A code of ethics is essential to a profession; the code will provide an ethical starting
point for the professionals and for others outside the profession. A code of ethics also ensures
quality in treatment of members of the profession and those the profession serves. As
*Foundations of Library and Information Science* states, “The ethical conduct of information
professionals is an affirmation of the critical values of service, respect for others, and the need
to improve society. Ethics provide a framework for conducting essential information functions,
instituting policies, and developing strategies for service. Without them, we are, as Foskett
observes above, merely ‘lurching’ about—stumbling in the dark.” (Rubin, 324)

A code of ethics provides a guide for dealing with ethical situations which arise in the
course of the job. This is not a clear cut set of rules or policies for all situations, rather a set of
statements of professional belief which should inform members of the profession about the
viewpoints they should consider in making a decision. As expressed by the ALA, “These
statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular
situations.” (retrieved from [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org), March 9, 2006)

Additionally, a code of ethics communicates the ethical viewpoint of the profession to
others. As stated by the ALA, a code of ethics serves in “making known to the profession and to
the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, and other
professionals providing information services, library trustees, and library staffs.” (retrieved from www.ala.org, March 9, 2006).

Ultimately, a code of ethics serves to promote the values of the profession over the personal, societal, and (sometimes) institutional values. It serves as a guideline for professionalism and quality of service. It should not be confused, however, with professional standards. A code of ethics does not set standards to which a professional must perform, but is instead a description of the values of the profession which members must consider in order to act in a consistent and professional manner.

The ALA Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics of the American Library Association, which was adopted by the ALA June 28, 1995, is a strong statement clearly outlining the ethical position of the ALA concerning library staff and users. It promotes equality of access and service, rights of users and producers, professional commitment, and fair practice in the workplace. The ALA Code fulfills the purpose of ethical codes in that it discusses the appropriate professional response to most of the ethical dilemmas library professionals face in the workplace, it is a strong statement of the ALA’s stance on various ethical topics for non-library professionals to refer to, and it strives to ensure equitable and quality service to library users. Not only is this code representative of the state of libraries today, but it looks forward to the future as well. Through the emphasis on equal access and intellectual freedom, it anticipates the ever growing impact of technology on information use and libraries. Thus, it is my belief that this code is a prime example of a functional professional code of ethics.
The points of the *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association* include most ethical situations which arise in libraries. In theory I support all of the points raised by the Code. They speak to important issues facing libraries, especially in this era of changing technology and in the wake of the attacks of September 11th, and the USA Patriot Act. However, in one instance, practical use diverges from theory. Although I also maintain that censorship, or any manner of restricting access, is an invasion of users’ rights, I feel that there are some instances where preservation of the institution and/or the social good may prevent a library professional from wanting to allow full access. This is an example of the complex and difficult nature of ethics. Most ethical situations require such a decision to some degree, thus I feel that the Code should include a statement to this regard.

The Code of Ethics has already greatly affected my personal philosophy regarding librarianship. It is all too easy to think of librarianship as just a job, and to forget the importance of the service we provide to our patrons. It is easy to forget that every interchange has importance and some ethical implication. However, if we keep the Code of Ethics in mind, we can provide the highest quality of service to all of our users.