“Human beings have grappled with issues of right and wrong, morality and law, and ethics and duty ever since human beings began to engage in abstract thinking” (Lester 2003, 225). This struggle is due to multiple and sometimes conflicting inputs to our lives and the relationship between these inputs. These can be our religion, our family, society and the law. Each person must sort through these inputs and determine what is important to them as an individual. This, then, becomes the basis of our professional values (Winston 2005, 235).

I believe values are the ideals that we care about, consider important and use for the basis for our actions. We all develop personal values and professional values. While they are often related, they are not always the same. For example, a person may be a pacifist, but if they are working in the library they should not expect the library to represent this view exclusively. Our professional values are also shaped by the context and setting in which they exist (Rodger 1998, 68). They reflect how we conduct ourselves at work and how we relate to our patrons, colleagues and members of our community. They are guides to our decision making. However, we often do not think about or even understand what our values are. This is important to do to avoid conflict between what we feel as an individual is important and what is important to the organization where we work. This is not easy, but after sitting down and reflecting on what is important to me, I have defined my professional values as People, Service: With Honesty and Integrity, Freedom of Information and Knowledge.

People

I believe that valuing people is the basis of all other values. People matter – all groups of people and each person as an individual. Demonstrating respect for human dignity of all persons is the primary value on which library policies and our actions should rest. We must respect ourselves first and then respect others. Human dignity belongs equally to every person; it is universal to everyone, regardless of citizenship, race, color, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation or age. I believe that culturally diverse peoples have the right to hold and practice diverse views and beliefs provided that they do so within domestic and constitutional law. Everyone is equal before the law and the law applies equally to everyone, and we should demonstrate tolerance for all people.

Tolerance is accepting and valuing differences among people and not judging others as inferior or less deserving of our support due to their differences. I think that the principles of equality and non-discrimination must guide our actions and decision making. People have a fundamental right to speak openly, honestly, and without
censorship as long as they are not infringing on the rights of others. For example, they do not have the right to yell “Fire” in a crowd, causing panic and possible harm to those around them. All people should be treated with dignity and respect.

I also believe that people have the right to privacy. Privacy can be defined as “the claim of individuals, groups or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about themselves is communicated to others” (Cate 1997, 22). However, this definition is very broad and all encompassing, and it can result in conflicts with society. Using this broad definition, it would be difficult for law enforcement to gather information when investigating a crime, and for physicians to obtain medical information to treat an individual in an emergency. Therefore, I believe that the right to privacy must be taken in context. In a library, I believe it means that reading and the information accessed by an individual is private. Neither the library nor the government has a right to freely access this information without a court order for a specifically defined investigation. If a librarian suspects criminal activity, he or she has an obligation to society and other patrons to report this to authorities, but the librarian and the government do not have the right to go ‘fishing’ through personal records. People have the right to use library materials that they determine are useful without fear of action or judgment from others.

**Service: With Honesty and Integrity**

Because I believe in the equality of all people, I believe in providing equitable and exceptional services to all library patrons. This means performing functions in a timely, reliable and accurate manner, while being proactive and responsive. Library patrons are the lifeblood of our business and I believe our primary duty should be to always offer our best professional judgment. I agree that “the purpose of the field is to communicate knowledge to people” (Rubin 2004, 304) and this is “more than just ‘meeting an information need’” (Rubin 2004, 304). The difference in these statements is two-fold. The first is the definition of information versus knowledge, with (in simplistic terms) information being a set of facts and knowledge being the accumulation of facts that result in further understanding. The second difference is meeting just the stated need of a person versus providing knowledge that may not be specifically requested but is important and of value. For example, a patron may come to the library to obtain information on what flowers to plant in their yard in April. ‘Meeting their information need’ would be to find a book or article to answer that one question. ‘Communicating knowledge’ might be providing a pamphlet or having a display on all plants found in the area or information on botanical gardens to visit. We want patrons to visit the library for what they might learn beyond what they need to know. What they need to know can most likely be found, these days, on the internet without a visit to the library. As librarians, we should understand our patrons and be proactive in providing information products and services in anticipation of their needs. “Excellence in customer service leads to greater use of library services” (Schachter 2006, 8).
The other part of service, I believe, is honesty and integrity. “Integrity includes but goes beyond honesty. Honesty is telling the truth - in other words, conforming our words to reality. Integrity is conforming reality to our words - in other words, keeping promises” (Scarnati 1997, 25). I think we must value both personal and organizational integrity. Patrons expect the library to provide timely, as well as accurate information. Part of the accuracy of that information is the responsibility of the provider of the information, the librarian. I think that respect for truth is separate from the search for truth. We can search for truth, but we need to be sure we provide the most accurate, truthful information within our capacity as librarians. This does not mean that only truthful information should be part of the library collection. As mentioned in *Foundations of Library Information Systems*, some of the ideas of Hitler may be known to not be true, but they are valuable for historical analysis and understanding about the past and the dangers that may lie in the future. Making this information unavailable would result in people not understanding the truth (Rubin 2004, 312). I believe integrity helps ensure the trust of those we serve by ensuring we are operating both ethically and professionally. No one is perfect, but everyone is expected to be perfectly honest.

**Freedom of Information**

I believe that the free flow of information is a by-product of valuing people and valuing service. This is a ‘standard’ or ‘traditional’ value of librarians. However, with today’s war on terrorism and the USA PATRIOT Act, there are some real issues on how to balance providing information to those who need it, protecting patrons’ civil liberties and performing our duty to the government. While I believe in freedom of access to information, I do not believe this means access to all information, all the time and by everyone. I think libraries are a part of the community and they should define their policies for information access to correlate with national security issues. The government should define sensitive security information in a way that is recognized so that libraries know how they should address their own collections and their patrons’ request for information. However, outside the issue of national security, information should be accessible to everyone, no matter what our personal values may be. This is an area where personal and professional values may come in conflict, but I believe in order to be a librarian, personal values must be put aside for the values of the librarian profession.

**Knowledge**

Providing knowledge to library patrons is of prime importance, and I think this has been addressed through my values listed above. In reference to the term knowledge in this section, I am referring to the knowledge of myself as a librarian. I feel in order to be a professional, each person must continuously evaluate their professional knowledge and skills. There are many changes in technology and today’s social environment, and we all must keep informed and educated about the practices in our profession to ensure ethical conduct. Continual, life long education and learning are an integral part of a meaningful and professional career. As a librarian, we are part of a ‘learning
organization’, and we must constantly improve our practices and procedures to support the services for our patrons. Part of this process is also to continually review our professional values in light of changes within the library and society.

**Professional Values and the ALA Code of Ethics**

Professional values are often supported by ethical principles and the code of ethics of professional associations (Winston 2005). The American Library Association (ALA) has developed their Code of Ethics with an introduction that states, “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” (ala.org). With this statement, I believe my professional values are in line with and supported by the ALA Code of Ethics. My most important professional values, as defined above, fall in line with the first three and the last item of the ALA Code of Ethics:

I. 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.

II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

III. 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.

VIII 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.

I therefore, feel comfortable with the values I have defined for myself and how they fit within the library profession.

**Where Do My Values Come From**

One thing I have not addressed yet is where my values came from. I do not have an answer to this. I had a good family, and we went to church, but I do not see anything in those relationships that stand out to make me feel the way I do. I think my values have been formed more by just growing up and my interaction with society around me. In my experiences I saw people and actions I liked and those I did not like and these have affected my values both personally and professionally. People and service, have been core values to me for a long time, and I have lived my professional and personal life by these beliefs. Freedom of Information is new, as I had not thought a lot about this issue before. Professional development has also been important for some time, which is why I started graduate school late in life. And while I have just performed the exercise of
putting thoughts to paper, this learning process is not over. It is important to continue to review and update this statement, not only for myself, but for the profession as well.

**Conclusion**

I believe that “librarians will be seen as professional as long as our professionalism is valued in American culture” (Crowley 2005, 2). Libraries must continually reassess the definition of customer service in terms of the patron. As a professional, I must continually review the quality and availability of library services, as well as the customer support for those services. Our professional values are not useful if they do not match those of our patrons. Today, patrons have many choices for obtaining information, and if they do not see the value of going to the library, they will turn elsewhere and “will abandon any organization that they feel is unresponsive to their wants and needs” (Deane 2003, 316). Professional values are important to understanding what is important to us, and they are the basis of our actions with our customers. They should be reviewed and adjusted over time to make sure we are in sync with ourselves, our patrons and our community.
Works Cited


