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TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Ethics Working Group
DATE: 12 September 2007
RE: Study Results and Recommendations for an Ethics Code for SLA

Summary:

In response to the request of the Board President, the Ethics Workgroup carried out an analysis of the ethics codes and guidelines of ten library and information associations. The results of this analysis are attached in the Appendix and summarized here. Based on our research, we recommend that SLA pursue the establishment of ethics guidelines for its members. We also recommend that the guidelines fit the following criteria:

- ❖ Brief
- ❖ Concise
- ❖ Relevant to all segments of the membership
- ❖ Instructive, not subject to enforcement
- ❖ Aligned with our core competencies

Background:

Members of the Ethics Workgroup (Barbara Spiegelman, chair; Lynn Berard, Christina Darnowski, Carolyn Sosnowski, Barbara Wildemuth) examined and analyzed the content of the ethics codes of 10 professional associations. The Associations were chosen to represent the wide variety of our membership in subject interest and type of organization served, and to cross international borders.

- ❖ American Association of Law Libraries (AALL)
- ❖ American Library Association (ALA)
- ❖ American Society for Information Society & Technology (ASIS&T)
- ❖ Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP)
- ❖ Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA International)
- ❖ Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
- ❖ Canadian Library Association (CLA)
- ❖ Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP)
- ❖ Medical Library Association (MLA)
- ❖ Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP)

The basic tenets of the codes were also examined in connection with the SLA [*Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century*](#) (2003).

These ethics codes and guidelines address a variety of professional values and behaviors, including levels of services and responsibility for service and system quality; equity of access; the role of personal beliefs in providing services; intellectual freedom; privacy and confidentiality; intellectual

property rights and other legal considerations; conflict of interest; treatment of or relations with employer, colleagues, or users, and balancing their competing needs; informing users about the sources provided; obligations for professional development; accurate representation of one's expertise; protecting the reputation of information professionals and promoting the information profession; concern for the public good; concern for the preservation of cultural heritage; and enforcement of such codes.

Findings:

We found that the vast majority of library and information associations have some form of ethics code or guidelines. Because the profiles of members vary among the associations studied, code components are wide-ranging but do have many common elements. The provision of the highest levels of service was most frequently cited in the codes. Although some codes were quite detailed and long, we found the shorter, more concise lists of guidelines had more impact.

Recommendations:

In our research, we noted characteristics both common and unique to the LIS codes and guidelines, and determined which we thought fit most appropriately with SLA's [Vision, Mission, and Core Values Statements](#) and the profile of its membership. The following is the list of components selected for their relevance to SLA:

- ❖ Professional development
- ❖ Highest levels of service
- ❖ Responsibility for quality of systems, services, materials
- ❖ Integrity and accurate representation of expertise
- ❖ Legal considerations and intellectual property concerns
- ❖ Treatment of/relationship with employer, colleagues, and users
- ❖ Conflicts of interest
- ❖ Confidentiality and privacy

The following components were present in one or more of the analyzed codes, however we do not recommend including them in the set of guidelines developed for SLA. While not inherently objectionable, they do not fit into the scheme of a broad code that would serve the membership as a whole, and they do not "feel" like SLA.

- ❖ Code enforcement
 - SLA can encourage adherence, but it does not have the ability to compel compliance.
- ❖ Concern for the public good
 - Our members' concerns are for their clients, who are not usually society as a whole.
- ❖ Concern for preservation of cultural heritage
 - Cultural heritage is a priority for a very small number of our members.
- ❖ Balancing the needs of users and employers
 - Users and employers are often one and the same.
- ❖ Balancing the competing needs of users
 - While important, we do not see this as an ethical issue.
- ❖ Equity of access
 - This is largely a concern in dealing with the public. For most of our members, equity of access is not of prime concern.
- ❖ Intellectual freedom
 - Protection of intellectual property rights, not intellectual freedom, is more appropriate for consideration here.
- ❖ Personal beliefs and convictions
 - The mission of an SLA member's employer will most often dictate behavior and influence decision-making.
- ❖ Reputation of the information profession
 - Reputation is implied in the recommended components of integrity, high service level, acceptance of professional responsibility.

Appendix

Codes analyzed:

- ❖ American Association of Law Libraries (AALL): Ethical Principles, http://www.aallnet.org/about/policy_ethics.asp.
- ❖ American Library Association (ALA): Code of Ethics, <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.htm>.
- ❖ American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIST): Professional Guidelines, <http://www.asis.org/AboutASIS/professional-guidelines.html>.
- ❖ Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP): Code of Ethical Business Practice, <http://www.aiip.org/AboutAIIP/aiipethics.html>.
- ❖ Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA): Code of Professional Responsibility, <http://www.arma.org/about/overview/ethics.cfm>.
- ❖ Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA): Core Values Statement, <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/core.values.html> ; Code of Professional Conduct, <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/professional.conduct.html>.
- ❖ Canadian Library Association (CLA): Code of Ethics, <http://www.cla.ca/about/ethics.htm>.
- ❖ Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP): Ethical Principles, <http://www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/ethics/principles.htm>; Code of Professional Practice, <http://www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/ethics/code.htm>.
- ❖ Medical Library Association (MLA): Goals and Principles for Ethical Conduct, <http://www.mlanet.org/about/ethics.html>.
- ❖ Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP): Code of Ethics for CI Professionals, http://www.scip.org/2_code.php.

Codes Analysis:

Highest levels of service

ALA	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.
ASIST	following and promoting standards of conduct in accord with the best current practices
CLA	facilitate access to any or all sources of information which may be of assistance to library users;
CILIP EP	Provision of best possible service within available resources.
ALIA CV	Excellence in professional service to our communities.
MLA	The health sciences librarian ensures that the best available information is provided to the client.
AALL	We provide zealous service using the most appropriate resources and implementing programs consistent with our institution's mission and goals.
ARMA	Strive to serve the client or employer at the highest level of their professional competence.

Responsibility for quality of systems, services, materials

SLA B.2: Builds a dynamic collection of information resources based on a deep understanding of clients' information needs and their learning, work and/or business processes.

SLA B.3: Demonstrates expert knowledge of the content and format of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate, select and filter them.

SLA C.1: Develops and maintains a portfolio of cost-effective, client-valued information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization and client groups.

SLA C.3: Researches, analyzes and synthesizes information into accurate answers or actionable information for clients, and ensures that clients have the tools or capabilities to immediately apply these.

SLA D.1: Assesses, selects and applies current and emerging information tools and creates information access and delivery solutions.

SLA D.2: Applies expertise in databases, indexing, metadata, and information analysis and synthesis to improve information retrieval and use in the organization.

ASIST	undertaking their research conscientiously, in gathering, tabulating or interpreting data; in following proper approval procedures for subjects; and in producing or disseminating their research results
CILIP CPP	Ensure that the information systems and services for which they are responsible are the most effective, within the resource available, in meeting the needs of users.
CILIP CPP	Ensure that the materials to which they provide access are those which are most appropriate to the needs of legitimate users of the service.
MLA	The health sciences librarian provides leadership and expertise in the design, development, and ethical management of knowledge-based information systems that meet the information needs and obligations of the institution.
AALL	We strive to obtain the maximum value for our institution's fiscal resources, while at the same time making judicious, analytical and rational use of our institution's information resources.
AIIP	Give clients the most current and accurate information possible within the budget and time frames provided by the clients.
ARMA	Support the creation, maintenance, and use of authentic, reliable, usable information and support the development and use of information systems that place a high priority on accuracy and integrity, which requires that records be complete and unaltered (ISO 15489-1 Records Management).

Equity of access

ALA	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.
ASIST	To treat all persons fairly.
CLA	make every effort to promote and maintain the highest possible range and standards of library service to all segments of Canadian society;
CILIP EP	Equitable treatment of all information users.
ALIA CV	Respect for the diversity and individuality of all people.
MLA	The health sciences librarian promotes access to health information for all.
MLA	The health sciences librarian works without prejudice to meet the client's information needs.
AALL	We promote open and effective access to legal and related information. Further we recognize the need to establish methods of preserving, maintaining and retrieving legal information in many different forms.

Personal beliefs/convictions

ALA	We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
CILIP CPP	Avoid inappropriate bias or value judgements in the provision of services.

AALL	We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with the service we provide.
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Intellectual freedom

ALA	We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
ASIST	To promote open and equal access to information, within the scope permitted by their organizations or work, and to resist procedures that promote unlawful discriminatory practices in access to and provision of information,
CLA	support and implement the principles and practices embodied in the current Canadian Library Association Statement on Intellectual Freedom;
CILIP EP	Commitment to the defence, and the advancement, of access to information, ideas and works of the imagination.
CILIP EP	Impartiality, and avoidance of inappropriate bias, in acquiring and evaluating information and in mediating it to other information users.
ALIA CV	A thriving culture, economy, and democracy requires the free flow of information and ideas.
ALIA CV	Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works.
ALIA CV	Connection of people to ideas.
ALIA CV	Commitment to literacy, information literacy and learning.
ALIA PC	encouraging intellectual freedom and the free flow of information and ideas;
MLA	The health sciences librarian... creates and maintains conditions of freedom of inquiry, thought, and expression that facilitate informed health care decisions.
ARMA	Support the free flow of publicly available information as a necessary condition for an informed and educated society.

Privacy, confidentiality

SLA D.3: Protects the information privacy of clients and maintains awareness of, and responses to, new challenges to privacy

ALA	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.
ASIST	To uphold each user's, provider's, or employer's right to privacy and confidentiality and to respect whatever proprietary rights belong to them, by limiting access to, providing proper security for and ensuring proper disposal of data about clients, patrons or users.
CLA	protect the privacy and dignity of library users and staff.
CILIP EP	Respect for confidentiality and privacy in dealing with information users.
CILIP CPP	Protect the confidentiality of all matters relating to information users, including their enquiries, any services to be provided, and any aspects of the users' personal circumstances or business.
ALIA PC	protecting their clients' rights to privacy and confidentiality;
MLA	The health sciences librarian respects the privacy of clients and protects the confidentiality of the client relationship.
AALL	We uphold a duty to our clientele to develop service policies that respect confidentiality and privacy.
AIIP	Uphold the profession's reputation for... confidentiality.
AIIP	Respect client confidentiality.

ARMA	Affirm that the collection, maintenance, distribution, and use of information about individuals is a privilege in trust: the right to privacy of all individuals must be both promoted and upheld.
ARMA	Maintain the confidentiality of privileged information.

Intellectual property rights

SLA A.8: Advises the organization on copyright and intellectual property issues and compliance.

ALA	We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.
CILIP EP	Respect for, and understanding of, the integrity of information items and for the intellectual effort of those who created them.
CILIP CPP	Defend the legitimate needs and interests of information users, while upholding the moral and legal rights of the creators and distributors of intellectual property.
CILIP CPP	Respect the integrity of information sources, and cite sources used, as appropriate.
ALIA PC	recognising and respecting the intellectual property of others;
AALL	We recognize and respect the rights of the owner and the user of intellectual property.
AIIP	Recognize intellectual property rights. Respect licensing agreements and other contracts. Explain to clients what their obligations might be with regard to intellectual property rights and licensing agreements.
ARMA	Recognize the need for careful action to assure appropriate access to information without violation of the intellectual property rights of the owners of that information.

Legal considerations

AIIP	Accept only those projects which are legal and are not detrimental to our profession.
SCIP	To comply with all applicable laws, domestic and international.
ARMA	Recognize illegal or unethical RIM-related actions and inform the client or employer of possible adverse consequences.

Conflict of interest

ALA	We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
ASIST	informing their employers, clients or sponsors of any circumstances that create a conflict of interest
CILIP CPP	When working in an independent capacity, conduct their business in a professional manner that respects the legitimate rights and interests of others.
ALIA PC	distinguishing in their actions and statements between their personal viewpoints and those of the library and information service that employs them or the Australian Library and Information Association;
ALIA PC	avoiding situations in which personal interests might be, or be seen to be, in conflict with the interests of clients of library and information services, colleagues or employers;
MLA	The health sciences librarian maintains high standards of professional integrity.
AALL	We have a duty to avoid situations in which personal interests might be served or significant benefits gained at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
SCIP	To avoid conflicts of interest in fulfilling one's duties.
ARMA	Avoid conflict of interest or improper gain at the expense of clients, employers, or co-workers.

Treatment of or relations with employer, colleagues, or users

SLA A.2: Assesses and communicates the value of the information organization, including information services, products and policies to senior management, key stakeholders and client groups.

SLA A.4: Contributes effectively to senior management strategies and decisions regarding information applications, tools and technologies, and policies for the organization.

SLA A.5: Builds and leads an effective information services team and champions the professional and personal development of people working within the information organization.

SLA Personal: Creates partnerships and alliances.

SLA Personal: Builds an environment of mutual respect and trust; respects and values diversity.

SLA Personal: Employs a team approach; recognizes the balance of collaborating, leading and following.

ASIST	To act faithfully for their employers or clients in professional matters
ASIST	ASIS&T members have obligations to employers, clients, and system users, to the profession, and to society, to use judgement and discretion in making choices, providing equitable service, and in defending the rights of open inquiry.
CLA	protect the privacy and dignity of library users and staff.
CILIP EP	Respect for the skills and competences of all others, whether information professionals or information users, employers or colleagues.
CILIP CPP	Develop a knowledge and understanding of the organisation in which they work and use their skills and expertise to promote the legitimate aims and objectives of their employer.
CILIP CPP	Avoid engaging in unethical practices during their work and bring to the attention of their employer any concerns they may have concerning the ethics or legality of specific decisions, actions or behavior at work.
CILIP CPP	Afford respect and understanding to other colleagues and professionals and acknowledge their ideas, contributions and work, wherever and whenever appropriate.
CILIP CPP	Refer to colleagues in a professional manner and not discredit or criticize their work unreasonably or inappropriately.
CILIP CPP	Deal promptly and fairly with any complaints from information users, and keep them informed about progress in the handling of their complaints.
ALIA CV	Partnerships to advance these values.
ALIA PC	exercising their responsibilities within the context of duty of care for the clients of the library and information services they offer;
ALIA PC	treating clients and colleagues with respect.
MLA	The health sciences librarian conducts all professional relationships with courtesy and respect.
AALL	We relate to our colleagues with respect and in a spirit of cooperation.
AIIP	Maintain a professional relationship with libraries and comply with all their rules of access.
SCIP	To faithfully adhere to and abide by one's company policies, objectives, and guidelines.
ARMA	Embrace and practice an attitude of cooperation and mutual respect for the contributions of other RIM professionals and attempt to create an atmosphere in the best interests of clients or employers.

Balance competing needs (users and employers, among users)

ASIST	ASIS&T recognizes the plurality of uses and users of information technologies, services, systems and products as well as the diversity of goals or objectives, sometimes conflicting, among producers, vendors, mediators, and users of information systems.
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CILIP EP	Concern for balancing the needs of actual and potential users and the reasonable demands of employers.
CILIP CPP	Deal fairly with the competing needs of information users, and resolve conflicting priorities with due regard for the urgency and importance of the matters being considered.
CILIP CPP	Strive to achieve an appropriate balance within the law between demands from information users, the need to respect confidentiality, the terms of their employment, the public good and the responsibilities outlined in this Code.
AALL	We acknowledge the limits on service imposed by our institutions and by the duty to avoid the unauthorized practice of law.

Inform users

CILIP CPP	Ensure that information users are aware of the scope and remit of the service being provided.
CILIP CPP	Make the process of providing information, and the standards and procedures governing that process, as clear and open as possible.
ALIA PC	assisting clients to understand the most effective ways to gain access to the information they need;
AIIP	Help clients understand the sources of information used and the degree of reliability which can be expected from those sources.
SCIP	To accurately disclose all relevant information, including one's identity and organization, prior to all interviews.

Professional development

SLA, Core I: Information professionals contribute to the knowledge base of the profession by sharing best practices and experiences, and continue to learn about information products, services, and management practices throughout the life of his/her career.

SLA Personal: Demonstrates personal career planning.

ALA	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.
ASIST	pursuing ongoing professional development and encouraging and assisting colleagues and others to do the same
CILIP EP	Commitment to maintaining and improving personal professional knowledge, skills and competences.
CILIP CPP	Strive to attain the highest personal standard of professional knowledge and competence.
CILIP CPP	Ensure they are competent in those branches of professional practice in which qualifications and/or experience entitle them to engage by keeping abreast of developments in their areas of expertise.
CILIP CPP	Encourage colleagues, especially those for whom they have a line-management responsibility, to maintain and enhance their professional knowledge and competence.
ALIA PC	maintaining and enhancing their professional knowledge and expertise, encouraging the professional development of their colleagues and fostering the aspirations of potential library and information service professionals;
MLA	The health sciences librarian assumes personal responsibility for developing and maintaining professional excellence.

AALL	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.
ARMA	Pursue an appropriate program of ongoing education for the professional practice, which may include certification.
ARMA	Enrich the profession by endorsing the sharing of knowledge, experience, and research; encourage public discussion of the profession's values, services, and competencies.

Representation of expertise

ASIST	To truthfully represent themselves and the information systems which they utilize or which they represent
ASIST	not using their position beyond their authorized limits or by not using their credentials to misrepresent themselves
CILIP CPP	Claim expertise in areas of library and information work or in other disciplines only where their skills and knowledge are adequate.
SCIP	To provide honest and realistic recommendations and conclusions in the execution of one's duties.
ARMA	Accurately represent their education, competencies, certifications, and experience to superiors, clients, co-workers and colleagues in the profession.

Reputation of information professionals; promotion of the profession

ASIST	seeking to extend public awareness and appreciation of information availability and provision as well as the role of information professionals in providing such information
CILIP EP	Concern for the good reputation of the information profession.
CILIP CPP	Act in ways that promote the profession positively, both to their colleagues and to the public at large.
CILIP CPP	Refrain from ascribing views to, or speaking on behalf of, CILIP, unless specifically authorized to do so.
CILIP CPP	Refrain from any behavior in the course of their work which might bring the information profession into disrepute.
MLA	The health sciences librarian advances and upholds the philosophy and ideals of the profession.
MLA	The health sciences librarian advocates and advances the knowledge and standards of the profession.
AIIP	Uphold the profession's reputation for honesty, competence, and confidentiality.
SCIP	To continually strive to increase the recognition and respect of the profession.
ARMA	Are actively committed to recruiting individuals to the profession on the basis of competence and educational qualifications without discrimination.

Concern for the public good

ASIST	ASIS&T urges its members to be ever aware of the social, economic, cultural, and political impacts of their actions or inaction.
CILIP EP	Concern for the public good in all professional matters, including respect for diversity within society, and the promoting of equal opportunities and human rights.
CILIP CPP	Consider the public good, both in general and as it refers to particular vulnerable groups, as well as the immediate claims arising from their employment and their professional duties.

AALL	We promote fair and ethical trade practices.
ARMA	Affirm the legal, ethical, and moral use of information.

Concern for preservation of cultural heritage

CILIP EP	Concern for the conservation and preservation of our information heritage in all formats.
CILIP CPP	Show an appropriate concern for the future information needs of society through the long term preservation and conservation of materials as required, as well as an understanding of proper records management.
ALIA CV	Preservation of the human record.

Enforcement of the Code

CILIP CPP	Report significant breaches of this Code to the appropriate authorities.
CILIP CPP	Encourage and promote wider knowledge and acceptance of, and wider compliance with, this Code, both among colleagues in the information professions and more widely among those whom we serve.
AIIP	Assume responsibility for employees' compliance with this code.
SCIP	To promote this code of ethics within one's company, with third-party contractors and within the entire profession.