculty representatives. But are there cases when the thrust to support the curriculum becomes the overwhelming goal, rather than providing varied information for intelligent decision making?

Since budgets can prohibit acquiring extensive collections, and since hidden agendas may preclude the purchase of specific controversial materials, many libraries have embraced resource sharing to extend patron access to information. Resource sharing became an important component of library services when publishing rates skyrocketed, library funding decreased, and patron informational needs beyond the resources within one library increased. Today, resource sharing is so expected that national accrediting associations require statements that describe the provisions made to transport resources between libraries and/or the borrowing procedures visiting patrons must follow.

The formation of national bibliographic utilities, such as OCLC, which placed thousands of shelflist files online, increased access to all resources cataloged online. OCLC and other bibliographic utilities greatly increased the importance of interlibrary loan services by offering patron access to information located in libraries within and even beyond the United States.

The need for formal resource sharing arrangements between libraries beyond interlibrary loan is increasing because articles, books, and visuals are being accessed through sophisticated indexes, databases, and online catalogs. Businesses, such as *UMI Article Clearing House* and *CARL UnCover*, provide articles for a fee plus copyright charges. These services are excellent, but fees are often beyond what faculty and students are able or willing to pay.

Shared online catalogs also increase the significance of resource sharing because patrons can review catalog entries for several collections. The downside to shared databases is the fact that patrons are exposed to information that is not immediately accessible, thus leading to increased user frustration. Several North Carolina academic libraries are sharing databases, but only the three western UNC libraries (Appalachian State University, UNC-Asheville, Western Carolina University) supply patrons reliable, prompt access to titles listed in the shared databases in a cost effective manner. With today's diverse population, writ-

ten resource sharing agreements that do not include a reliable, prompt means to transport desired resources are not sufficient. Librarians can no longer rely on the intent to provide access to information; instead they must devise realistic means of delivery.

As new formats are designed, production costs increase, and library funding shrinks, decisions about what information and which formats to acquire become increasingly difficult to make. With each new format, the problem broadens. Music is produced as scores, compact discs, tapes, and records in various speeds. Written information is generated in everything from books to videos to multimedia compact discs. The statistical probability of having the specific format desired by a patron decreases as the number of formats available for titles grows. In addition, the selection of the most appropriate format involves issues of durability, sound or visual quality, or entertainment quality. For example, libraries with large record collections now are faced with the task of finding record players and attempting to decide how the music will be preserved, transferred, and stored in a format that contemporary patrons can utilize.

Technology and varied formats can be used to offer more reliable access to current information and maintain balanced collections. For example, microfiche subscriptions can be used instead of traditional bound periodicals to maintain access to required journals. Combining microform reader/printers as companion equipment ensures high quality reproduction of articles.

The extent and variation of media formats cause many librarians to rely upon larger or specialized collections to give patrons access to video and films. Videos are excluded from many small collections because of the expense of purchasing and maintaining

them. Some libraries must adopt this policy because budgets are so limited that any attempt to acquire newer media, even on a limited or controlled basis, would limit the number of books received and journal subscriptions maintained. Additionally, the varied subjects produced on videos can place some librarians in the position of determining the "appropriateness" of a title for a collection or using restricted access policies in their circulation.

Because of the size of their budgets and the extent of their collections, large libraries have provided more information in varied formats to satisfy patron needs. They also have responded more effectively to patrons with unique physical needs. While they have purchased varied formats, they have not been able to solve adequately the problems of cataloging, indexing, and storing these resources. Processing and storage of media are not done with the same care and consistency as that of books. Many librarians feel that the limited subject headings or access points that have been assigned to media have limited access to this information.

Librarians committed to providing unrestricted access to information have devised indexes and catalogs to help patrons identify and locate media, as well as other resources in their collections. But the basic design of traditional indexes — using standardized subject headings and indexing a constant group of journals — immediately creates a barrier for patrons in locating current information. The subject headings used are not terms commonly considered by the

Many librarians feel that the limited subject headings or access points that have been assigned to media have limited access to this information.

Either by omission or commission, much of the information about the world's minorities currently is being withheld from the average researcher because of the design of common indexing systems.

general public and are difficult to interpret. The chance that a patron will select the same heading as the indexer is slight.

Another limitation—indexing standardized journals — severely limits access to current and sometimes controversial information. Researchers in specialized areas such as Women's Studies, African American Literature, or African American History have difficulty locating information because the indexing of these topics is not sufficient and the journals that are indexed are not those that cover those subjects.[3] In the book *Unequal Access to Information Resources: Problems and Needs of the World's Poor*, Kay Klayman Brown describes indexes as obstacles to retrieving information.[4] Either by omission or commission, much of the information about the world's minorities currently is being withheld from the average researcher because of the design of common indexing systems.

New CD-ROM-based indexes have enhanced access to current resources significantly; patrons can search for information covering two to three years at one time using Boolean and keyword searching capabilities. Keyword searching eliminates the necessity of using standardized terminology. Full-text databases expand patrons' access to current literature and increase the chances of finding a desired article. In addition, CD-ROM full-text databases often provide patrons almost immediate access to articles without leaving the workstation. These databases are good, but they still limit access to current information because, again, publishers select titles included in the database; moreover, these titles often are the same as those found in traditional paper indexes.

Journals are a vital section of academic library collections, but the growing number of journals and escalating publishing costs have made journal collections difficult to control. Originally, serials collection development policies consisted of adding all titles recommended by faculty and maintaining subscriptions until titles ceased publication. Because of inflation, sustaining serial collections within the limitations of the budget is an awesome task. Serial collection development policies have been modified to direct expansion and ensure that collections mirror instructional programs while, at the same time,

outlining review procedures for additions and cancellations from renewal lists. While the professed intent will be to provide the most useful serial collection within specific budget guidelines, subtle opportunities to shape academic collections and censor potentially controversial titles and topics will arise continuously.

The Internet has allowed information to be shared beyond the walls of the library at a faster rate than ever before.

Although technology in theory is bringing libraries closer to the goal of universal and equal access, the goal has become more elusive because of the vast amount of information produced.

Although technology in theory is bringing libraries closer to the goal of universal and equal access, the goal has become more elusive because of the vast amount of information produced.

Vice President Al Gore coined the term Information Superhighway in 1978. This concept has developed into a "seamless web of communication networks, computers, databases and consumer electronics that put a vast amount of information at users' fingertips." [5] One of the objectives of the Internet or Information Superhighway is to provide the general public with the information they need when they need it, but increased public access to information is unlikely because many people will not have access to computers and/or will not be able to afford line charges.

Internet users are already facing several urgent issues. Can users express their opinions without censorship? Can users remove unwanted comments and advertisements from the screen? Can "members" of informal user groups be banned from participating in the group without concerns for censorship?[6]

The Internet will, in theory, make more information available, but the audience will be smaller. A select

group will view the Internet as a "world library and the individual library will simply be one information supplier among many."[7] Whitson suggests that the role of the local library will be to provide patron access to the resources needed via electronic means. In addition, the local staff will help patrons with "defining information needs, since the network of information resources will be more complicated and searching those resources efficiently will require experts."[8] He predicts that libraries will have basic collections that will be accessible without costs or subsidy, but many of the services and resources acquired through electronic means will require some form of cost recovery.

If too many libraries embrace an electronic means of disseminating and preserving information, the average citizen's intellectual freedom and the right of access to information will be controlled because a small group of people will determine what is included on the Internet. Decisions will be made based on limited information. '

Electronic publishing has generated some controversial points. Among them is the question of its role in the scheme of providing information to the masses. Scientists and researchers view electronic publishing as an excellent means to share research promptly with fellow researchers and to receive equally prompt feedback.[9] Critics indicate, however, that it allows information to be shared only among a select few. Controversy apart, electronic publishing has several short comings, including lack of indexing and adequate tamper-resistant security.[10] Also, very few people control which information is digitized, and information that is covered by copy-

If too many libraries embrace an electronic means of disseminating and preserving information, the average citizen's intellectual freedom and the right of access to information will be controlled because a small group of people will determine what is included on the Internet.

right laws is not generally accessible. Those persons with the money will "make the rules, and those who invest billions in the new digitized world will have control of access to knowledge and information, and limitation of intellectual freedom is boundless."[11]

Because of the information explosion, the varied formats used in publishing, and the introduction of electronic publishing into the information arena, the task of providing patrons with comprehensive access to information has become even more challenging. Adding in the factors of limited budgets and protesters, the challenges librarians must overcome to safeguard the public rights to have sufficient information for informed decision-making will be great. Although these issues are significant and the costs great, academic librarians must not abdicate their mission to provide sufficient written information to educate and inform the public. Building and sustaining comprehensive academic collections guarantees that intellectual freedom will be upheld. Libraries without extensive resources should, as a group, decide which ones will provide access to specific formats or highly specialized subjects, and design a reliable, efficient, timely means to transport information among libraries. These efforts are important and will ensure that the library mission to inform the masses continues to be met.

References
[1] Frank Hoffman, *Intellectual Freedom and Censorship: An Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 1.

[2] Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., "From Censorship to Intellectual Freedom to Empowerment: The Evolution of the Social Responsibility of the American Public Library: A Bibliographic Essay," *North Carolina Libraries* 51 (Fall 1993): 136.

[3] Kristin H. Gerhard, Trudi E. Jacobson, and Susan G. Williamson, "Indexing Adequacy and Interdisciplinary Journals: The Case of Women's Studies," *College & Research Libraries* 54 (March 1994): 125.

[4] Kay Klayman Brown, "Information Poverty: The Rose of General Periodical Indexing," in *Unequal Access to Information Resources: Problems and Needs of the World's Poor* (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1988): 25-27.

[5] Mark L. Gordon and Diana J.P. McKensie, "From County Roads to Superhighways: Keeping Pace with the New Business and Legal Turns on the Information Super Highway," *Illinois Libraries* 76 (Summer 1994): 124.

[6] Thomas J. Delaughry, "Gatekeeping on the Internet," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 41 (November 23, 1994): A21.

[7] William L. Whitson, "Free, Fee or Subsidy? The Future Role of Libraries," *College & Research Library News* 55 (July-August 1994): 426.

[8] Ibid., 427.

[9] Carol Tenopir, "Electronic Publishing," *Library Journal* 119 (April 1, 1994): 42.

[10] David L. Wilson, "Internet Users Get New Alert on Hackers," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 41 (March 3, 1995): A19-21.

[11] Michael Gorman, "The Treason of the Learned: The Real Agenda of Those Who Would Destroy Libraries and Books," *Library Journal* 119 (February 15, 1994): 131.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS ...

Pauletta Brown Bracy
Education: B.A., Fisk University; M.L.S., University of Pittsburgh; Ph.D., The University of Michigan
Position: Associate Professor, School of Library and Information Sciences at North Carolina Central University

Frances Bryant Bradburn
Education: B.A., Wake Forest University; M.L.S., UNC- Greensboro
Position: Chief Consultant, Library Media Programs, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

James V.Carmichael, Jr.
Education: B.A., Emory University; M.L.S., Emory University; Ph.D., UNC-Chapel Hill
Position: Associate Professor, Department of Library and Information Studies at the UNC-Greensboro

Thomas Kevin B. Cherry
Education: B.A., UNC-Chapel Hill; M.L.S., UNC-Chapel Hill; Ph.D., UNC-Chapel Hill
Position: Local History Librarian, Rowan Public Library

Plummer Alston Jones, Jr.
Education: B.A., East Carolina University; M.S., Drexel University; Ph.D., UNC-Chapel Hill
Position: Director of Library Services, Catawba College

Teresa Leonard
Education: B.A., UNC-Chapel Hill; M.L.S., UNC-Chapel Hill
Position: Director, News Research Department *The News and Observer* Publishing Company

Rodney E. Lippard
Education: B.A., UNC-Chapel Hill; M.L.I.S. program, Graduate student, UNC-Greensboro
Position: Approval Plan Coordinator, UNC-Charlotte

Bill Roberts
Education: A.B., Earlham College; M.S. in L.S., Drexel University
Position: Director, Forsyth County Public Library System

Mae L. Rodney
Education: B.A., North Carolina Central University; M.L.S., North Carolina Central University; Ph.D., UNC-Chapel Hill
Position: Director of Library Services, G. C. O'Kelly Library at Winston-Salem State University

Justin L. Scroggs
Education: B.A., Wake Forest University; M.A.Ed., Wake Forest University
Position: Research Manager, News Research Department *The News and Observer* Publishing Company

Susan Steinfirst
Education: B.A., Sarah Lawrence College; M.L.S., University of Maryland; Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh
Position: Professor, School of Information and Library Science, UNC-Chapel Hill