

Editor's Corner: Government Information Librarianship Existentialism

Elizabeth Sanders

While I try to keep my editorials optimistic, I have also made no secret that I, like many others, struggle with the current political environment in which I find myself, both within the United States and globally. Every time I sit down to work on an editorial on an aspect of government information librarianship, it seems more events occur and more information emerges.

To give a sample, I will highlight just three. First, in mid-September, the United Nations Human Rights Council concluded that Israel “bears responsibility for the failure to prevent genocide, the commission of genocide and the failure to punish genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.”¹ Second, President Trump has deployed the National Guard in several states for months using the justification of quelling large increases in crime and domestic terrorism which are not proven to exist.² Finally, the US Supreme Court recently heard oral arguments on *Chiles v. Salazar*, the decision on which may deem state laws that ban conversion therapy for minors unconstitutional.³

I know it is my professional and civic duty to keep up with these events and the corresponding government information—but on an emotional level, I have found myself questioning government information librarianship. What is our role as government information librarians in times like these? How are we to navigate the current and future landscape, when so much has changed so quickly? So, like any academic librarian with questions, I turned to the published literature to see if I could find answers.

Several insightful articles on the history and transformation of government information librarianship, particularly in academic libraries, exist.⁴ In this issue of *DttP*, Sanga Sung’s work joins that body of literature; I found her discussions of contemporary challenges and future opportunities especially useful. Equally interesting is how government information librarians describe themselves. On the positive side, government information librarians described their work as “rewarding and challenging,” with “specialized knowledge, distinct professional culture, and strong community identity.” On the negative side, they felt the value of government information was “not fully understood” and thus “underutilized by the public, underappreciated by library administration, and eschewed by other librarians.”⁵

Thinking about the federal government in particular, I found two articles addressing how government information librarians tackled Trump’s first presidency.⁶ For our current situation, *The Political Librarian* has released a special issue titled “The 2024 Election and the Future of Libraries” with 22 articles that offer different perspectives, subtopics, and practical advice that I am

working my way through reading in its entirety.⁷ I also found inspiration in long-standing and recent efforts to preserve government information and the Internet Archive’s designation as a Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) library.⁸

Both sets of literature described above encouraged me in recognizing how challenges I face are not new, whether that be in my struggles to embrace change or my frustration at the types of changes occurring, and reminding myself of the larger community of librarians, government information focused or otherwise, who have preceded me or are beside me. Yet, the most helpful resource I found was one that addressed librarianship more broadly.

In Moore’s “Going Around in Circles: Interrogating Librarians’ Spheres of Concern, Influence, and Control,” she provides an overview of circles of influence, concern, and control and its potential applications to librarianship.⁹ While somewhat familiar with the concept, as seen in my general call in past editorials for us to work in the areas which we can influence and control, the connection built between anxiety, job creep, and burnout felt only too familiar to me but articulated in a way I had previously been unable to do myself. She also covers the concept of “slow librarianship,” with which I was not familiar, as a potential way to rethink how to divide time and energy.

I didn’t find concrete answers to my questions through this dive into the literature; honestly, I didn’t expect to find them. What I wanted, what I needed, was reassurance. I did find that. I found reassurance that with change comes adaptation, that there is a community who has seen and adapted with which I can engage. I found reassurance in the reminder that I shouldn’t burden myself with expectation and that taking things slowly still has value. So, for those of you who may be in the same mental space I was, please take heart. The way forward may not be clear yet, but that does not mean we should stop trying. The work we do is valuable, even if it is small.

The views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government Documents Round Table (GODORT), the American Library Association (ALA), Lamar University, or any other entity.

Elizabeth Sanders (esanders5@lamar.edu), Director of Learning & Research, Lamar University

Notes

1. United Nations Human Rights Council, Sixtieth session, *Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel*, Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, A/HRC/60/CRP.3 (September 16, 2025): 71. <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>.
2. President Donald J. Trump to The Secretary of War, The Attorney General, and The Secretary of Homeland Security, *SUBJECT: Department of War Security for the Protection of Federal Personnel and Property in Illinois*, October 4, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/10/department-of-war-security-for-the-protection-of-federal-personnel-and-property-in-illinois/>; "PORTLAND: Fake News Ignores Antifa Violence, Residents' Pleas for Help," *The White House*, October 8, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/10/portland-fake-news-ignores-antifa-violence-residents-pleas-for-help/>; Juliana Kim, "Where has Trump Suggested Sending Troops? In Cities Run by Democratic Mayors," *NPR*, updated October 11, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/10/nx-s1-5567177/national-guard-map-chicago-california-oregon>.
3. US Supreme Court, "Oral Argument—Audio for *Chiles v. Salazar*," Docket No. 24-539, October 7, 2025, https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/audio/2025/24-539. The above webpage offers access to a playable audio file (1:24:44), downloadable MP3 file (1:24:44), and Transcript (PDF). For more information on the case, see: *Chiles v. Salazar*, Docket No. 24-539, Accessed October 8, 2025, <https://www.supremecourt.gov/docket/docketfiles/html/public/24-539.html>; Amy Howe, "Majority of Court Appears Skeptical of Colorado's 'Conversion Therapy' Ban," *SCOTUSblog*, October 7, 2025, <https://www.scotusblog.com/2025/10/majority-of-court-appears-skeptical-of-colorados-conversion-therapy-ban/>; Sam Levin and Rachel Leingang, "US Supreme Court Appears Poised to Overturn Colorado Ban on 'Conversion Therapy,'" *The Guardian*, October 7, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/07/conversion-therapy-ban-supreme-court-adf>; Nina Totenberg, "Supreme Court Seems Highly Doubtful of Limits on Conversion Therapy for Minors," *NPR*, October 7, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/07/nx-s1-5563987/supreme-court-conversion-therapy-colorado>.
4. Claudene Sproles, "Technological Transformation of United States Government Documents Librarianship," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 48, no. 2 (2022): 102498, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102498>; Megan E. Miller, "Trends in Government Information Librarianship," *Kentucky Libraries* 85, no. 3 (2021): 9-14; Claudene Sproles and Angel Clemons, "The Migration of Government Documents Duties to Public Services: An Analysis of Recent Trends in Government Documents Librarian Job Advertisements," *The Reference Librarian* 60, no. 2 (2019): 83-92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2019.1570419>.
5. Richard M. Mikulski, "Language, Professional Culture, and Self-Depiction in Government Documents Librarianship," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 22, no. 4 (2022): 1037, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0051>.
6. Kian A. Flynn and Cassandra J. Hartnett, "Cutting Through the Fog: Government Information, Librarians, and the Forty-Fifth Presidency," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 208-216, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90019888>; Alicia Kubas, "A Turbulent Time: Government Sources Post-2016 Presidential Election," *Reference Services Review* 48, no. 1 (2020): 129-142, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2019-0073>.
7. *The Political Librarian* 8, no. 1, Special Issue: The 2024 Election and the Future of Libraries (2025), <https://journals.library.wustl.edu/pollib/issue/1971/info/>.
8. Rob Mackinlay, "Q&A with US Government Information Librarian at Stanford University," *CILIP*, June 19, 2025, <https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/703995/>; *Free Government Information*, accessed October 13, 2025, <https://freegovinfo.info/>; Data Rescue Project, <https://www.datarescueproject.org/>; End of Term Web Archive, <https://eotarchive.org/>; Preservation of Government Information (PEGI) Project, <https://www.pegiproject.org/>; "Home - Government Information Data Rescue - Subject Guides at American University." Accessed May 30, 2025. https://subjectguides.library.american.edu/data_rescue/; Jenny McBurney, Molly Blake, Sanga Sung et al. *Tracking Government Information (TGI)*. University of Minnesota—Twin Cities, University of Illinois, Urbana—Champaign, and California State University, Sacramento, Accessed June 2, 2025, <https://sites.google.com/umn.edu/trackinggovinfo>; Senator Alex Padilla to Scott Matheson, *Letter Designating Internet Archive a Federal Depository Library*, July 24, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/padilla-designation-letter-to-gpo-7.24.2025>.
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