

# OLAQ

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## OLA Today: Oregon Librarians Respond to Changing Times

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# OLA Quarterly



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Oregon Librarians Respond  
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**OLA Today:  
Oregon Librarians Respond  
to Changing Times**

**Upcoming  
Issue**

**Summer 2017**

*Critical Librarianship*



*The views expressed in this issue do not necessarily represent the views of the Oregon Library Association.*

# From the Guest Editor



LYNNE STAHL

Lynne Stahl works as a bilingual access services assistant at Multnomah County Library's Gregory Heights branch. She is pursuing her MLS through Emporia State University, where she also serves as a graduate research assistant. She earned her BA in English and Hispanic Studies from Colorado College and her PhD in English from Cornell University. Her writing has appeared in *The Velvet Light Trap*, *Popular Culture Review*, and the *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier*, and she is particularly interested in open access digital humanities platforms as a means of amplifying marginalized voices. In her free time, she enjoys playing rugby, eating ice cream, and coveting strangers' dogs.

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I feel honored and fortunate to have been asked to introduce this issue of the *OLA Quarterly*, and, having lived in Oregon for less than two years, not a little daunted in light of my relative newness to the state. Neither a longtime Oregonian nor even yet a fully credentialed librarian, I am hardly the fittest person imaginable to introduce a journal issue focused on Oregon librarians' response to broad and dramatic changes. And yet, in the same way that one can benefit greatly from the distanced perspective of a different set of eyes looking over a draft of writing in which one has become deeply immersed, perhaps my outsider's view can offer useful observations even at its degree of remove. I am very grateful to Charles Wood and all of the journal's editors and contributors for the opportunity and for their parts in shaping the issue.

This issue's contributors and topics span academic and public institutions, rural and metropolitan libraries, political activism and personal narrative, and programming as well as abstraction. I undertook the task of introducing it with humility, but also with genuine hope that my experiences living in some of the most conservative and some of the most liberal parts of the United States, working in academic and public libraries, and teaching classes founded in feminism and critical race theory would enable me to offer something productive to this conversation, as I have learned abundantly from its constituents.

Considering instances of political action and librarianship, Oregon Library Association President Elsa Loftis begins this issue by profiling the organization. She cites its Legislative Agenda and its advocacy body, the Library Development and Legislation Committee, offering resources and steps toward political action that align with such guiding principles as Intellectual Freedom, Equitable Access, and Stewardship of Public Resources. Donna L. Cohen details a series of civic education workshops she has offered in recent months as part of an effort to combat the dissolution of social institutions and relationships that she views as playing a crucial role in forging and maintaining democracy—now losing out to the individualist and fragmentative drives of neoliberalism. Carolina Hernandez also writes about her endeavors to create and provide resources in the wake of the 2016 election, which have entailed improving upon existing fake news research guides by using pressing topical issues to draw connections to the broader importance of information literacy.

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Elucidating the importance of progress through failure as well as through success, Barratt Miller and Jane Scheppke offer a vivid account of programming gone awry: an event called *Guns in America* in Prineville that devolved quickly into a racially-charged shouting match among attendees. Verbal melee notwithstanding, the event left both with a greater sense of how to anticipate and address both implicit and overt bias among patrons, marketing strategies for controversial topics, security precautions, and other contingencies, which they present here in a thoughtful and edifying conversation. Pondering activist tactics on a more abstract level, I contemplate the role of librarians amid political upheaval as well as some of the risks that inhere in democracy and the tenet of access to all, emphasizing the need to historicize contemporary issues and reflect on the shortcomings and successes of Oregon librarians since the state's segregationist inception. Finally, this issue closes with an elegant, poignant narrative from Victoria Cross that relates her immersion into American culture through the work carpool she joined and all that it taught her: a Russian immigrant's tale in microcosm.

As diverse as they are in form, authorship, and subject matter, these articles share a common thread that I believe is fundamental to the very fabric of librarianship. They all draw on theoretical, historical, and lived experience to identify and address their own blind spots, with questions ranging from "What is a travel mug?" to "How can we ensure safe discourse on hot-button topics?" to "Do I truly understand this metaphor?" to "How can libraries employ specific topical issues as a bridge to universal information literacy skills?" all contributing equally to the ongoing process of illumination. Reading these contributions has left me feeling galvanized and hopeful at a time when much of what I read has the opposite effect, and I hope that they do the same for you.

—LYNNE STAHL  
*OLAQ Guest Editor*  
Bilingual Access Services Assistant,  
Multnomah County Library



# Political Action and Your Library Association

by **Elsa Loftis**

Director of Library Services,  
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and  
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Oregon Library Association  
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ELSA LOFTIS

Elsa is the Director of Library Services at the Oregon College of Art and Craft and serves as the current president of the Oregon Library Association. She earned her MLIS from the Pratt Institute in New York City in 2009, and her B.A. from the University of Oregon. She has worked in public libraries, a museum archive, and academic libraries. Among the many things she loves about library work is serving students and collaborating with the amazing people who work in the library world.

Political action. Libraries. The two seem to intersect more often than one might expect (unless one is a library worker, supporter, or patron; in which case it doesn't seem terribly unusual). People in our line of work are often called upon to assume the mantle of library-worker-activists. These calls to action affect us in our various roles as professionals, as private citizens, and as members of the Oregon Library Association.

## **Libraries are Political Places**

This article is not a history of political involvement by pioneering library champions—although it could be. It could outline the struggles and sacrifices of real heroes in the name of stewardship, education, privacy, freedom from censorship, and so much more. There are many wonderful examples. I remember starting library school on the east coast right around the time the “Connecticut Four” librarians were standing up against the overreach of the Patriot Act. These people were examples of the kind of librarian I wanted to be, and still want to be: someone who defends civil liberties and fights for what is right. I continue to feel inspired



and grateful to be a member of a profession that has a brave history of standing up for the public good. Though it is true that libraries are a reflection of the communities they serve and are operated by people, who are inevitably fallible, sometimes libraries have not been on the right side of history. For example, Stephen Cresswell wrote an eye-opening article called “The Last Days of Jim Crow in Southern Libraries” in *Libraries & Culture* in 1996 about the sometimes ignored history of racially segregated libraries as a stain on the tradition of libraries being a bastion of free and equitable access.

However, my aim today is not to recount the political history (positive and sometimes negative) of libraries, though it is an interesting topic. For more information in that vein, you can find plenty of resources. One example I can recommend *Libraries & Democracy* edited by Nancy Kranich, (2001).

Please excuse the digression. My goal in this article is to give the reader a sense of what the leadership of the Oregon Library Association has been thinking and doing in the current political climate. In case you haven’t looked out your window, the current climate is blustery with a chance of rain.

### **The Oregon Library Association**

Our association supports Oregon libraries, the people who work in them, and the communities we serve. That commitment casts a wide net in a large state full of people with diverse backgrounds and different political ideas on both local and national levels. We may have a spectrum of personal political beliefs, but we have a unifying body of core values as library workers.

The people in leadership positions in the association, such as the president, vice president, and other executive board members are elected to serve you, the OLA members. We all work hard to speak up and stand up for Oregon libraries. That’s definitely a team effort. This work is ongoing, and we have guiding principles to direct us when issues appear murky.

Many of our members are unaware of our association’s [Legislative Agenda](#), and if you are one of them, I invite you to read it on the OLA website. It outlines our guiding principles: Intellectual Freedom, Lifelong Learning and Literacy, Equitable Access, and Stewardship of Public Resources. In relationship to these principles, the agenda states: “To fulfill these principles and provide leadership within Oregon, OLA will study and respond to any measures, legislative or ballot, which affect the ability of Oregon libraries to follow the guiding principles. The Library Development and Legislation Committee is charged as the lead in these efforts” (Oregon Library Association, 2017).

OLA has an advocacy body, the Library Development and Legislative Committee (LDLC), whose members are brilliant and incredibly knowledgeable. We employ a lobbyist, Nan Heim, whose expertise and skill in navigating the political landscape in Salem are extraordinary. As OLA president, I am indebted to the LDLC for their advice and the ability to use them as a sounding board when I’m called upon to make statements of a political nature on behalf of our association.

I am writing this in the hope that a brief explanation of my perspective—as OLA’s current president—will illustrate my view concerning OLA’s mandate as an association in terms of political action, and the resources we have at our disposal to take action when appropriate. I have found that many of our members, even those on the board, are not always





familiar with our Legislative Agenda, and I hope that discussing it a bit here will help shine a light on it. The board is also developing a Core Values document with the objective of making these guiding principles more visible and easier to locate. I believe the term “Legislative Agenda” in itself may not be what interested parties seek to look at when they are exploring OLA’s guiding principles.

### **Political Engagement for the Association, the Employee, and the Individual**

OLA is a 501(c)(3) which means there are restrictions on the kind of lobbying and advocacy work we can do. For example, we are non-partisan, meaning that we can absolutely not support or oppose a political party or a candidate for public office. We are allowed to do “grass-roots lobbying,” which includes communicating with the public about an issue, and making calls to action, but we are restricted in what we can do in terms of “direct lobbying.” Our voice is important, and I know that our members hope that OLA represents them and their interests. It is vital that we speak up and are active if our professional ethics are endangered. It is my hope that we are able to do this responsibly, effectively, and speak with one clear voice. The Oregon Library Association is a powerful body, and when we mobilize, we can accomplish big things. This is why we don’t always simply defer to the American Library Association to speak for Oregon Libraries on the national level—we get active ourselves. That said, the Oregon Library Association can’t speak for every individual working in an Oregon library. You may want to engage politically on an individual level, and that can mean different things as an employee and as a private citizen.

As library workers, we may have limitations on what we can do, in terms of political activity, in our workplaces. Public employees should be aware of the constraints on their political activity at work, as should employees of nonprofits. As private citizens, we are of course free to express our political beliefs and be engaged as we see fit (letter-writing, protesting, campaigning, and so on). You may well be limited in what you can do in your workplace, so it makes sense to use your own time and your own resources for your political engagement and speak for yourself rather than for your employer or institution.

I realize that I’m not providing a complete “how-to” for the library worker/political activist/OLA member, and I don’t pretend to. If you have questions about what you can and can’t do on the clock and in your organization, you should talk to your employer, or take a look at District Dispatch from the American Library Association, which has some good tools and resources. Furthermore, I would encourage you to look at a past issue of the OLA Quarterly called “Political Action” from Winter of 1997, 2.4 (full citation below). OLA past president and current LDLC co-chair Janet Webster wrote an excellent piece titled “Staying effective and safe in the political arena” that is as relevant now as it was when it was written 20 years ago.

### **Conclusion**

At this writing, we’re being called upon to contact our elected representatives to preserve IMLS funding, which is in danger, we’ve watched in sorrow as public libraries in Douglas County closed this year due to funding issues, and we continue to face threats to privacy, net neutrality, and intellectual freedom. There’s a lot of advocacy work to be done in the





name of libraries. It feels very daunting, but please remember that these challenges are not new, and we are prepared to face them as an association, and as individuals who are dedicated to our libraries and communities. 🌱

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# Enhancing Civic Knowledge/Inspiring Political Engagement:

## The Role of Public Libraries in Civic Participation

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DONNA L. COHEN

A teacher and librarian, Donna is now focused on presenting non-partisan workshops for adults that fill in gaps in civic and political understanding and that encourage critical evaluation of information. She is actively involved in various civic/political projects. From 1996 to 2014, under the name D. L. Cohen Information Services, as a consulting and freelance librarian, she conducted information needs assessments, created virtual and physical libraries, provided website usability testing and evaluation, and designed website architecture. Find Donna on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/Civics-for-Adults-1490728887922036/](https://www.facebook.com/Civics-for-Adults-1490728887922036/)

*The most important political office is that of the private citizen.*

—JUSTICE LOUIS BRANDEIS

For the past several months I have been conducting “civic education” workshops under the umbrella title: Civics for Adults—To Enhance Civic Knowledge and Inspire Political Engagement. I doubt there is anyone in the library community who is not concerned about the public’s level of civic understanding, political discourse and civic engagement. As Robert Putnam pointed out in his book *Bowling Alone*, the cohesive function of social and civic groups—as with the simple bowling league—has withered, and along with the demise of those groups a correlative decline in political activities like voting.



Unlike in the past, people live less and less frequently in close-knit, long-term communities. Ties to schools, religious institutions and other civic groups have weakened. The founders of our nation imagined continued, close-knit personal relationships shoring up our Democracy. James Madison had a clear vision of the needs of the Republic—groupings not so small as to allow special interests to dominate, nor so large as to lose the personal ties between citizens and their elected representatives. In addition, the influence of wealth on the political process was feared as were strong political parties, which could turn people against each other.

Yet, here we are with a population size beyond the wildest imaginings of the founders, the influence of wealth well beyond what they could anticipate, and political parties—well, where they exist members often become rigid in thinking, and where people remain unaffiliated they are often excluded from the political process, such as during primary elections.

We are not born knowing how to be good citizens; if that was the case the invention of Democracy would not have been necessary! The framers of the Constitution knew they were creating a political system that broke with tradition. Although we'd like to think that the design for Democracy sprung into being fully formed, in fact, the word “democracy” does not even appear in the Declaration of Independence nor in the Constitution. The concept of “democracy” was that of mob rule to the founders and the system of government they created set up an elaborate set of filters through which the “will of the people” would be screened and refined by men of higher moral and intellectual talent than the average person. They used the term “republic” for this system. This was why “the people” did not elect Senators directly until the [17th Amendment](#) in 1913 ([archives.gov](#), 2016).

The gift of the Constitution was not that it began as a fully formed architecture for a government of “the people.” It was that it laid down a blueprint which could be built upon to move toward “a more perfect union.” The Constitution, and the country, are evolving concepts. The question is—evolving in what ways?

In 2012, the City Club of Portland conducted research on civic education. Although geared to answer concerns about public education, the basic findings apply to all ages. City Club wrote that society needs citizens to have three things:

1. Basic civic knowledge. It is well documented that Americans’ civic literacy is abysmally low. Many of us probably could not pass the naturalization test given to those wanting to become citizens.
2. Critical thinking skills. Misinformation, fake news, arguments that are not logical—too many people are prey to these when critical thinking skills are lacking.
3. The inclination to act civically and the knowledge of how to be an active citizen: how to express one’s views, to whom to express one’s views, and how to become influential in civic/political life.

To the three above I would add a 4th:

4. The ability to engage in civic dialog civilly.



Once beyond high school (assuming these are taught in public school, which they often aren't) where does one accrue these attributes? Perhaps college—or not. Fact is, we—society, that is—does not make it easy to cultivate civic knowledge, critical thinking, nor rational civic action.

So, who is to pick up the mantle for civic education across the generations?

To my way of thinking there is only one institution that fits the bill when it comes to civic education lifelong learning. The public library.

Simply put, we are:

- Welcoming to all
- Oriented to learning
- Filled with an abundance of good information
- Educated, smart, and caring
- Whizzes at programming
- Located everywhere
- Free

There is no other public institution that can make these claims as a whole. Public libraries should be primary instruments for civic education in the community. It is a role that can be well filled by public libraries. Bonus—it provides a rationale for increased funding.

Public libraries can make better citizens. It's as simple as that!

### **From my OLA workshop “Democracy Requires Civic Engagement and Knowledge—What Libraries Can Do”:**

*Suggestions for Implementing Civic Engagement/Critical Thinking in your public library.*

We are a very small library that cannot devote a lot of staff time or resources towards civics education and critical thinking. What can we do?

- Host discussions based on articles / books about civics, critical thinking, current events.
- Have “cheat-sheets”/resource lists on the above.
- Start a Human Library (<http://www.humanlibrary.org/>)


“The Human Library is designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue.” Yes, it's real. It began in Denmark and has been replicated in over a hundred libraries. Include cross-partisan dialog.

We are a mid-sized library that can devote some staff time and resources towards civics education. Add the following:

- Bring in a local community advocate to talk about what they do but also to give general advocacy advice.
- Prepare a resource sheet about elections and campaign finance that goes beyond the mechanics of voting.
- If you are near a college, perhaps a student majoring in: Political Science, Education, History, etc. could come and speak about some topics [and even get credit for it!].
- Plan for limited but consistent programming. Perhaps rotate the topics so each year has a specific Civics focus.



We are a large public library. Include the following to the above suggestions:

- Planning around these topics should be included in programming budgets.
- Train interested, talented, instructional librarians to be your “Civics Specialists.” 

### **My Workshops**

*Civics for Adults Workshops: Enhancing Civic Knowledge/Inspiring Political Engagement Misinformation, Fake News and Political Propaganda*

To distinguish truth from fiction using critical thinking strategies. The workshop uses real world examples in a “what do you see here?/what is missing?” type of format. The last part is about finding accurate information.

*Citizen Activism 101—Making Change Happen*

Learn about strategies for change, and more: Examples of successful advocacy; Brief historical perspective; Choosing your battles; What matters to you?; Who makes the rules?; Getting heard: tools for change; “Tracking” civic/political issues.

*The Influence of the Constitution on Political Conversation*

By looking back at the creation of the Constitution, we puncture some myths and develop a broader perspective on its significance—perspective that helps us evaluate current political events more thoughtfully.

*Beyond Voting: Elections and Campaign Financing*

This workshop cover 20 topics related to our electoral systems and presents specific ideas for bi-partisan civic/political engagement.

<http://www.facebook.com/Civics-for-Adults-1490728887922036/>

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# Fake News and Information Literacy:

## Creating Resources to Develop Source Evaluation Skills at the University of Oregon Libraries

**by Carolina Hernandez**  
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CAROLINA HERNANDEZ

Carolina is currently the Journalism and Communication Librarian at the University of Oregon Libraries. Her current research interests involve innovative approaches to outreach and diversity-related issues in academic libraries. She received her MLIS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MA in Media Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.

In the months following the 2016 presidential election, much discussion has occurred regarding the proliferation of “fake news” and what impact it may have had on the election results. Regardless of whether there was an actual increase in fake news in the last year, it is certainly true that interest in the topic has increased dramatically. Interest appeared to peak in January, according to Google Trends (Google Trends, n.d.). Widespread concern over how to prevent the spread of this problem has led to possible solutions cropping up often.

Though often excluded from these recommendations, libraries have the opportunity to play a natural role in combating this problem. Librarians have always understood the need for source evaluation skills in determining credibility, and indeed, many libraries across the country have created resources for others to strengthen and cultivate these skills. At the University of Oregon (UO) Libraries, the response has been no different. With clear interest across campus in having the right tools to counteract the effects of fake news, we decided that we needed to create our own [research guide](#) (Hernandez, 2017). As the Journalism and Communication Librarian, I was in a natural position to compile the relevant resources, which eventually led to the development of an instructional exercise. As interest and need continued, the exercise became the basis for a future workshop on evaluating news sources.

Before reviewing the details of building the guide and exercise, I will address the decision to focus on fake news in particular. In researching other fake news research guides that already existed, a trend emerged: these guides tended toward focusing on tools and checklists for evaluating a news source. I wanted the UO guide to show more than just how to identify and avoid fake news. It was also important to:

- Draw a connection between developing evaluative skills in relation to fake news and translating these skills towards assessing other types of information.
- Work towards increasing information literacy more broadly.
- Create an opportunity to highlight a topical issue and use it as an access point to other tools and resources.





How did I do this? First, I divided the guide into four distinct sections, thereby allowing the focus to flow from fake news to a broader use of information literacy skills. Knowing that the concept of information literacy would be new to some, at least under that terminology, the first section of the guide introduced this topic and provided the connection to fake news and beyond. It was critical that potential users did not feel alienated by the concept or jargon and understood the connection from the start.

I also looked into the resources other libraries had created, since it was not necessary to reinvent the wheel. This initial step yielded a list of some excellent websites, apps, and software that can be used in detecting fake news, which formed the basis for the second section of the guide. I also gleaned resources from some of my colleagues in the School of Journalism and Communication (SOJC) at UO to include on this page of the guide. These resources were more practical and provided users with tools to address a very specific issue within the information landscape.


The third section went beyond tools specifically for fake news and focused on improving skills related to information literacy. This section highlighted other issues affecting perception and evaluation of the media: i.e., bias, among others. It also provided information on organizations and online courses that provide self-guided resources. This led nicely into the fourth and final section of the guide, which included a set of tables that present key aspects for evaluating the credibility of a source, regardless of information type. The evaluation tables provide a framework of questions to ask when assessing the authority, objectivity, quality, currency, and relevancy of a source.

Upon completion, the research guide was well received in the UO community, becoming one of our most popular guides in the months since it was introduced. Part of its success was due to the work of our Communications and Marketing Department, who were very invested in promoting the guide through the library's homepage and social media accounts. In addition, a feature story was shared through *Around the O*, a hub for news about the UO community. The latter in particular helped to draw attention from a broader audience across campus and generate feedback from faculty in a variety of disciplines from business to dance.

After the successful launch of the guide, I considered other resources we could offer students and faculty. After discussions with SOJC colleagues, we agreed it would be useful to produce an interactive workshop on news and information literacy. Though this workshop is still in development, I have designed an instructional exercise that may form the workshop's foundation. With help from colleagues, I created an activity that introduces students to the "Fake News and Information Literacy" guide and has them work through the process of analyzing different sources. To start this activity, small groups of students receive articles of varying levels of credibility and discussion questions for them to consider during the evaluation of these sources. Using the evaluation tables as a starting point, the students read through the articles, then decide which sources are credible and which are biased or "fake." As part of the exercise, they would also consider and discuss how they might use the different types of sources. Because of the different environments in which we often teach, I wanted to make sure this would be an adaptable activity that could be presented digitally or in an analog setting with printed hard copies. For a session in a computer-less classroom, a librarian could prepare a packet with the articles printed out, as well as any necessary contextual information that would assist in evaluating each source. In a digital context, the set-up could be more fluid, with students discovering contextual information themselves.





While interest in fake news may wane over time, the ability to evaluate a variety of sources accurately and effectively will always be necessary. Because critical thinking skills are timeless, it is important to emphasize, particularly to students, that it is not only valuable to learn how to identify fake news, but that it is also essential to know how to discern *the credibility of any type of source*. By framing the concept of information literacy within current concerns of fake news, I generated a resource that resonated with users across campus and across disciplines. 

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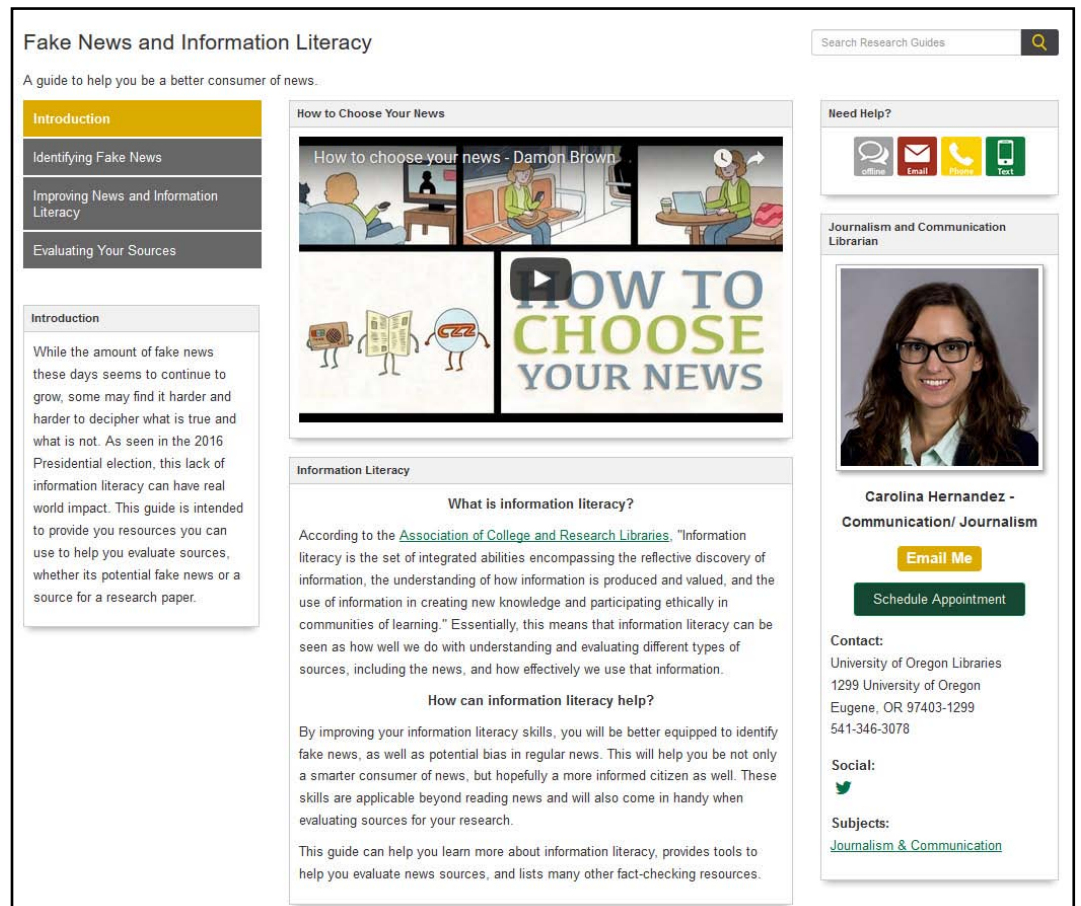
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**Fake News and Information Literacy**

A guide to help you be a better consumer of news.

- Introduction
- Identifying Fake News
- Improving News and Information Literacy
- Evaluating Your Sources

**Introduction**

While the amount of fake news these days seems to continue to grow, some may find it harder and harder to decipher what is true and what is not. As seen in the 2016 Presidential election, this lack of information literacy can have real world impact. This guide is intended to provide you resources you can use to help you evaluate sources, whether its potential fake news or a source for a research paper.

**How to Choose Your News**

How to choose your news - Damon Brown

**HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR NEWS**

**Information Literacy**

**What is information literacy?**

According to the [Association of College and Research Libraries](#), "Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning." Essentially, this means that information literacy can be seen as how well we do with understanding and evaluating different types of sources, including the news, and how effectively we use that information.

**How can information literacy help?**


By improving your information literacy skills, you will be better equipped to identify fake news, as well as potential bias in regular news. This will help you be not only a smarter consumer of news, but hopefully a more informed citizen as well. These skills are applicable beyond reading news and will also come in handy when evaluating sources for your research.

This guide can help you learn more about information literacy, provides tools to help you evaluate news sources, and lists many other fact-checking resources.

**Need Help?**

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**Journalism and Communication Librarian**



**Carolina Hernandez - Communication/ Journalism Librarian**


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**Social:**



**Subjects:**

[Journalism & Communication](#)



# Guns and America and the Library and Us: What We Learned from the Worst Library Program ... Ever!

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BARRATT MILLER

Barratt started her library career at Crook County Library in 2012 after graduating from the iSchool at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She's been the Youth Services Librarian at Oregon City Public Library since 2016. In her spare time, Barratt makes extremely complicated friendship bracelets and caters to the whims of her tiny dog.



JANE SCHEPPKE

Jane first came to Crook County Library in 2013 as a fresh graduate of the University of British Columbia iSchool. She was promoted to Assistant Director in 2016. In her spare time, Jane is an avid writer and digital multimedia artist. She also likes to hide Animal House references in professional papers.

## Introduction

**BARRATT:** On a dark and stormy night in Prineville, fifty members of the community gathered in Crook County Library's meeting room. The program facilitator walked in the door five minutes before go-time. The Assistant Director introduced him to the room. And then all hell broke loose. The program topic? *Guns and America*.

**JANE:** Barratt was that Assistant Director. I was also there. Yes, *Guns and America* was, as the Canadians say, a real gong show. The participants disrespected Barratt, the presenter, and each other. Voices were raised. Racist accusations were thrown. At one point the presenter wrote the verbatim text of the 2nd Amendment on the whiteboard, and people accused him of lying. It was horrible.

To a large extent this is Barratt's story, in that she was the primary mover and shaker for the program. This is not to cast blame; it was hella brave of her to attempt this topic in Prineville. For my part, I just sat there with my arms crossed over my center mass and tried to look very small while people screamed and yelled. I am a coward.



**BARRATT:** No you're not. It was self-protection. Also, you were there as a community member and not as a library staff member. You had a different role to play in that situation.

**JANE:** I am a cowardly lion. But I am also the person who succeeded Barratt as the Assistant Director at Crook County Library when she moved on to Oregon City. I experienced this from both ends, and it's been my privilege to see how this has played out for our organization in the long term.

**BARRATT:** It was a valuable (if horrible) learning experience for everyone involved. So let's make like Miss Manners and talk about the do's and don't's of hosting a politically charged program!

### Choosing Your Program

*Guns and America* was offered as part of the Conversation Project series of community discussion programs given by Oregon Humanities. Conversation Project programs are intended to be open-ended discussions run by a trained facilitator who is an expert in the topic at hand. The facilitator creates a neutral space, but political conversations that occur within the boundaries of civil, productive conversation often arise and are not discouraged. In general, these programs are extremely well-run and well-received. Both of our current libraries have done and continue to do Conversation Projects. We would recommend these programs for any library.

While programs centering on contentious topics can be intimidating, they fill a necessary role in public library services. In order for such programs to be successful, however, library staff members have to do some additional legwork when selecting a topic and preparing to host a program.

- Who are the people in your community? What values do they hold dear? Is your community more homogenous in terms of beliefs and background, or is there more diversity?
- What are the main social and service groups in your community? To what extent are they politically active?
- How do your own values align with those of the community? Do you read as an "insider" or an "outsider?"
- What role does the library play in the community? How do individuals and community groups interact with the library? What story is the library trying to tell?

If you're an outsider in a largely homogenous community, you'll need to be especially vigilant about preparing for the program. At the time, our library staff consisted mostly of young, hipsterish women who grew up outside of our rural community of hunters, sportsmen, and 2nd Amendment activists. If we'd asked ourselves these questions beforehand, we would have learned a lot about the topic and our community.

Even if you feel like you're operating in your comfort zone, you need to prepare for all eventualities.



## Choosing Your Facilitator

Additionally, your program must be led by someone who has training and experience with facilitating discussion groups or workshops. Just because you can lead a staff meeting or talk down an angry patron at the desk does not mean you can mediate conflict in a room of strangers. If you have examined you and your library's place in the community and have found it to be deficient—for example, if you don't have a relationship of trust and collaboration established with local groups, or if you don't feel a part of the community—outside facilitators are a must.

Not all outside facilitators will be prepared to lead a program exploring contentious topics, however. Here are some attributes to look for when choosing a facilitator:

- **Training and experience working with large groups.** This is essential. Specific training in conflict mediation is super double secret essential. Be sure to ask the presenter if they have presented on this topic before.
- **Active listening skills.** Your presenter must be able to listen attentively and compassionately, building on and centering on comments made by the attendees.
- **Expertise in the topic.** This might look different depending on the presentation; a program dealing with issues related to law or medicine requires a different threshold of expertise than one on local food culture.
- **An interest in your community and the people who live there,** especially if the presenter is from outside your service area. A new strategy employed by Oregon Humanities is to have the facilitators ask the hosting library for local news stories or background on current community issues.
- **A plan for establishing ground rules, presenting background information, and guiding the group discussion in a way that is accessible to all participants.** If you're having difficulty contacting your facilitator to discuss these issues before the program, you're in big trouble.

It's not enough for your presenter to say, "Yes, I have these qualities!" If you can't establish an active dialogue, or if they're unable to provide details about how they plan to address challenges that could arise before or during the program, then you need to find someone who can.

We highly recommend Oregon Humanities' requirement that presenters arrive early at the site of the program. This is a great opportunity for last-minute discussions between the facilitator and the hosting library, and for the presenter to establish a rapport with participants as they arrive.

## The -ism Factor

This one's hard.

During *Guns and America*, a few members of the audience saw fit to directly question the citizenship of the presenter. The presenter was African-American. That was the macroaggression in an atmosphere thick with microaggressions. We weren't prepared for racism to enter the conversation, and we didn't give the presenter the support he needed in that moment.



Prejudice tends to rear its head during moments of conflict. If you feel that you, your library, or your facilitator lack the skills to adequately navigate those moments when and if they arise, you need to arrange adequate staff and facilitator training prior to the program.

Even if you don't want to plan a discussion program around a hot topic, training in mediating conflict and addressing racism, sexism, homophobia, and other prejudice in your institution is essential. It will empower your staff and help create a welcoming space for all members of your community.

### Promoting Your Program

Storytelling isn't just for story time. Effective marketing of library programs and services is all about narrative—you've got your setting (the library—is it friendly, official, quiet, active, or some combo of all of these?), your characters (the staff and the patrons—who are they?), and a plot (all the stuff you're doing) driven by themes (your vision and mission statements). Marketing your program is a matter of integrating it into the ongoing story of your library. If you can't make it fit, its purpose will be ignored or misunderstood by the community.

If you haven't thought about your marketing in this way before, start right now. Crook County Library switched to a more narrative-driven marketing strategy post-*Guns and America*, and it's worked well. Even libraries who have adopted this approach for years should consider the following points when marketing a program with the potential for controversy:

- What's the story we have already been telling? Who's been hearing it? Do they buy in?
- How do people in the community get their information?
- Where on social media are conversations about the library happening? How does your library know about these conversations?
- What kind of images or ad copy do you use in your marketing? We recommend neutral ad copy and images that resonate with your community but aren't provocative for the sake of being provocative. Actual photos of your community, rather than stock photos, are best.
- How much control do you need to have over your messaging? If you market your program with a press release, you may be contacted by media outlets that exert their own editorial control. Don't be afraid to turn down PR opportunities if there is a risk that your message could be distorted or misinterpreted.
- If you decide to give an interview about the program, are you the best person to speak on behalf of the organization in this situation? Whatever you do, don't start talking to the reporter when they call you the first time! Ask them if you can get back to them and prepare, prepare, prepare—talk to the facilitator, talk to your boss, do your research and have additional resources ready.

There were a lot of ways we failed when planning this program, but our marketing fail was heinous. Our marketing image was a big ol' gun. Someone whose name rhymes with carrot gave an ill-advised interview in which she used the phrase “gun control” in an inappropriate context. Wherever the conversation took off before we opened the doors that fateful night, it didn't happen within earshot of the library.





## Security

If you sign up for an Oregon Humanities program in 2017 (and, if we haven't been perfectly clear, we still totally think you should), you will receive a thick packet with all of the resources you'll need to carry out a successful Conversation. Thanks in part to us, one of the first documents in that packet is a letter strongly suggesting that program hosts that anticipate crowds or conflict should consider hiring outside security staff.

Everyone in attendance at your program—staff, patrons, facilitators, innocent bystanders—deserves to feel safe from both a physical and emotional standpoint. This is a matter of both training and material support.

- Is the space in which your program will be held safe and appropriate? With discussion programs, it is standard practice to have the participants sit in a circle. How many people can you accommodate in this arrangement? Is the space welcoming? If you did have to evacuate the space in an emergency, what's the plan?
- Would outside security fit with the story you're telling about your library? Your security choices send a message. Depending on your community and the topic, security could make people feel safe, or it could make them feel threatened.
- If you decide to hire security officers, how will they present themselves? Will they wear uniforms or plain clothes? Will they be in the room or at the entrance, or on call?
- How will you communicate with local law enforcement? You'll need to ask yourself this question whether or not you use hired security personnel.
- How will you or the program leader establish the rules and the consequences of breaking them with attendees? Who will enforce them? If your staff or facilitators aren't comfortable enforcing those consequences, you need to find someone who can.
- What are the rules for public buildings in your community, especially rules related to weapons?

When we hosted *Guns and America* at Crook County Library, we didn't know that Oregon Humanities offered security support for Conversation Projects on contentious topics. While our county sheriff was instrumental in keeping the (relative) peace, we would have gladly taken outside security if we'd known it was available. Depending on the relationship the library and the community have with local law enforcement, it may not be wise to have a police presence unless absolutely necessary.

Err on the side of caution. If you're on the fence about hiring security personnel, hire them.

## Evaluating Outcomes

It wouldn't be an *OLAQ* article if we didn't talk about outcomes-based evaluation. It's a helpful tool for assessing whether or not your program did what you wanted it to do, and to determine if you succeeded in integrating your program into the overall story of your library.

For programs of *Guns and America's* ilk, it's not a numbers game. A lot of our mistakes were driven by a desire to finally have an adult program with decent attendance. We got it. Somewhere between 50 and 60 people showed up; we lost a few after the mandatory "concealed carry permits are required for guns in public facilities" announcement.



Instead, you want to focus on qualitative data such as participants' experience: what they felt, what they learned, and whether or not they'd come back for more.

- What do you want your program to achieve? It might be useful to you to have it written up as a statement of purpose: "We will do (x program) to accomplish (y strategic goal), and we will measure it using (z metric)."
- How will you evaluate the program? Some facilitators, like Oregon Humanities, will provide their own tools. If you need to create your own evaluation, the State Library's Library Development office has plenty of resources.
- What will happen to the evaluations at the end of the program? You, the facilitator, and the sponsoring organization all need access to the data. You also need to be able to explain to the subjects who will see the evaluations, what personal information will be tied to their answers, and how the evaluations will be stored or disposed of after the data has been analyzed. They will probably ask.
- When you are done collecting and analyzing your data, you can tie it back into your library's overarching narrative. Did you reach your goal? Would you offer the program again? If so, what would you do differently next time? Are there opportunities for related programs of interest to your community?

For *Guns and America*, Crook County Library used evaluations provided by Oregon Humanities, which are used at all Conversation Project programs and featured no CCL-specific questions. The evaluations that weren't torn up in dramatic fashion were eye-opening in the sense that they gave us a very clear picture of what the audience was thinking, but they didn't provide us with any library-specific constructive feedback that we could build upon.

### **What to Do if Everything Goes Pear-Shaped Anyway**

So let's say it is the future, and you have followed our advice to a T. You have done everything that Crook County Library didn't do, took all the necessary precautions, and your program still ended in tears.

Don't murder us. You knew this job was dangerous when you took it.

You will probably feel like curling up in a ball and never engaging with the world again, but you and your library will have to get up the next day and face your patrons, your community, and yourselves. How do you start?

- Self-care, self-care, self-care. Take a long walk in the woods, take a road trip to Enchanted Forest, eat your body weight in pie, whatever. It's going to feel bad for a while. If you can, get some physical distance and take a friend with you.
- Be open with your staff about what happened. If it's safe to be blunt, be blunt. If there's a backlash, everybody will need to be ready for it.
- If you weren't physically present at the program, it is your responsibility as a co-worker and as a human being to listen to them with an open mind and heart. They need your support! If you do have constructive criticism to share, wait until the immediate aftermath has passed and you've had a chance to process all of the information.





- Have a response strategy in place, but don't feel compelled to respond to every comment from the public. Keep the discussion off your library's social media page, if you can—the goal is not to out-yell everybody else.

We coped by taking a mini road trip to Salem for pie, donuts, sushi, and roasted chicken. When we returned to Prineville, our co-workers were nothing but supportive. We spent hours discussing “what went wrong” with Crook County Library colleagues, Oregon Humanities staff, and each other. While the library did not respond to the flurry of Letters to the Editor in the local newspaper, Oregon Humanities did. These continued conversations—within the library and in the public more broadly—might also be seen as a kind of success: people were talking about the topic and about how best to talk about it. In any case, the immediate flames of the controversy eventually died down, and while the gunpowder-scented aftertaste of the program lingered in the library and the community past the end of Barratt's tenure as Assistant Director, Jane can attest to the fact that this, too, did pass.

### Conclusion

JANE: So, Barratt, *how have we grown?* (cue tinkly Full House life lessons music)

BARRATT: Well, I learned a lot about how not to market a program! It also exposed me to a different side of rural America than I'd seen, which changed how I think about and discuss political issues in my personal life. And, perhaps most importantly, I rarely stress about my youth services programs now!

JANE: Hear, hear! My motto as a manager these days is: “is an atrocity occurring? Are people scared? No? Then, as Pete the Cat would say, ‘it's alllllll goooooood.’” The chaos threshold was definitely recalibrated after *Guns and America*.

BARRATT: How has this affected the Crook County Library in the long-term?

JANE: I got questions about it from other librarians for a long time, but the library's service population had pretty much forgotten all about *Guns and America* by the time I stepped into the Assistant Director role in early 2016. Since then, Crook County Library has successfully hosted multiple Oregon Humanities programs, including two of their statewide Talking About Dying and This Place programs. While not as immediately controversial as *Guns and America*, This Place turned out to be a great example of a program where people were able to bring different political perspectives into the library and discuss them in a way that was peaceable and productive. It was a real kumbayah moment.

BARRATT: One of the things that frustrates me about *Guns and America* is that it didn't have to be a bad program! I think that, under wildly different circumstances, it could have been a great topic.



**JANE:** I think it still could be a good topic, and I'd welcome that topic back into our space if the stars aligned. With the right presenter, the right set of marketing guidelines, the right ground rules, and maybe some prior discussion with some of the local service groups or the schools, I still have faith that Crook County Library could do right by this topic. Would you be willing to try again at Oregon City?

**BARRATT:** I think so! It's a different community with different hot-button issues, though. We recently hosted *Power, Privilege, and Racial Diversity in Oregon* through Oregon Humanities. Our community has really been struggling with racist incidents in the schools and KKK activity. The facilitator was amazing, our librarian was prepared, and everyone participated in a great conversation.

**JANE:** The best part in all of this? When a hiring manager or an up-and-coming library school student (or, in my dreams, a network exec who wants to make a show about sexy librarians) asks us about a time we screwed up and learned from it, we have a real corker of a story.

**BARRATT:** The only way to live with failure is to learn from it! If you do a political program at your library, something will probably go wrong. It might be a little thing. It might be half a dozen big things. It might be even worse than *Guns and America*. But it's not the end of the world. It will suck for a little while, and you will do better next time. 🌱



# The Right Tool for the Job?

## Ignorance, Evolution, Reflection, and the #Resistance

by **Lynne Stahl**

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LYNNE STAHL

Lynne Stahl works as a bilingual access services assistant at Multnomah County Library's Gregory Heights branch. She is pursuing her MLS through Emporia State University, where she also serves as a graduate research assistant. She earned her BA in English and Hispanic Studies from Colorado College and her PhD in English from Cornell University. Her writing has appeared in *The Velvet Light Trap*, *Popular Culture Review*, and the *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier*, and she is particularly interested in open access digital humanities platforms as a means of amplifying marginalized voices. In her free time, she enjoys playing rugby, eating ice cream, and coveting strangers' dogs.

"Librarians are Swiss Army knives for the #Resistance," tweeted musician and activist Neko Case on January 27, 2017, a characterization both fortifying and thought-provoking for library workers everywhere. Like any tool, a knife is useless without an agent to wield it—and destructive if applied incorrectly or to the wrong material. If library workers are instruments to be plied to all manner of social ills, what are the potentialities and limits of our agency, and how can we best equip those who would put us to use? This essay works to unpack Case's metaphor within the context of Oregon libraries, casting its gaze back to Mary Frances Isom's early push to democratize libraries, ahead to librarian Angelica Novoa de Cordeiro's efforts to serve immigrant populations in rural areas, and around at evolving political discourses and circumstances as well as their precursors. In many ways, the challenges Isom identified and addressed were akin to those that now confront libraries on a national scale as they contemplate means of resisting the multiphobic, and shortsighted rhetoric and policy that suffuse the contemporary political climate while adhering to the ALA's core values of democracy, diversity, equitable access, intellectual freedom, privacy, and professionalism.

### Whose Hands Are We In?

Even while asking how libraries can equip their users to do the respond to these challenges, this essay considers a more cautionary metaphor from activist Audre Lorde (1993), who advises us that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." Lorde was referring to her experiences with feminist work in academia, where she too often found that conference programs and scholarly journals habitually marginalized or omitted considerations of difference based on race, class, sexuality, and ability—in other words, that



they replicated the very patriarchal structures they purported to strive against by centering the views and concerns of white, heterosexual, cisgender women. The issue applies equally, albeit in different ways, to public, academic, and other kinds of libraries. How, with the understanding that we are part of institutions that are often complicit in legislative and social injustices, can we ply our tools and ourselves as tools to the eradication of those injustices?

Having felt, since the election, energized but unsure precisely where or how to channel my zeal, I was initially tickled to be so anointed by one of my musical idols and prepared to embrace the notion wholeheartedly. Yet the more thought I gave the metaphor, the more double-edged its meanings seemed. The genius of the Swiss Army knife is that it serves as whatever its owner needs it to be, but it bears noting, too, that a plurality of Swiss Army knife functions serve not to incite resistance but to overcome it: wood, paper, cork, food, tin cans, etc. This doesn't mean that Case's metaphor is flawed, necessarily, but it reminds us that as with much technology, the tool's beneficence or malignancy is wholly contingent upon the aims and actions of those who wield it. I don't know how carefully she considered the conceit any more than I know the intent or character of many of my library's patrons—nor do I know what percentage of librarians even support the resistance movement or consider themselves part of it, and this ignorance is at once discomfiting and galvanizing.

### **Reflectio Ad Absurdum?**

I'm currently enrolled in an MLS program, and I work at a public library. In both environments, I'm struck by the evident willingness and ease with which library students, staff, and faculty in all roles can admit that they don't know the answer to something, but will endeavor to find out. In my previous grad school experience, some unwritten but universally recognized code of conduct dictated that a student admitting ignorance would have been only slightly less shocking than a student admitting that they enjoyed punching puppies. But, in my new milieu, I feel not just able but impelled to admit that I didn't actually know what the Tweet meant. Whether Case put as much thought into her metaphor as I am here is ultimately irrelevant; in the age of social media, any utterance into the digisphere immediately escapes the reins of its author's intent. The crux of the problem was not that Case's metaphor exceeded the bounds of her intentions, as all metaphors and indeed all language slip away from their utterers; it was my initial, unexamined presumption that I understood.

On the surface, the Tweet constituted an incitement to change and a call to action. It goes without saying that action is essential to change and that both are imminently needed at this juncture. Yet action without constant reflection too easily becomes dogma, and—as historical attempts at authoritarian communism have demonstrated—intractable, unexamined dicta too easily become oppressive, however far left they fall on the political spectrum. I'm using this essay, therefore, as an opportunity to address a gap in my knowledge in a way that I hope also provides avenues of thought in what has been, for many, a time of stultifying enormity: an exercise in identifying and contending with what we don't know in order to make ourselves better informed and, therefore, better able to act.

### **Unpacking the Metaphor**

The Swiss Army knife was developed in the late 1800s by the Ibach, Switzerland-based company Karl Elsener as a compact, versatile tool for use by Swiss soldiers. Case's conceit therefore points the way to another conceit whose linkages carry even more powerful implications: Switzerland is a country notorious for the policy of "armed neutrality" it maintained



throughout both World Wars. While the Swiss adopted some measures to shield against a German invasion in the 1930s, their aims were based primarily in self-protection, not in aversion to genocide. The Swiss military took action against Germany only when Axis forces made incursions on Swiss borders and interests; it also prohibited Allied advances through its land and airspace. Further, and with a chilling resonance, Switzerland's strict immigration policy resulted in the turning away of thousands of Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1945. Those refugees admitted were proscribed from gainful employment, and many were interned in so-called "reception camps," as political asylum was not granted on the basis of ethnic or cultural persecution (Bergier et al., 2002). The parallels to the travel ban that is currently bouncing around various courts likely need not be belabored to bring home the gravity of this historical moment and the directions in which it threatens to head.

The masters of Swiss Army knives did not, then, wield their tools in the interest of ending a global atrocity. With this historical context in view, the Swiss moniker seems less of an honorific and more a caution against neutrality. As library workers, we are committed to serving every patron regardless of their political views or demographic attributes. Whether the promise of universal service necessarily entails political neutrality is up for debate, and numerous library publications have questioned this notion before and since the election, reaching various conclusions. It behooves libraries in Oregon and nationwide to engage in this type of rumination and arrive at answers themselves as well as a vision of the forms that neutrality or non-neutrality takes; they may be aided by such resources as the 2008 essay collection *Questioning Library Neutrality* edited by Alison Lewis.

In a democracy as envisioned by the Constitution, the core values of the American Library Association would be commonsense and unremarkable: access, democracy, diversity, intellectual freedom, privacy, and so on. However, one needn't read far into our nation's founding document before stumbling onto hollow clauses, false universalisms, and notions of freedom that belie a history of genocide, slavery, misogyny, and a class system that turns a blind eye to all three, perpetuated by fantastical narratives of prosperity through diligence. So where, at a time when the Constitution is under threat by an administration whose leader and followers embrace many of the inequalities it glossed over, do libraries stand?

I spent most of Election Day 2016 at the public library branch where I work, watching individuals and families drop their ballots into the big blue box, checking the news on my breaks, and trying unsuccessfully not to fall apart on the bus ride home as the outcome became inexorably clear. Since then, I've found that focusing on small, everyday thoughts and actions helps to keep me focused and energized, whereas trying to think about how to "fix" all the issues, the racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia that were present before the election—less inescapably for some than for others—plunges me quickly into inertia and despair. We need to acknowledge that these problems are systemic, but we also need actionable plans to end them and the faith to carry those plans through.

### **On the Origin of Oregon Libraries**

If this country is the master's house, its rooms are walled by state borders varying in design but built from the same bricks. I would be remiss to quote Lorde (1993), who was instrumental in illuminating the shortcomings of mainstream feminism with regard to race, in an article about Oregon institutions without acknowledging the hardwired racism upon which the state was founded.



As one of thousands of Portland transplants over the past decade, I can't deny that my qualifications to comment on the directions that Oregon's libraries might take are suspect; I learned only recently about the state's ignoble genesis as a would-be white utopia. However, my upbringing in Kansas—where public funding, civil rights, and intellectual freedom have been in crisis as long as I can remember—afford me what I hope is a useful view on the largely-but-not-entirely chiasmic paths of these two states. Kansas entered the Union through the Wyandotte Constitution, which banned slavery and accorded property rights to married women but stopped short of granting suffrage to females or people of color (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.d.). Embarrassingly recent news to me and perhaps my fellow relocatees is the fact that the Oregon Constitution also prohibited slavery when statehood was granted in 1859, but three separate exclusion laws banning all African Americans from Oregon and providing for their forcible deportation were passed at various points through the latter half of the nineteenth century (Nokes, 2014); the final exclusionary clause was not removed from the Constitution until 2000. According to the most recent census data, a mere 2.1 percent of Oregonians identified as black or African American, compared to 13.3 percent nationally (US Census Bureau, 2016). It's impossible to know, of course, precisely how this skewed population has shaped Oregon's libraries, but it's equally impossible to deny that it has and still does inform how we serve patrons of color. We need to know whom we are serving and whom we are not; we need to understand the negative spaces and the demographic gaps that contour the populations we serve because they are inextricably linked to the facts and contexts that structure our ignorance.

In the early twentieth century, prompted in part by John Wilson's donation of a formidable reference collection appended to a stipulation that it be made freely available to the public, librarian Mary Frances Isom helped transform Portland's private, subscription-based library to a tax-funded, public venture open to all (Hummel, 2009); she identified its exclusionary nature as a problem and advanced efforts to provide free access and culturally relevant materials, actively seeking out patrons "who were not its traditional middle or upper class base" (p. 7). She also recognized the need for coalitions to advocate for libraries and worked to improve the services they provided, helping to found the Oregon State Library, Oregon Library Association, and Pacific Northwest Library Association.

In the early twenty-first century, Angelica Novoa de Cordeiro of Canby Public Library has conducted research to assess the library needs of Spanish-speaking populations, responding to growing communities in urban and rural settings alike (Novoa de Cordeiro, 2016). Lincoln City District Librarian Diedre Conkling has worked to identify environmental and social issues and take them up in free, open-access capacities both locally and globally, helping to establish a feminist book review called the Amelia Bloomer Project as well as a Women of Library History Tumblr (Fiore, 2017).

### **A Call to Inaction?**

The core problems that Isom, Novoa de Cordeiro, Conkling, and others have identified are the same, though the legal and demographic contexts have shifted: social inequalities rooted in economic disparities that in turn derive from municipal and federal institutions and systems that prioritize the well-being of certain groups over others. These three librarians identified systemic problems and shortcomings within their communities and took steps to remedy them. How can library workers throughout Oregon, on however a minute and mundane level, do the same every day?





This issue's original call for papers framed change in terms of evolution—a word I read with some chagrin, as a native Kansan who attended public schools from K–12 amid a set of hearings in which the Kansas Board of Education ruled that evolution should be taught as theory, not fact, and that Intelligent Design could be presented as a viable alternative. Evolution is defined as a “process of gradual change . . . from a simpler to a more complex or advanced state” (*OED*, n.d.); it is defined, intriguingly, in opposition to the “sudden or instigated change” of revolution. In a biological context, evolution is a natural phenomenon that results from a combination of accident, genetic predisposition, and learned behaviors—but not necessarily on a conscious, informed level. And even when it is conscious, those efforts may be gallingly misguided. Former Oregon State Librarian Cornelia Marvin Pierce, who pioneered the concept of traveling libraries to provide rural access to books, saw evolution as justification for eugenics and supported the forced sterilization of the mentally, physically, and morally “unfit” that her future husband, Governor Walter Pierce, had legalized through a 1923 bill (*Oregon Encyclopedia*, 2017). To this day, Reed College maintains an endowed professorship in her name.

If Oregon libraries are to evolve rather than revolt, which I do not take as a given, how can they catalyze meaningful, beneficent change? Where does resistance become instigation, and when does open-mindedness verge into pathological neutrality? How does one right systemic wrongs that, even if at a head now, have persisted throughout the state's history and formed a part of its very foundation?

The risks that lie in the work of libraries are the risks that we see now all over with regard to free speech and universal access to services: we serve Muslim immigrants and we serve white men in MAGA hats; we are committed to providing them with information, shelter, Internet access, privacy, and more, and we have no choice but to accept the uncertainty of what they do with those resources. They're the same risks inherent in a democracy founded on freedom of expression and the same ambivalences of a profession in which someone can fight tirelessly to bring books to the rural poor even while fighting to deny others the ability to reproduce, and in them resonates the simultaneous privilege and jeopardy of working in public service. We are in the hands of autonomous beings in a putatively free society, the cost of whose freedom is uncertainty.

So after all of this, I have few answers but many implements with which to approach the problems at hand, as well as a renewed mindfulness that no utterance, figurative or otherwise, Tweet or legislation, is too banal to warrant examination. A rare presumption that I've found salutary amid these risks is the notion that I am always coming at every issue from a position of at least partial ignorance that requires conscious redress. Evolution's defining trait is its duration, and a process of gradual change makes room for—demands—reflection. Activism isn't always about action; it must be attended by the constant cognitive processes and exercises of paying ample attention to words, learning the deep histories of everyday surroundings, recognizing the limitations as well as obligations of one's agency, and assessing our past, present, and future positions to all of the above—especially those of us who, in 1859 and now, have dwelt in the master's house. 🐘





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# It's a Long Drive and Learning Experience

**by Victoria Cross**

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VICTORIA CROSS

Since she started working at the Multnomah County in 2000, Victoria Cross has worked to link immigrant and refugee employees, as well as immigrant and refugee communities, to Multnomah County programs that serve them.

Born in Russia, Victoria graduated from the Moscow State University of Culture with a B.A. in Library & Information Science, and a minor in Nursing. She was chief librarian for the central library in a large Russian city. She also worked in a joint training center involving the Former Soviet Union, the United States, and various countries of Europe, Asia and Africa. Victoria moved to Oregon in 1998 with her husband, Richard, and her daughter, Olga.

In 2011 Victoria founded, and remains the Chair of, the Multnomah County Employee Resource Group for Immigrants and Refugees. The group's purpose is to identify challenges and opportunities faced by this diverse cohort; advance their knowledge about the American workforce and its culture; assist the group's members in achieving their full potential through career development, celebrations, education, and mutual support; provide Multnomah County with a critical linkage to the diverse communities from which these employees come; and help prepare Multnomah County to meet future needs of this diverse workforce.

In June 2014, her Employee Resource Group won an Achievement Award from National Association of Counties for creating safe space for immigrants and refugees employed by Multnomah County, enabling them to share experiences, support and suggest opportunities to improve their experience in the workforce. The group is the first of its kind in the United States, and it serves as a teaching tool for other counties to increase awareness about immigrant and refugee experiences in a work environment, as well as out in the community.

Victoria Cross was honored with the Robert Phillips Regional Diversity Award at the Northwest Public Employees Regional Diversity Conference, where she was recognized for her pioneering efforts in promoting awareness about the needs of immigrants and refugees in the workplace and her success in founding Multnomah County Employee Resource Group for Immigrants and Refugees.

When most immigrants picture the United States, they think of Manhattan, Las Vegas or Hollywood. Few consider Scappoose, where I eventually landed when I arrived from Russia. When my father visited me, he asked: "Where is America?"

I told him: "This is it."



Like most immigrants, I didn't drive and relied on public transportation. When I got a job in downtown Portland, I had to find a way to make the 20-mile trip each day. If I could find my way from Russia to the United States, I knew I could handle this problem. Eventually, someone suggested I join a carpool. It was a new concept. When my American friends asked me if we had carpools in Russia, I said we did, but called them trains.

The carpool I joined had been founded 10 years earlier. After a phone call, I was invited to join, and on the first day, I stood with my husband on St. Helens Road to wait for a red Ford to arrive and pick me up.

I was nervous when I thought about the 40-minute drive to the city. What would I talk about with these strangers? What if they didn't like me?

And then the car stopped, and the door opened.

"Hi," the driver said, "I am Anne."

My husband suspiciously looked inside the car, kissed me goodbye and let me go. On that first day, it was just the driver and me. Anne was very talkative. Relieved, I just sat and listened. But the next day the whole team went to work, and I met the rest of my carpool.

I knew I was on probation.

The rules were simple: No smoking and you could sleep.

In this little bubble, I learned how to communicate, discovered what was appropriate to discuss and how to dress so people at work wouldn't take a look at my outfit and ask me if I planned to go to the opera that night.

Each day I worked on my language skills. I'd studied English in school, but it was a British version of English language.

At first, it was difficult to communicate. I'd heard just some of the words, and because it was not my native language, I had to assume what the conversation was about. But as I grew more comfortable, I started to relax. All of the carpool members were Oregonians, and some of them didn't travel much outside the state. They were curious about what I ate and where I shopped for groceries. Through these conversations we learned about each other.

In time, I learned the American version of small talk.


My buddies traveled with coffee mugs. Travel mugs were absolutely new for me. It was cool to see people walking on the streets with cups of coffee. I bought those travel mugs for my Russian friends and family as souvenirs.

This carpool was a vehicle that brought me to American culture. You can read American literature, watch movies and TV shows, but only when you can acquaint yourself with ordinary people on a regular basis does it become real.

By communicating about everyday life, you learn about the culture. I found more similarities than differences. People have the same family values and work ethic even the communication styles are different.

This carpool was a gift. I learned just by observing my fellow carpool members. Through listening, observing and trying to adapt to a new culture, I learned about myself. I learned my strengths and weaknesses.

And then the carpool ended.

My husband and I moved and I no longer needed a ride to the city. I moved on and started a new chapter in my life and journey. 



# OLA Quarterly Publication Schedule 2017

The *OLA Quarterly (OLAQ)* is the official publication of the Oregon Library Association. The *OLAQ* is indexed by *Library Literature & Information Science* and *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts*. To view PDFs of issues, visit the OLAQ Archive on the OLA website. Full text is also available through HW Wilson's *Library Literature and Information Science Full Text* and EBSCO Publishing's *Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA) with Full Text*.

Each issue is developed around a theme determined by the Communications Committee and Guest Editor(s). To suggest future topics for the *OLA Quarterly*, or to volunteer/nominate a Guest Editor, contact the OLAQ Coordinator.

Vol./No.	Theme	Deadline	Pub. Date	Guest Editor
Vol 23 • No. 2 Summer 2017	<i>Critical Librarianship</i>	July 15, 2017	September 15, 2017	Elsa Loftis LIBRARY DIRECTOR, <i>Oregon College of Art &amp; Craft</i> OLA PRESIDENT

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