Explicitly Ethics: A Review of Professional Codes for Informed Development of a Personal Code

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INTRODUCTION

In sixth grade I lied to a teacher about the quality of my homework because I felt backed against a wall. As a sixth grader I knew lying was wrong, but I wasn’t sure what to do when I had to betray a friend in order not to lie. There were conflicting circumstances and objectives fighting a battle of morality in my mind and I wasn’t accustomed to integral critical thinking. An understanding of ethics as “the art and science that seeks to bring sensitivity and method to the discernment of moral values and actions” (Carbo) implies preparation and preemptive decision-making in order to be prepared for problems like the one I had in sixth grade. I won’t wait to be confronted with difficult problems before I think about what principles I prioritize in order to live a responsible and ethical life within my social and professional communities.

Organizations need to similarly anticipate conflicting stakeholder objectives and be explicit about the ethical principles that influence how they operate. A code of ethics should inspire and impress the importance of ethical practices on members of an organization so that it sets a standard of practice (Fallis 25). Through use of a code of ethics every individual who claims to be part of the community understands the guidelines that are expected. Additionally, a code of ethics allows individuals outside the community to be informed about operation within the community and how community ethical standards will affect their interactions. Thus, the public can hold members of the community to the code of ethics; it can be used as a measure to determine if disciplinary action is required, and it encourages accountability.

REVIEW OF ORGANIZATION CODES
Information organizations have determined the need for codes of ethics and teams of professionals have subsequently met to determine the tenets of such codes. The American Library Association (ALA), the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the Special Libraries Association (SLA), and Cyberjournalist.net on behalf of bloggers of the world have written codes of ethics that consider a few primary principles: service to others, intellectual freedom, intellectual property, privacy, professional development, and interests in the workplace. The tenets are similar, but differ when particular aspects of the organization’s represented profession require additional specificities. This normally occurs in reference to the public community with whom they are interacting. For example, information organizations generally emphasize fairness, being unbiased, not discriminating, and providing best practices when fulfilling job duties. However, associations whose primary activity is reporting emphasize compassion to those who may be affected by their work. SPJ (1996) states in particular to “give voice to the voiceless; tell the story of diversity and magnitude of the human experience.” This statement is particular to the job of the journalist. The other professional organizations may generalize more because of the variety of job responsibilities that could be required of individuals who have the same title.

The right of individuals to access a variety of information is critical to an informed society. “Resist censorship” is a tenet of the codes of ethics by the ALA, ASIS&T, and the ALISE. However, the ASIS&T (1992) specifies that there should be no inappropriate
selection of information as a result of biases or errors. The ALISE (2010) states that members should promote access to diverse points of view. This difference occurs because of the scope of practice that these professionals experience. The ASIS&T is setting the standard for global information practice, while the ALISE (2010) is concerned with education. Similarly, the SPJ (1996) is concerned with supporting the open exchange of views, and takes responsibility for transparency of public business. Thus, the scope of an organization’s professional environment also results in different ethical tenets.

Codes of ethics also reflect the type of information with which professionals within the organization interact. Each code of ethics also makes statements about privacy. The ACM and ASIS&T make general statements about maintaining best practices to ensure confidentiality of individuals personally identifiable information. Other organizations such as the ALA, ALISE, SAA, and SLA are more concerned with proprietary information that is not necessarily personally identifiable, but is personal information such as access and borrowing records. Cyberjournalist.Net (2003) and the SPJ (1996) emphasize that private people have a greater right to privacy than those in the spotlight who desire power, influence, and attention. They state that “Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone’s privacy.” This statement prioritizes transparency to the public over maintaining an individual’s privacy, which is an important decision for the profession. Other information organizations are concerned about intellectual property. General respect for other’s work is encouraged by all organizations, but attaining a balance between users and rights holders is encouraged by the ALA and the SAA because of situations that result in property disputes at many
levels throughout libraries. Copyright and use is continually an issue within these organizations. Similarly, bloggers and journalists are told to never misrepresent people or occasions through picture manipulation or misleading headlines. Determining how to correctly use the information and knowledge attained through one’s profession is incredibly important for ethical success.

The ability of an information professional to conduct themselves with excellence and to prioritize professional work on the job is crucial. When considering private interests, each organization states that private agendas should never conflict with an individual’s professional activities or result in misuse of their power. Also, individuals need to represent themselves accurately. The ACM (1992) notes that people should never trespass, but get appropriate approval before using resources. The code developed by the ACM differs when consideration of excellence because it provides a measure of enforcement within the code of ethics. Membership to the professional organization is terminated if an individual does not uphold the tenets of the code. This ensures best practices within the community and emphasizes the importance of ethical practice.

Organizations often mention how professionals should further the interest of the profession with their codes. The SAA (2011) desires members to advocate for the use and understanding of the historical record; this is specific to archives. Bloggers are journalists are encouraged to expose unethical peers. ALISE (2010) and ACM (1992) members are encouraged to participate in the peer review process. The ASIS&T (1992) encourages members to increase the public’s awareness of their role in making
information available. The ALA and SLA do not encourage professionals to advocate for their jobs, but this may be excluded because of the variety of jobs that members could have and still be included in the organization. However, the spirit of each code of ethics suggests best practice within a professional field and are critical to encouraging and maintaining excellence.
### FIGURE 1 - DETAILS OF ETHICAL CODES

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<td>Provide the highest level of service through organized resources, equitable policies, access, and &quot;accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests&quot;</td>
<td>Act &quot;faithfully&quot; and treat all people fairly</td>
<td>Contrib ute to society and human well-being. Protect fundamental human rights, respect cultural diversit y, and minimiz e harm to on human health, welfare, and the environment through testing and reportin g violatio ns if determi ned necess ary. Don’t discrimi nate.</td>
<td>Act with integrity, honesty, openne ss, and fairness . Respec t others and recogni ze their human value and dignity. Do not discrimi nate. Aff ord all student s due process when evaluati ng work. Provide best practice s when advisin g and referrin g.</td>
<td>Show compas sion; be sensitiv e when using content of those affected by tragedy or grief. Pursuit of informat ion is not a license for arrogan ce.</td>
<td>Meet the needs of users as quickly, effectivel y, and efficiently as possible. Serve the needs and interests of employer s and institution s immediat ely. Contribut e to individual and communi ty memory. Act fairly, collegiall y, equitably, honestly.</td>
<td>Act with honesty, fairness, and in good faith. Provide the highest level of service, Deliver best sources and services possible. Enhance employer success by contributi ng to the mission, goals, policies, and strategie s of organizat ion.</td>
<td>Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage, especially those affected by grief or tragedy. Give voice to the voiceless; Tell the story of diversity and magnitude of the human experience.</td>
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<td>Resist censorship, “inappropriate selection and acquisitions policies, and biases in information selection, provision and dissemination.”</td>
<td>Resist censorship, “inappropriate selection and acquisitions policies, and biases in information selection, provision and dissemination.”</td>
<td>Resist censorship and actively promote access to diverse points of view.</td>
<td>Promote and provide the widest possible accessibility of materials. Promote open access and use when possible. Ensure proper custody of documents, balancing the needs of various stakeholders.</td>
<td>Deliver best sources.</td>
<td>Support the open exchange of views. Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public’s business is conducted in the open.</td>
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<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Protect privacy in respect &quot;to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted&quot;</td>
<td>Uphold privacy and confidentiality, &quot;respect whatever proprietary rights belong to [others]&quot;.</td>
<td>Respects the privacy of others by following retention and disposal periods, using information only what it was collected for, and keeping information confidential.</td>
<td>Respects privacy and confidentiality of student(s) and colleagues.</td>
<td>&quot;Private people have greater right to control information about themselves than public officials or others who seek power, influence, or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.&quot;</td>
<td>Establish procedures and policies to protect the interests of donors, individuals, groups, and institutions. Respect all users' rights to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of their research.</td>
<td>Honor privacy, rights, and reputation of individuals and organizations. Best practices for confidentiality.</td>
<td>&quot;Private people have greater right to control information about themselves than those who seek power, influence, or attention. ...Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.&quot; Generally, minimize harm.</td>
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<td>Balance consideration of information users and rights holders.</td>
<td>Resist procedures that promote unlawful discriminatory practices.</td>
<td>Honor property rights and give property credit to whom it is due.</td>
<td>Avoid unfair borrowing of ideas from others, give appropriate credit for joint authorship. Share research findings with both scholarly and community audiences.</td>
<td>Never plagiarize. Identify sources, Make sure content is not misrepresented. Do not change content of photos. Distinguish factual information from advertising.</td>
<td>Balance the competing interests of all stakeholders.</td>
<td>Respect the intellectual property of employer, clients and competitors. Inform clients or employer of potential legal and ethical violation in the provision of sources or services.</td>
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**EXPLICITLY ETHICS: REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT**

Never plagiarize. Test the accuracy of information from all sources. Seek out subjects of news stories to give them opportunity to respond. Identify sources whenever feasible. Question source’s motives. Make sure headlines and photos do not misrepresent. Avoid misleading re-enactments. Avoid undercover information gathering.
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<td>Do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or employing institutions. Personal convictions do not interfere with fair representation of the aims of employee/users access to information.</td>
<td>Don’t use position beyond authorized limits, do not misrepresent yourself, adhere to due processes and equality of opportunity.</td>
<td>Don’t trespass - get appropriate approval before using system resources, communication ports, file space, etc.</td>
<td>Avoid use of the classroom to promote ideas or products for personal gain.</td>
<td>Disclose conflicts of interest, affiliations, activities and personal agenda. “Be wary of sources offering information for favors. When accepting such information, disclose the favors.”</td>
<td>Never take unfair advantage of their privileged access to and control of historical materials.</td>
<td>Avoid conflicts of interest while at work. Represent yourself accurately concerning education, competencies and experience.</td>
<td>Avoid conflicts of interest. Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility. Refuse gifts, favors, special treatment. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.</td>
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<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
<td>Maintain and enhance skills, help coworkers, and foster the aspirations of other potential members.</td>
<td>Pursue ongoing professional development and encourage colleagues to do the same, undertake research conscientiously.</td>
<td>Strive for excellence, take responsibility for acquiring and maintaining professional competence. Know and respect laws pertaining to professional work.</td>
<td>Strive to improve teaching effectiveness by maintaining expertise in areas of specialization and ensure course content is informed by updated information.</td>
<td>Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.</td>
<td>Strive for excellenc e; lifelong learning is important and should be encouraged among co-workers. Encourage aspirations in those entering the field.</td>
<td>Seek excellence by maintaining professional knowledge and competencies in intellectual and information technologies, colleagues, organizations or other professionals.</td>
<td>Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.</td>
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<td>Professio nal Interests</td>
<td>Extend public awareness and appreciation of information availability and the role that information professionals have in providing it.</td>
<td>Accept and provide appropriate professional review. Give comprehensive reviews of computer systems, including potential risks. Honor contracts. Improve public understanding of computing and consequences.</td>
<td>Provide highest level of service to students through appropriate preparation, presentation and assessment. Promote the interests of LIS education within universities. Participate willingly in the peer review process.</td>
<td>Expose unethical practices of other bloggers.</td>
<td>Accountability of public leaders through documentation and collection. Advocate for the use and understanding of the historical record. Document and preserve the record of the broadest range of people. Preserve primary resources.</td>
<td>Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media. Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media. Invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.</td>
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PREAMBLE: PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS

Beginning a career as an information professional is a potentially unnerving experience unless one is guided by ethical guidelines for professional action. As a student of library and information science whose interests lie in competitive intelligence and knowledge management, my employment will most likely be by a for-profit corporation. The continual development of information and communication technologies will test my ethical use of knowledge within this field. Thus far in my personal, educational, and professional life experience I have pursued excellence in performance, just judgement, and service for the good of humanity. My life experiences have resulted in my increasing awareness of economic, political, social, and cultural diversity, which I embrace and will continue to encourage through my professional decisions. I seek to act with integrity, openness, and without bias. I hope that this ethical code will encourage me to live fully, be the best person I can be, and to actively participate with full knowledge that this life is the only one I will have. The following tenets list the ethical conduct that I would like to permeate my professional activities.

TENETS

I will serve with honesty, fairness, respect and excellence towards my coworkers and clients.

I will actively participate in organizational endeavors.

I will admit mistakes and correct them promptly (SPJ).
I will honor the privacy, rights, and reputation of individuals and organizations, adhering to best practices of confidentiality (SLA).

I will willingly participate in peer review processes and offer opinions based on experience and expertise, not personal incentives (ALISE).

I will represent myself as an information professional with pride and professionalism (ALISE).

I will promote library and information science by sharing research findings with scholarly and community audiences (ALISE).

I will give credit where credit is due and protect the interests of employers, competitors, and clients by resisting procedures that promote unlawful practices (ASIS&T).

I will avoid biases in selection, provision, and dissemination of information (ASIS&T).

I will strive for excellence by continually pursuing knowledge about current events, technology, and information literacy.

I will avoid conflicts of interest, and never manipulate unfair advantage (SAA).

I will treat others as I want to be treated.

CONCLUSION

These tenets will undoubtably help decision making and action in my future profession.

By continual consideration of the ethical principles that are important to me as an
information professional I perform to the best of my ability and encourage others to do similarly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


