
Standards for ethical conduct for rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians

Prepared by the RBMS Committee on Professional Ethics

Fourth draft, March 1, 1984. Your comments are invited.

Following is the text of the proposed *Standards for Ethical Conduct for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Librarians* being drafted by the Ad Hoc Ethics Committee of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA). The Committee is chaired by Terry Belanger, Columbia University, and includes David Farmer, University of Tulsa; John Lancaster, Amherst College; Beverly P. Lynch, University of Illinois, Chicago; Francis O. Mattson, New York Public Library; Robert Patterson, University of Tulsa; and David Stam, New York Public Library.

The Committee seeks comments on the proposed code of ethics and asks that they be directed to Terry Belanger, Assistant Dean, School of Library Service, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.

1. Preface

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians hold positions of trust, involving special responsibilities for promoting scholarship by preserving and providing access to the records of knowledge in their care. Such librarians, in implementing the policies of their institutions, shall accept and discharge these responsibilities to the best of their abilities for the benefit of their institutions and the publics those institutions serve. In all their

activities, they shall act with integrity, assiduously avoiding activities which could in any way compromise them or the institutions for which they work.

Directors or other appropriate supervisors shall give a copy of these standards to all presently-employed rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians in their institutions. They shall give a copy to all prospective rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians in their institutions, securing their assent to them as a condition of employment.

2. Access

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians should be familiar with the *Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials* approved as policy by the Association of College & Research Libraries Board of Directors in July 1976; this Statement appears below as Appendix A [It also appears in *C&RL News* for April 1979, pp.111-12—*Ed.*]. Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall respect the privacy of individuals who created or who are the subject of records and papers, especially those who had no voice in the disposition of the materials. They shall neither reveal, nor profit from, information gained through work with materials to which they have access but to which others have restricted access.

3. Deaccession

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall deaccession materials in their care only in accordance with the established policies of their institutions. Further safeguards, such as the advice of scholars in the field of the materials to be deaccessioned, might well be established. The procedure for the deaccession or disposal of materials shall be at least as rigorous as that for purchasing materials.

4. Appraisals

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians should be familiar with the *Statement on Appraisal of Gifts*, approved as policy by the Association of College and Research Libraries Board of Directors in February 1973; this statement appears below as Appendix B [It also appears in *C&RL News* for March 1973, p.49—*Ed.*]. Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall not give, for a fee or on a retainer, any certificate or statement as to the authenticity or authorship or monetary value of rare books, manuscripts, and other special materials in their institution's collections or in the possession of a potential donor, except where authorized by and in accordance with the established purposes of their own or other non-profit institutions concerned, and with the knowledge of their supervisors. Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall not appraise for personal profit any rare book, manuscript, or special collections materials except with the knowledge of their supervisors.

5. Preservation

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall protect the physical integrity of the materials in their custody, guarding them against defacement, alterations, and physical damage. They shall (so far as is economically and technologically feasible) insure that their evidentiary value is not impaired in the work of restoration, arrangement, and use.

6. Theft

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall not knowingly acquire nor allow to be recommended for acquisition any materials which have been stolen, or materials which have been imported in contravention of the applicable laws of the countries of origin or exporting coun-

tries. Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians should be familiar with the *Guidelines for the Security of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Other Special Collections*, approved as policy by the ACRL Board of Directors in July 1983; these Guidelines appear below as Appendix C [They also appear in *C&RL News* for March 1982, pp.90-93, in the draft form that was later approved—*Ed.*].

7. Personal research

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians may use their institutions' holdings for personal research, publication, and profit if such practices are made known to their immediate supervisor and conveyed to the appropriate senior administrator of their institution, and if such work is done on the same terms as others using the same holdings. Because the possibility of conflict exists, the matter shall be fully discussed by rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians with their supervisors and clear guidelines developed.

8. Personal collecting

Private collecting of books, manuscripts, and other materials by rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians is not to be discouraged. However, such collecting shall not conflict, either in fact or in appearance, with the best interests of an employing institution and its collecting programs. Because the possibility of conflict exists, the matter shall be fully discussed by rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians with their supervisors and clear guidelines developed.

9. Personal dealing

Rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians shall not deal in rare books, manuscripts, and special collections materials for personal monetary profit without the knowledge of their supervisors; nor shall they be party to the recommending of materials for purchase, by institutions or by collectors, if they have any undisclosed financial interest in these materials; nor shall they accept any commission, or undisclosed or otherwise compromising gift from any seller or buyer of such materials. Upgrading a private collection through occasional sales or purchases is not considered dealing in rare books, manuscript, and special collections. Because the possibility of conflict exists, the matter shall be fully discussed by rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians with their supervisors and clear guidelines developed. ■■

