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Leaving the Books Behind -- The Fate of Librarians, Especially Those in Technical Services: A Library Science Student's Perspective

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Little Red Herrings:
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made this up but it's probably out there) have for anyone? What informational needs are being served by making available *whitehouse.com*, or the *sexmuseum.com*, to every ten-year old? Those who defend the absolutist view have the burden of proof upon them. Let me make this clear. This is *not* a call for books to be burned. It is to sound the tocsin before libraries really do become "bare and ruined choir" where late good books were read.

In 1908, then **American Library Association (ALA)** President, **Arthur E. Bostwick**, addressed librarians in the *ALA Bulletin* about counting *everything* as reading material. He opined,

"Some are born great; some achieve greatness; some have greatness thrust upon them. It is in this way that the librarian has become a censor of literature.... Books that distinctly commend what is wrong, that teach how to sin and tell how pleasant it is, sometimes with and sometime without the added sauce of impropriety, are increasingly popular, tempting to the author to imitate them, the publishers to produce, the bookseller to exploit. Thank Heaven they do not tempt the librarian."

Leaving the Books Behind — The Fate of Librarians, Especially Those in Technical Services: A Library Science Student's Perspective

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One of the major questions confronting our profession today is the impending retirement of numerous librarians from various positions throughout the United States and the world. This is especially troubling, given that the current rate at which library science programs are churning out MLS/MLIS graduates is not enough to fill those positions as they become empty in the next five to ten years. Thus, a major concern for librarians everywhere is how are we as a profession going to handle this crisis.



Before **Bostwick**, ALA president **Joseph Nelson Larned** wrote in 1893 that the librarian should, "defend his shelves against an endless siege of vulgar literature." We've come a long way, baby. For all practical matters, our professional organization of librarians is fighting desperately to keep *www.schlong.com* open as part of the Constitution's First Amendment inalienable right to be titillated.

The **ACLU** and the **ALA** argue that Internet filtering must be halted, first because filtering violates the First Amendment. Filtering, it argues, directly contradicts the First Amendment, ergo, it's wrong, as, indeed, *any* censoring is. This is true only if the First Amendment is viewed to protect any speech or any expression. ALA's *Intellectual Freedom Manual* defines intellectual freedom as "... the right of any person to believe whatever he wants on any subject, and to express his beliefs or ideas *in whatever way he thinks appropriate* (emphasis added)." But is this true, is *all* speech protected by the Constitution?

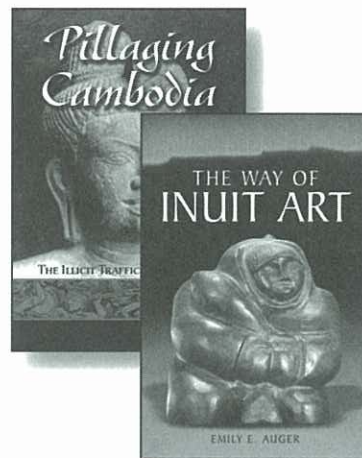
We'll examine that next time. 

Watch for "**Part Three: Free Speech and Filtering Myths,**" coming in *Against the Grain* soon!

A solution that is being offered nowadays is the downgrading of these professional jobs so that a paraprofessional can fill the position. However, it has become of increasing concern to librarians everywhere that once these positions are downgraded, it will be all the more difficult to elevate their status back to what is suitable for a librarian, if at all. Given this uncertain future climate, it is disheartening to know that one of the most affected departments in libraries will be that of technical services.

Filling technical services positions has always been problematic at best, but will be especially so in the near future, given that very few students going through library science programs today are opting to be catalogers and government document librarians. Therefore, the most critical question today is not how we as a profession are going to handle this crisis in general, but how we as a profession are going to

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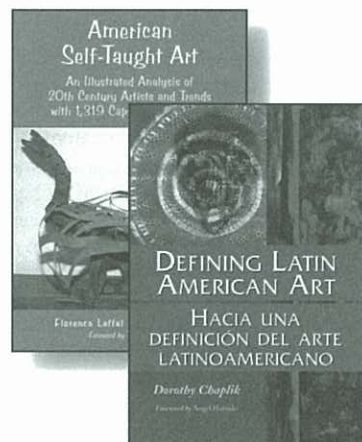


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technical services with qualified librarians when they are already suffering in the present. It is a very slippery slope, one that has prompted even more questions than answers, such as should we as librarians give into the current trends and accept that paraprofessionals will assume our positions or should we go down fighting for our positions. Also if we do decide to fight, how can we combat this trend effectively?

These are all questions that have been asked by library science students in the last weeks, even days preceding the publication of this article. While attending class at the **University of South Carolina**, these concerns came to the forefront of our discussion. Answers to these questions ranged from requiring librarian certification to somehow force the powers that be to stop hiring paraprofessionals to do a librarian's job. However, this spawned even more debate over the distinction that some of these paraprofessionals have in their respective fields and in the profession in general. Is it really fair not to call someone a librarian who has been in the profession for decades and who is an expert in their chosen field just because they do not have MLIS after their name?

These are the types of questions that the profession and the librarians of the future are asking themselves. Do we have any security once we have graduated with an MLIS? That question led to another line of questioning in relation to this crisis such as, are library science programs providing future librarians with the knowledge needed to succeed in their profession, especially when in competition with their paraprofessional counterparts. Also, how can library science programs and librarians in general better recruit to fill these soon to be vacant positions?

It is ironic that today, we as a profession have long acknowledged the crisis in front of us but have long tended to spend more time and energy contemplating the effect of technology and digitization on our profession than pondering how to keep this profession thriving. This is truly a crisis that some say is of our own making. When did we become so involved with technology and the impending changes it presents that we neglected to follow the previous paths of the profession in "growing our own."


It is indeed a slippery slope. The question now is how are we going to stop our rapid descent, keeping in mind departments like technical services that have often been neglected in terms of recruitment for those already vacant and soon to be vacant positions. This discussion is not trying to say that the advancement of technology and digitization in the profession is unimportant, only that without librarians to implement these changes, we will have bigger problems to handle. Thus it is important that we as a profession start and continue the dialogue needed to answer these questions and while it is inevitable that we will have more questions than answers at first, it is hoped that through perseverance and dedication, answers will be reached. It is also important that library science students are involved in this dialogue, because we are the future members of the profession and we will be the ones helping to shape the qualifications of the profession in the future.

**Many of the philosophies and discussions alluded to are from class chat and on-site sessions at the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science.*

Rebuttal from Tinker Massey:

It seems like years since I rebutted this argument. At that time, I was at the **University of Florida Libraries**. We were in a practical discussion with the Director of the Library and came to the conclusion that we, in the profession, were having a hard time defining who we were and where we were going. I think with the added stresses of change today, we are still in this predicament. At Florida, we decided to get proactive and help the definition by finding suitable professional career paths for our librarians. Librarians were interviewed as to their interests and ideals and found to have dreams and aspirations of more diligent research goals or work capabilities. Plans were made and carried out to further educate/equip our professionals to do more professional jobs within the present structure. Those might include preparation for research, writing articles or books, developing Websites for particular local research on campus, working with bibliographic teams or faculty, developing analyses for particular studies on campus, or any number of other activities that not only promoted the individual, but also the library and university communities. When you analyze jobs, you often find that activities can be passed down the line to more appropriate personnel, but there must be new activities to take their place. Our work did not stop there, either. We designed a way for paraprofessionals to choose a similar course of action, by receiving developmental hours during each week of work, but having to

show results of that time on the yearly evaluation as part of the job structure. A contract was developed and people fulfilled those contracts. As I said, this was a choice made by each individual, and some chose not to pursue it, while others became deeply involved in their dreams.

The common failure of any system is to ignore the needs of the staff they employ. While there are certainly general needs for all of us, some require the ability to continue their development in many different ways. We are not only looking to replace the graying employees, but establish an environment that will promote respect between all workers. Much of what we do in Technical Services is learned "on the job" from various sources, especially from the paraprofessionals. After we acquire their knowledge, we need to return to them knowledge "in kind." They are our best allies for organizing and completing the tasks at hand. They are our team members, not our enemies. There should be no atmosphere of fear, just a coordinated effort to get the job done and institute those changes wherever needed. I have agonized over these discussions in classes and hope that I am able to give a different perspective to the new students and graduates. I have enjoyed the classroom determination of most professors to instill the power of learning and discussion, and hope that all students continue those principles no matter where their work venues are. 

Lost in Austin

by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Director, Scarborough-Phillips Library, St. Edward's University, 3001 South Congress Avenue, Austin, TX 78704-6489; Phone: 512-448-8470; Fax: 512-448-8737) <leonhard@libr.stedwards.edu>

For the past several years, I recognize fewer and fewer faces at the conferences that I attend. Friends and colleagues from the 1970s and 1980s are still around but many have retired or, sadly, died, and those who are still working don't get around much anymore, mostly by choice.

The **2004 Charleston Conference** was no exception for me. Of course, with 880 registrants, no one could know them all, but I had to seek out familiar faces as I moved through the crowds of strangers headed for refreshments and the next session. I figure that I might have known only thirty or forty people at this conference but the good news is that I have known them for many years, a quarter of a century or more in some cases. It is those long associations and friendships that draw me back to Charleston and a couple more gatherings each year.

With air travel becoming more onerous with each trip, I need something more than interesting programs and speakers. I have had a lifetime of those and while I am not averse to learning new tricks, the thrill is gone.

Are reminiscences history? Oral histories qualify. Did anyone tape the reminiscences that were part of the **2004 Charleston Conference**? There was no **Studs Terkel** there to guide the conversations; they were left to the discretion of those on the panel — **Mike Markwith, John Laraway, Knut Dorn, and Dan Tonkery**.

Oftentimes when people look back, reminisce, re-visit the past, they tend to ramble, grabbing a bit from here, another bit from there, and never connect anything or develop a coherent memory. These pan-

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