

Decolonizing & Indigenizing “Intellectual Freedom” in the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa LIS Curriculum

Andrew B. Wertheimer

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, USA

wertheim@email.edu

ABSTRACT

Intellectual Freedom (IF) has been a key construct in the definition of professional ethics and identity in the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Library and Information Science Program (UHM LISP) since its establishment in 1965. This paper takes a critical lens to examine how the program has viewed and taught IF, without necessarily considering what it means in occupied land. This paper emerged as part of a faculty participation in a 2023 Indigenizing Social Sciences seminar. This paper follows the Program to move forward in a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning and helps to problematize IF for LIS educators.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Intellectual freedom; Information ethics; Critical librarianship; Curriculum; Pedagogy.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa; Native Hawaiian Place of Learning; Indigenous; Resistance; Critical LIS Education.

Copyright 2025 by the authors. Published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.alise.2025.2097>

Introduction

Although our theoretical understanding and praxis of intellectual freedom (IF) has greatly changed in the past two decades, such as the dropping of a position of neutrality, IF remains the central philosophy of both librarianship and LIS education. Its centrality is affirmed in the American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics, ALA Core Values, Library Bill of Rights, and “Libraries: An American Value.” Teaching IF was implied as part of the 2023 ALA Accreditation standards which expect “Program-level learning outcomes” dealing with:

II.1 Ethics and Values. Program-level learning outcomes and curriculum are designed to incorporate the philosophy, principles, and ethics of the field, including the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and relevant professional codes of ethics.

II.2 Program-Level Learning Outcomes. Program-level learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. The outcomes are informed by the most recent statement of ALA Core Competences, ALA Core Values and include a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Earlier COA Standards had an even more explicit mandate to teach intellectual freedom. However, as an LIS educator teaching in Hawai‘i, it is important to ask what does it mean to teach a professional ethics grounded in one construct of intellectual freedom as codified by the ALA Code of Ethics. In light of the ALISE 2025 theme of “Decolonizing Pedagogies: Agency, Identity, Practices,” this paper reviews my two decades of changing perspectives on this question. I realize that I am writing this as a colonist myself, but hope that raising the discussion will be a useful contribution to my current and future colleagues in Hawai‘i. I believe that this dialog will be relevant for LIS colleagues in Puerto Rico, Guam, as well as North American schools that are also nurturing indigenous approaches to LIS in affinity with professional groups like Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, & Museums (ATALM). Of course, decolonizing LIS is part of a larger international discussion beyond the American empire, especially given the imposing legacy of American librarianship in shaping LIS education in developing and developed nations (Wertheimer).

While writing this, it is important to recognize that IF education is under attack in a number of Republican states, where there are laws supporting censorship and opposing DEI content in libraries and schools. At the same time the second Trump administration seems to have successfully defunded the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and created an environment where many agencies are clearing records dealing with civil rights, sexuality, identity, inclusion, as well as purging scientific evidence of global warming. It is almost enough to overwhelm our efforts, and make one buckle down and simply support IF as part of a defense of democratic infrastructure in these crazy times. However, we would fail as scholars and educators if we were to ignore the value-laden implication of forcing our students to embrace IF as encoded by ALA codes.

Historical Context from an American Traditional Perspective

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) established the Graduate School of Library Studies in 1965. Dr. Ralph Shaw was hired to be the “Dean of Library Activities,” and to bring in a faculty who could teach librarianship according to the American Library Association Committee on Accreditation (ALA-COA) Standards. Shaw brought so many of his colleagues from his former employer that the UHM Program was called the “Rutgers of the Pacific.” The curriculum was a nearly complete transplant from New Jersey, and quickly received accreditation. Shaw and his colleagues added three courses to Rutgers’ offerings that dealt with Asian Librarianship. This reflected the school’s founding mission to work with the East-West Center (EWC), a State Department education facility located across the street from campus. The EWC offered scholarships to current and future librarians from Asia as part of a Cold War effort to win hearts and minds at a time when the US was engaged in war in Vietnam and wider South East Asia. This model for UHM’s library school was mapped out by another scholar, Robert Gitler, who had created the Japan Library School at Keio University in Tokyo in 1951, at the tail end of the American Occupation. Gitler was hired as a consultant after an earlier study of libraries in the state found that there was a need to educate more librarians. The need for librarians was a combination of a number of factors, namely (1) statehood in 1959 (which followed six decades as an American Territory), (2) the Library Services and Construction Act, of 1964, which led to the creation of a number of public library branches to meet undeserved rural and urban readers in Hawai‘i, and (3) similar legislation, like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provided increased funding for public schools, and created a need for more school library media specialists (then called school librarians). A fourth reason was the so-called Hawai‘i Democratic Revolution of 1954, when Asian Americans, especially Japanese American veterans of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442 RCT, won elections in the Territorial Legislature. According to the 1950 Census, Asian Americans were the largest ethnic group in Hawaii (285,066) compared with Native Hawaiians (86,090) and European-Americans (124,344).¹ The Hawai‘i Democratic Party took power from the Hawai‘i Republican Party, which had run the territory since the beginning of the occupation. Hawai‘i’s governor had been appointed by the US President and most Hawai‘i residents could not even vote for territorial legislators since Asian immigrants were denied the right to become citizens. Not surprisingly, Republicans largely represented the perspectives of the American missionaries and especially the sugar planters who colonized Hawai‘i. So, when the Democrats came to power, they wanted to create schools and libraries that would provide educational and economic opportunity to their keiki (children). Along these lines they also supported UHM efforts to create professional schools so that “locals” would be able to have a chance to break existing glass ceilings. They also wanted professionals with local knowledge or cultural capital who would treat all residents with respect. This was the spirit on campus and the State Capitol when the Graduate School of Library Studies was established. It was an optimistic spirit that was helped by generous federal funding for libraries, public schools, and a public research university and the spirit of the Civil Rights movement and war on poverty. In addition to federal dollars, this was

development was also financed by revenue on tourism development, that followed the introduction of jet travel to the islands.

Questioning the American Traditional Perspective

The faculty of the University of Hawai‘i Graduate School of Library Studies largely imported the COA-approved curriculum from Rutgers, as mentioned, with few changes to reflect their new home. One exception was a new course in Asian Children’s literature, that as to appeal to students in the Asian Librarianship path as well as librarians who would work with Asian American children. Their only initial curricular recognition of the host culture and Native Hawaiians, whose land the school was built on, was creating LS 685, Traditional Literature and Oral Narration, which was one way of recognizing Hawaiian ‘Ike (knowledge) and folklore.

Enter another Colonist

I was hired by the UHM Library and Information Science Program (as it was then and still is known) in 2003, nearly four decades after the school’s establishment. It feels surreal to admit that I’m now the most senior faculty member of the Program if one counts year of service. For over two decades I’ve been teaching core courses like LS 615 Collection Management and LS 610 Foundations. Even today, six decades after the school’s founding, some of the course numbers are the same, although the names have changed. Of course, the content has also changed, especially as librarianship transformed from a book-centric one to a digital one.

One constant though was the American ideological imprint. This was built into the Program since the faculty were products of American LIS Programs. While some of the later faculty were had been born and grown up in Hawai‘i, the only *Kanaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiians) were adjunct faculty who taught courses like the Traditional and Oral Literature course. Regardless of ethnicity, most of the faculty learned the LIS curriculum at UHM, as dictated by the Rutgers model. This model was kept in place by later COA Accreditation Standards, which for many years had explicit curricular mandates.

In my own case I certainly did not see myself as a colonist as I joined the faculty in 2003. Arriving on *Hawai‘i nei* that fall, I was struck by the ugliness of the industrial outgrowth of the airport infrastructure that obliterated the majestic mountains, which I would later learn were sleeping giants. The airport was replete with Hawaiian music piped in over an aging airport PA system, along with images which projected a commercially acceptable image of Aloha. It was my first time in Hawai‘i.

In my suitcases and boxes that followed, were notes and books that would support my liberal reform of LIS education, stressing social responsibility (we didn’t call it critical librarianship yet), diversity (which predated today’s DEI perspective), intellectual freedom, and library history. I saw my challenge as how to balance these with a traditional love of books and materials, and current trends of information communication technologies and customer service.

Of course, I knew of the occupation of Hawai'i, but originally had few contacts with Native Hawaiians. There were very few in the UHM LIS Program or the profession. There had been an effort to recruit more Native Hawaiians into the field when Senator Inouye and others had worked with the non-profit organization Alu Like to apply federal funds for scholarships. These furthered the careers of a few professionals like former State Archivist Susan Shaner. However, Alu Like's Scholarship ended decades before I arrived, and it would be another decade before Native Hawaiian librarians and LIS students would form their own organization, Na Hawai'i 'Imi Loa. Most of my students were Asian American or European American. My own research focused on Japanese American library and print culture history.

Problematizing Intellectual Freedom

Sociological theory relating to attributes of professions point to the importance of traits like ethical codes. Robbins (1996) shows how IF became a key tenant of ethical codes and the promotion of librarianship as a profession and a graduate professional degree. As a former student of Louise Robbins, and as the lead instructor for the foundations course and collections management course, I spent a lot of class time discussing IF and how to defend against banned books. A colleague, Rebecca Knuth, also offered her own popular course explicitly focused on intellectual freedom and her own innovative research on libricide. Both of our classes largely dealt with key ALA documents like the Freedom to Read Statement and Code of Ethics. We both had observed how librarians had come under attack for defending library user's IF and privacy rights and felt we needed to prepare students to be able to be a professional and fight censorship, even when under attack by powerful forces, like U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft. The point is that as a Program we were passionate about IF and believed that one could not be a librarian if not committed to IF. Indeed, students were expected to demonstrate this ethical stance in a capstone oral exam for non-thesis students.

What the faculty did not grasp was the problem in how we predicated IF on the ALA Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights, which were presented as extensions of the Bill of Rights, namely the First Amendment to the to the US Constitution. As more of our students studied at UHM's Hawai'i nuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge, they became more passionate about Hawaiian sovereignty, and rejected swearing allegiance to any statement of American rights since they rightly argue that the US played a key role in the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and that the royal family never relinquished to the United States. This was even recognized on the centennial of that overthrow as the "Apology Resolution" (PL-103-150), which passed both houses of the US Congress and was signed by President Clinton.

The problem became patently clear when the one student almost two decades ago was forced to retake part of the oral exam as the student selected the IF question, but was unable to follow the instructions to cite rationale for a decision to keep a book or not. The faculty tried to guide the student to the documents and ethical statements discussed in class and readings, but the student only responded with a rejection of anything to do with ALA or the Bill of Rights. The faculty presumably would have passed the student if he/she would have offered an alternative ethical framework, but none was offered. At the time the faculty felt this was the student's fault for not being able to offer an alternative model. I now realize that this was our own shortcoming.

Decolonizing IF: Offering Alternative Models

In the years since that time, I now share models for Intellectual Freedom based on traditional ALA measures, but also highlight the role of free speech in the various Constitutions of the Hawaiian Kingdom, which include some discussion on Lèse-majesté. I can also highlight Kālewa Correa's 'Ōlelo Hawai'i translation of the Library Bill of Rights. I also encourage students to consider Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and IFLA's Advisory Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE). IF scholars in LIS can build on how ALA, IFLA, SAA, ICA, and even the WIPO have come to terms with recognizing different rights when dealing with Indigenous Traditional Cultural Knowledge. This fits with the UHM LIS Program's Strategic Planning mission of becoming a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning, as is spelled out in the 2023 Self Study Report for COA and other UHM and UH System strategic planning goals.

Conclusion

I apologize if this seems like a slow buildup of what might be obvious, but that the point. We LIS Professionals often take things like the LBR or Code of Ethics as basic statements that require a clear defense; however, I hope this paper shows how some of librarians and students in Hawai'i nei are in trying to apply critical librarianship to basics of professional practice and what makes up an information professional. I hope that this discussion can lead our graduates to have forums with library users and that we can shape a Hawai'i-placed ethical code for librarians and archivists. As with any decolonization project, such a discussion will be difficult, nuanced, and passionate, but it is what is *pono* (just) and what our profession needs to do.

Appendix: LIS Oral Comprehensive Examination (2007) - Excerpt

B.2. INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Scenario:

You are the head librarian at (designate one)

- Orinoco Elementary or High School Library
- Orinoco Public Library
- University of Mirando at Orinoco

It is five minutes before closing and you and the clerk are busy with last minute checkouts. In walks an extremely irate patron. The patron throws a book on the counter and demands that such filth be removed from the library immediately.

In your response:

- What is your immediate response?
- What are possible subsequent responses in the upcoming weeks as the patron/s pursue the matter?
- What could have been done previously to prepare for this kind of challenge?

- What resources exist to support librarians in intellectual freedom battles?

[LIS Curriculum Objectives](#) addressed:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Demonstrate an understanding of the history, philosophy, principles, policies, and ethics of library and information science and technology |
| 5 | Demonstrate theoretical understanding of and basic competencies in evaluating, selecting, and organizing information sources |
| 7 | Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of administration applicable in libraries, archives, and information centers |
| 10 | Demonstrate the professional attitudes and the interpersonal and interdisciplinary skills needed to communicate and collaborate with colleagues and information users |

[Core Competencies](#) addressed:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Professional ethics: Codes and principles of ethical practice governing the field |
|---|---|

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Kamakana Aquino for leading the Indigenizing Social Sciences seminar in Spring 2023 as well as my students and UHM LIS colleagues for helping me come toward this understanding.

REFERENCES

- Alfino, M., & Koltutsky, L. (2010). *Library Juice Press Handbook of Intellectual Freedom: Concepts, Cases, and Theories*. Sacramento: Library Juice Press.
- American Library Association. (2023). "Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies." (Chicago: ALA).
- Candace, F., & J. Y. Okamura, eds. (2008). *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Gitler, R. Buckland, M., ed. (1999). *Robert Gitler and the Japan Library School: An Autobiographical Narrative*. Scarecrow Press.
- Gorman, M. (2015). *Our enduring values revisited: librarianship in an ever-changing world*. Chicago: ALA Editions.
- Knuth, R. (2003). *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*. Praeger.
- Moniz, H., Purcell, A., 'Ānela, Shim, K., & Long, K. S. (2025). *Indigenous Librarianship - Practices of Indigenous Agency and Abundance*. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/110937>
- Robbins, L. S. (1996). *Censorship and the American Library: The American Library Association's Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969*. Greenwood Press.
- Schmitt, R. C. (1968). *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii: 1778-1965*.
- Trask, H.-K. (1999). *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Rev. ed. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- University of Hawaii 1965-1966 General Catalogue*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii. eVols. <http://hdl.handle.net/10524/868>
- UHM LIS Program (2007). "Students: Information And Guidelines for Oral Comprehensive Examination." Internet Archive. <http://www.hawaii.edu/lis/content/orals/orals.pdf>
- Valeho-Novikoff, S. N. (2024). "Aloha 'Āina in the Library and Information Science Program: Understanding and Being a Hawaiian Place of Learning." UHM Dissertation.
- Wertheimer, A. B. (2009). "Decolonizing the East-West Information Flow in Library and Information Studies" *Asia-Pacific Conference on Library & Information Education & Practice 4th Conference*, Tsukuba, Japan. Proceedings [[Online](#)].

ⁱ The 1965 UHM Catalog of uses the term Oriental, which is no longer acceptable. In Hawai'i, Asian Americans are often called "local," as in "local Japanese" to differentiate between Japanese tourists or other nationals. The term Asian American is less common away from campus. Anticolonial UHM scholars like Candace Fujikane and

Jonathan Y. Okumura use the term Asian Settler Colonialists to show how they also displaced Native Hawaiians. See their *Asian Settler Colonialism*.