Toni Samek:

Teaching Information Ethics in Higher Education: A Crash Course in Academic Labour

Abstract:

This article builds on several prior informal publications that delve into my experiences teaching a course on intellectual freedom and social responsibility in librarianship in the context of the North American library and information studies curriculum. Here, I extend those discussions into a deeper exploration of the academic labour that frames conditions for teaching information ethics. While the intellectual freedom and social responsibility in librarianship subject matter represents only one narrow slice of the bigger information ethics pie, the actual teaching of it sheds light on more universal instructor immersion in contestations over internationalization of higher education, the contingent worker model, the meaning of global citizenship education and research, and academic freedom in the 21st century. This focused lens takes in how the working conditions of faculty are the learning conditions of students, as well as how some of the ill practices explored in information ethics (e.g., censorship) can also be apparent in the institutions in which it is taught. Thus, this article recognizes the political context of information ethics within the academy, a place undergoing redefinition in academic visions and plans designed to push faculty, staff and students harder in global competitions for university rankings.

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    - Toni Samek. (2008). *Biblioteconomía y derechos humanos: Una guía para el siglo xxi*. Gijón, España: Ediciones Trea, S.L. 268 p.
    - Toni Samek. 2007. *Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-first century guide*. Oxford: CHANDOS (Oxford) Publishing. (Read the preface.)
    - Toni Samek. 2001. *Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility in American Librarianship, 1967-1974*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. 179 p.

Information ethics offers opportunities to explore ethical questions about relationships in society among people, information, recorded knowledge, and the cultural record. The field exposes local, national, and international issues related to the "production, collection, interpretation, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval, dissemination, transformation and use of information" and ideas. (Capurro, Rafael and HjØrland, Birger (2003), The Concept of Information, Annual Review of Information Science and Technology 37, 389.) Contributions to information ethics occur between disciplines, across different disciplines (e.g., computer science, gender studies, law, business, library and information studies), and even beyond disciplines. Teaching and learning in information ethics includes examination of numerous timely topics, including knowledge economy, indigenous knowledge, cybernetic pluralism, post 9-11 surveillance, cognitive capitalism, imposed technologies, public access to government information, information rights, global tightening of information and border controls, and accelerated extinction of languages.

Earlier this year I published an informal article titled "Talking about Information Ethics in Higher Education" in the journal Information for Social Change and a short column titled "Tested Teaching" in the Journal of Information Ethics. This work now builds on those earlier personal accounts by extending the discussions into a deeper exploration of the academic labour that frames conditions for teaching information ethics. This is important, because the working conditions of faculty are the learning conditions of students. Some of the ill practices explored in information ethics (e.g., censorship) can also be apparent in the institutions in which we teach it. This article recognizes the political context of information ethics within the academy, a place undergoing redefinition in academic visions and plans designed to push faculty, staff and students harder in global competitions for university rankings. For example, on my own campus (University of Alberta), the current DRAFT academic plan "The Vibrant Academy: The University of Alberta's Academic Plan for 2011-2015", which is presently undergoing campus-wide discussion and critique, includes reference to the University having a "distinct competitive advantage in the global contest for elite people."(Accessed 12 November 2010. The Vibrant Academy. http://www.provost.ualberta.ca/~/media/University%20of%20Alberta/Administration/Office%20of%20the%20Vice-Prov-

ost/Provost/Documents/Academic%20Plan/AcademicPlan.ashx)

Other characteristics of the contemporary university landscape include: new managerialism or the introduction of corporate managerialism; more administrators who are not academics (even Presidents); market values set by students as customers and their market demand for courses; a vocational orientation to train people for jobs without a context of a broader education; civil discourse and respectful workplace policies used in a way to fundamentally threaten academic freedom; the growing national security; surveillance in campus-wide information systems; assault on tenure in medical schools; faith or ideological tests as a condition of employment; corporate consulting contracts; conflicts of interest and misconduct; the race for internationalization; and, the unbundling of academic work (e.g., course development done by one person and "facilitating" or " moderating" of that course performed in eClass by another).

The broad information ethics teaching terrain is inextricably linked to diverse understandings of life, liberty, the law, and the state; justice and injustice; communication, information, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda; education, knowledge, and power; equality, equity; universal access to information; human rights and moral dilemmas; and, multicultural landscapes, immigration and mobility patterns. My main interest at present is in how educators, students, administrators and their stakeholders in higher education consciously and unconsciously enable these words for better and for worse in post 9-11 society. In Canada, where I teach in a Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) program, the academy of the 21st century is transforming by an increasing reliance on contract academic staff (the single biggest threat to academic freedom). "In the USA, more than 75 per cent of academic positions are

off the tenure track and the number worldwide is close to 80 per cent. At the larger Canadian universities, the figure is reaching 50 per cent." (Penni Stewart. "Nothing Casual About Academic Work". President's Column. CAUT Bulletin Vol 57. No 6. June 2010.) The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has been sending the warning that protecting tenure is building a fence around a dwindling core and suggests that we need to put serious work into pushing for contract language for contract staff that puts onus on university administrations to state their reasons for non-continuance of contracts and to build in offers of first refusal rights for cours-

es. Otherwise, contract staff will continue to teach contract to contract with no job security; the obvious implications for academic freedom are serious.

Academic freedom depends on job security because tenure is its procedural safeguard. "Academic freedom requires that academic staff play a major role in the governance of the institution. Academic freedom means that academic staff must play the predominant role in determining curriculum, assessment standards, and other academic matters." (Accessed 12 November 2010. CAUT Policy on Academic Freedom. http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=247&lang=1) What is meant by academic freedom? CAUT asserts that "academic freedom is the life blood of the modern university. It is the right to teach, learn, study and publish free of orthodoxy or threat of reprisal and discrimination. It includes the right to criticize the university and the right to participate in its governance. Tenure provides a foundation for academic freedom by ensuring that academic staff cannot be dismissed without just cause and rigorous due process." (Accessed 12 November 2010. CAUT - Academic Freedom. http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=140)

While we do not have a duty of loyalty in the Canadian academy, academic freedom is the underpinning of the academy. Even for those of us with tenure rights and responsibilities, we should be mindful of how longstanding standard academic freedom contract language is now made vulnerable by new campus civility codes, such as the Human Resources Guidelines on Civil Conduct (University of Toronto). Academic freedom contract language can include directives to exercise academic freedom in a responsible way, with reasonable exercise of civil liberties, in the proper tradition, within norms of civil discourse, and consistent with the objectives and purposes of the university. The question is who defines "respect', "reason" and "norm"? In 2008, for example, the Brandon University Faculty Association (BUFA) "won language ensuring protection of academic freedom in the application of any employer workplace policy with disciplinary provisions. In addition, the employer agreed to submit its "Respectful Environment Policy" to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission for review." And BUFA was "able to negotiate language that protects BUFA members from potential employer harassment in the application of workplace policies." (Accessed 12 November 2010. "Brandon University faculty ratifies new contract." http://www.caut.ca/news_details.asp?nid=1191&page=490).

On this important foundation, I developed a crisper understanding of collegiality and its distinction from civility. CAUT's Policy Statement on Collegiality clearly states: "Collegiality refers to the participation of academic staff in academic governance structures. Collegiality does not mean congeniality or civility. To be collegial, academic governance must: (a) allow for the expression of a diversity of views and opinions, (b) protect participants so that no individual is given inappropriate advantage (for example, due to power differentials) with respect to decisions, and (c) ensure inclusiveness so that all who should be participating are provided the opportunity to do so. Collegial governance depends on participants being given and delivering their share of the service workload." (Accessed 12 November 2010. CAUT's Policy Statement on Collegiality http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=456&lang=1) Taking this in, I could begin to recognize how, often on campus, collegiality and civility are mistakenly (and sometimes dangerously) conflated.

Academic librarians, with their ethic of intellectual freedom and their relevant education and experience, should be understood to be key academics on campus to consult about both the relationships between civility, academic freedom, and intellectual freedom, as well as about records management, privacy, confidentiality, and access to information. It is highly ironic that our campus librarians should be devalued just at the time when these issues are rising to the surface of university life and labour. The 2009 CAUT Librarians Conference and subsequent CAUT President's Column exposed the issue. In her column titled "Academic Librarians Are Under Attack", Penni Stewart wrote: "As the role of librarians becomes narrower and more managed, academic freedom is being whittled away. At some institutions librarians are reporting that management is seeking to supervise curriculum and course preparation, control access to governance activities and scholarly and professional conferences, and supervise librarians' scholarly work by reviewing papers and grant applications prior to presentation or publication." (Accessed 12 November 2010. Penni Stewart. "Academic Librarians are Under Attack". CAUT Bulletin. Vol 56. No. 10. 2009. http://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?articleid=2958; Also see "Librarians Confront Threat to Profession in Vol. 56. No. 9. 2009. http://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?SectionID=1201&SectionName=News&VolID=290&VolumeName=No9&VolumeStartDate=11/10/2009&EditionID=30&EditionName=Vol56&EditionStartDate=1/9/2009&ArticleID=2944)

I rely on intellectual freedom principles in my own campus library system in order to properly function as an information ethics scholar. I rely the free flow of people and ideas. Indeed, I began my immersion into these particular matters in the circumstance of the North American library and information studies curriculum.

In the academic year 2000-2001 I developed a graduate course titled Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility in Librarianship. Teaching this course was my entrée into teaching information ethics. The course has a place as an elective in the MLIS curriculum, which falls under our faculties of graduate studies and research in the university setting, a teaching and learning space where the study of philosophy, ideology, and rhetoric should be as welcome as that of applied ethics. In 2010, I added a new unit on academic freedom for academic librarians. This unit is designed to speak to the importance of a free flow of information in the global academic enterprise and to reinforce the American Association of University Professor's (AAUP) assertion that "College and university librarians share the professional concerns of faculty members. Academic freedom, for example, is indispensable to librarians, because they are trustees of knowledge with the responsibility of ensuring the availability of information and ideas, no matter how controversial, so that teachers may freely teach and students may freely learn. Moreover, as members of the academic community, librarians should have latitude in the exercise of their professional judgment within the library, a share in shaping policy within the institution, and adequate opportunities for professional development and appropriate reward." This important work covers maximum access to information and ideas through diverse collections, technology licensing agreements, open Internet access, library exhibits, library meeting rooms, research carrels, exhibit spaces and other facilities.

The course runs annually, most recently in eClass format. Student contributions have examined such topics as 3M RFID contracted library services in the nuclear free city of Berkeley, California; deliberate destruction of cultural and intellectual property during war-time (including in Bosnia and Iraq); international debate of access to information in Cuban library/librarian context; and, information poverty, digital divide, and women's access to information about HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa. Teaching information ethics takes into account how I, my colleagues, and our students rely on freedoms. "Around the world today, scholars are attacked because of their words, their ideas and their place in society. Those seeking power and control work to limit access to information and new ideas by targeting scholars, restricting academic freedom and repressing research, publication, teaching and learning. Scholars at Risk (SAR) is a growing international network of over 220 universities and colleges in 29 countries committed to promoting academic freedom and defending threatened scholars worldwide. SAR works to assist scholars and other intellectuals who experience persecution in their home country because of their research, teaching and writing. SAR's work is rooted in the principle of academic freedom -- the freedom to pursue scholarship and research without discrimination, censorship, intimidation, or violence. Scholars at Risk aims to bring scholars facing severe human rights abuses in their home region to positions at universities, colleges and research centers in any safe country." (Accessed 14 November 2010. Scholars at Risk. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scholars_at_Risk)

The notion of scholars at risk has been on my mind especially since I began teaching online. Those of us teaching in the 21st century academy are very likely to be engaged in some form of distance education today or in the future. Both teachers and students involved in distance education may at times reside full-time or part-time in countries where information aspects of human rights (e.g. Article 19) are not enforced and protected as much as some of us have been accustomed to. These teachers and students have the right to know how secure eClasses actually are when it comes to privacy and confidentiality with respect to, for example, their discussion posts. How secure are their posts? Have we properly addressed this question with our administrations? Whose jurisdiction would a breach of security fall into? These questions have fuelled my interest in internationalization of higher education. Coupled with the contingent worker model, it has its problems.

The International Association of Universities Internationalization (http://www.iau-aiu.net/index.html) asserts that the internationalization of higher education, at its best, involves universities and higher education institutions and organizations from countries around the world in debate, reflection, and action on common concerns and of policy development. This includes the intercultural exchange of information, experience and ideas, as well as the ethical mobility of students and staff. But at its lowest operational level, competitive internationalization of higher education is simply about the act or process of buying and selling education as product to international markets. And while CAUT "is dedicated to the removal of barriers that traditionally

restrict access to and success in university-level studies and to increasing equality and equity of educational opportunity", it is also the case that "University employers may nonetheless misuse distance education techniques to increase managerial control over academic staff and/or as an innovative way to save money." (Accessed. 12 November 2010. CAUT Policy Statement on Distance Education. http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=263&lang=1).

Because of what is at play on campuses, we should pay attention to the many ethical issues arising from the interplay that information and communication technologies have on the world's cultures and how these were coming into local, national and global discussions. We can draw on the work of scholars interested in these interplays who are introducing intercultural information ethics discussions about "where the cultural presuppositions of the world's cultures are seen as an important factor in consideration of ethical theorization and the search for ethical guide-lines." (International Review of Information Ethics Call for Papers. (Accessed 1 June 2010. http://www.i-r-i-e.net/call_for_papers.htm). And we can use this work to support the International Association of Universities' internationalization recommendations, which can blend with teaching information ethics. For example, we can support the recommendation that "the curriculum of the university reflect the preparation of international citizens, through facilitating language competence; and understanding of global, international, and regional issues; preparation of experts in areas needed for such fields as information technology and science, peace and conflict resolution, and sustainable development, as well as the special curricular needs of international students."(Accessed 10 November 2010. IAU Statement on Internationalization: Towards a Century of Cooperation: Internationalization of Higher Education http://www.iau-aiu.net/internationalization/i_statement.html)

My first conscious experimentation with teaching intercultural information ethics is in a new course I developed and am now teaching for the first time in fall 2010. It examines the central concepts of diversity and inclusion and a range of related issues and contributions with respect to traditionally underrepresented groups, and their support systems, in library and information settings - including the politics of documentation therein. Attention is given to the history, philosophy, research, policy, and resources on these topics within a framework of fundamental questions about the theory and practice of outreach services and community development in relation to professional library and infor-

mation institutional roles. The course encourages innovative approaches to serving traditionally underrepresented communities by exploring the idea of universal access to information. Some of the course objectives are that students should be able to: identify and analyze multiple meanings of diversity and inclusion and discuss them in relation to multiculturalism, race, ethnicity, class, gender, cultural diversity, the transversal character of cultural rights, globalization, global migration, global citizenship, universal access to information; understand theoretical and practical service-oriented issues and concerns regarding library and information use by a range of populations and traditionally underrepresented groups, such as indigenous peoples, cultural minorities, religious groups, migrant workers, women, children, youth, elders, people with human exceptionalities, poor people and people living on fixed income, homeless and street people, veterans, LGBTQ individuals and groups, and people living behind bars; problematize the affirmation of the dignity of people and recognize how an acceptance of differences can place individual and collective values in conflict; and, communicate effectively, through both oral and written means, library and information professionals' roles in promoting and advocating diversity and inclusion, tolerance and understanding, and the value of people accessing and enjoying library and information services free from any attempt by others to impose values, customs or beliefs. Upcoming student presentations include explorations of mobile library services to rural and indigenous communities, critical treatments of traditional cultural expressions, and roles of library and information workers in global citizenship education.

In some respects this teaching and learning is designed to explore self-determination for all peoples in the face of global market fundamentalism. Examination of the importance of considering the inherent relationships between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants, library diversity and inclusion statements, and other positions taken by library and information organizations as sets and super-sets of persuasion and consensus building is central. Students are encouraged to explore how these ideological assertions reflect the inevitable tensions that exist between individual rights and community traditions, standards, and values. Discussions bring us to the idea that the most viable and authentic solutions to the cultural problems we face now will come in time and through multiple human engagements and interruptions, not as quick fixes or techno-managerial efficiencies. Together, we are probing the taxonomies

of special groups (e.g., homeless, fixed income, low income, no income) and prodding at reductive, negating, and racialized treatments of "minority", marginalized, and underrepresented parties, with special attention to newcomers to Canada (including refugees and asylum seekers). We are raising our awareness of how the liberalization of and de-territorialization of markets that have grown with globalization can result in the ongoing lack of understanding about orality and literacy and about status quo and dominant cultures of information exchange that serve to perpetuate misunderstandings about various contributors to traditional knowledge and knowledge activism, including within MLIS teachings.

A final thought is that in addition to our best efforts teaching information ethics in the classroom, quality education demands that we complement that act by also teaching outside the traditional classroom. For example, a few days ago, on November 10, 2010 I co-presented with David. G. Smith (University of Alberta) and John Willinsky (Stanford University; University of British Columbia) on a panel chaired by Kent den Heyer (University of Alberta) on the multiple pressures on and dimensions of intellectual and academic freedom in the contexts of teaching, collegiality, and publishing. David G. Smith examined intellectual freedom in the post-9/11 world, indeed what may be unspeakable about 9/11 itself. I explored contemporary tensions between academic freedom and new campus behavior and civility codes being adopted or considered across campuses today. John Willinsky drew from his work founding the Public Knowledge Project to explore what is and could be 'public' about knowledge in contemporary economies of scholarly publication and intellectual exchange more broadly considered.

Our panel in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta occurred in a significant moment in time. Right now in the USA, academic freedom is under scrutiny in service learning in law school clinics. AAUP reports that "As universities increasingly seek to educate students through service-learning courses, law school clinics may be the bellwether for determining whether the faculty's academic freedom in teaching will transcend the traditional classroom or be left at the classroom door. Recent legislative and corporate efforts to interfere in the operations of law clinics indicate that academic freedom is at risk when hands-on student learning bumps up against "real-world" disputes. In spring 2010, a law-clinic lawsuit against a $4 billion poultry company triggered a legislative effort to withhold state funds from the University of Maryland unless its law school provided the legislature with sensitive information about clinic clients and case activities. While the threat of cuts was finally withdrawn, one legislator boasted that the university now knows "we'll be watching" if it takes on other business interests favored by politicians. And in Louisiana, when Tulane University this spring refused to drop an academic program that sometimes represents citizens challenging petrochemical-industry environmental permits, the industry developed an eleven-point plan, in the words of its spokesperson, to "kneecap" the university financially. The attack plan included the introduction of legislation that would forfeit all state funding if a university offered certain types of law-clinic courses." (Accessed 14 November 2010. Robert R. Kuehn and Peter A. Joy. "Kneecapping" Academic Freedom" Academe Online. http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2010/ND/feat/kueh.htm).

In my view, those of us who teach information ethics, including academic librarians, should fully engage in this historical moment. The stakes are high. In many instances information literacy has been co-opted by the state. I suggest we try to save information ethics from the same fate – a fate that ultimately closes down rather than opens up new possibilities for effectively understanding human trajectories in the economy of ideas, commodification, monopolization, and war.