
Trusted Information in an Age of Uncertainty

Barry Trott

Correspondence concerning this column should be addressed to Barry Trott, RUSQ Editor, 7770 Croaker Rd., Williamsburg, VA, 23188; e-mail: btrott@wrl.org.

Public and academic libraries alike are facing a variety of challenges surrounding information, facts, and trust. These challenges arise from a societal shift that has been building over the half century since Richard Hofstadter published *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* in 1964. Though scholars may disagree on the actual level of anti-intellectualism in the United States, there seems to be little doubt that many of our library users increasingly encounter opinion presented as fact, disturbing dismissals of science, and a lack of critical thinking on social media and in the news. Unfortunately, this disturbing trend also seems to be making an appearance in information available from formerly reliable sources. As this issue's editors, David A. Tyckoson and Nicolette Sosulski, noted in their proposal for a special issue of *RUSQ* on information trustworthiness, "Professional organizations, educational institutions, [and] government agencies have always been trustworthy providers of quality information. But now that we are living in a time when government speech is inhibited, and some agencies are removing or revising their own publications, where do we find accurate and authentic information?" The columns and articles in this special issue of *RUSQ* have all been selected by Dave and Nicolette or by the *RUSQ* column editors to reflect in some fashion on the topics of information, authority, and trust, especially in regard to government information. Librarians as information professionals have always sought to provide access to accurate and authoritative information. Now, we need to be at the forefront of ensuring not only that access is preserved, but also that information itself does not become lost in the culture wars.

This is not necessarily a new role for librarians or for libraries. In 1939, the American Library Association adopted the first version of the Library Bill of Rights. In the preamble to the Library Bill of Rights, the drafters pointed to the need for libraries to affirm their support for access to information in the face of "growing intolerance, suppression of free speech, and censorship affecting the rights of minorities and individuals."¹ The current version of the Library Bill of Rights reminds us that "libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas."² Not only do our institutional values direct us to resist limits on access to information, they are also an ethical imperative for us as librarians. The preamble to the ALA Code of Ethics notes, "In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual

freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.”³

Our hope is that this special issue of *RUSQ* begins a dialog on how libraries and librarians can best navigate these challenging and contentious issues and continue to provide our users with trusted information in an age of uncertainty.

References

1. *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, 8th ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010), 51.
2. “Library Bill of Rights,” American Library Association, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.
3. “Code of Ethics,” American Library Association, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>.