Intellectual Freedom Syllabus

Speakers: Michael Kirby, Rachel Patton

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: So, I think we're going to get started in about one minute if that's okay with everyone. After the presentation, feel free to take buttons, please. We want to get rid of all of them. We do not want to bring them home in our luggage.

>> RACHEL PATTON: No space. There's no room. No room left.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: So, it's a little less than a minute but I think we're going to get started. I want to welcome everyone today. Thank you for coming. My name is Michael Kirby. I am an assistant professor at Kingsborough Community College. It's part of the Kibbee System. And I am joined by –

>> RACHEL PATTON: Hi. I am Rachel Patton. I am a teacher librarian at Manzano Day School in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: I now have to read a prepared statement from ALA. ALA is aware of growing concerns related to the safety and security of library workers across the nation. Due to the sensitive nature of this session and the wellbeing of its participants, please refrain from capturing and sharing videos, photos, or other identifying information from this session.

However, we welcome and encourage all to share their experiences and excitement for LibLearnX on social media throughout the weekend.

And we're going to get started. So, the project we're going to talk about today is the Intellectual Freedom Syllabus, which is still in its infancy. It was sort of thought up while we were emerging leaders in the Emerging Leader Program, with support from IFRT, whose members are here today. Thank you for supporting us.

And yeah, let's get started talking about our project.

>> RACHEL PATTON: So, we wanted to kind of start this conversation with, you know, the thread that brings us all together today, that hopefully connects us across different fields in librarianship, and that is what intellectual freedom actually is, right? Very foundational across librarianship, right?

I'm not a big fan of just reading the slides, so I'll let you read and also say that, you know, that we know how absolutely critical intellectual freedom is, and it is a right both protected under the First Amendment of the Constitution, and the United Nations Bill of Human Rights, right?

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: I'm more of a fan of reading directly from the slides, so forgive me. This was kind of like the guiding sort of principle right here. So, why is intellectual freedom important? Intellectual freedom is the basis for our democratic system. We expect our people to be self-governors, but to do so – also, some interpretive dancing here today.

Our citizenry must be well-informed. Libraries provide the ideas and information in a variety of formats to allow people to inform themselves.

So, this was sort of our guiding principle when we began the project.

>> RACHEL PATTON: So, yeah, intellectual freedom encompasses the freedom to hold, receive, and disseminate ideas, right? This is how – we hope this is the aspirational element of librarianship, right, is that we hope that we are supporting an informed, critical citizenry, right, with the tools to tell right from wrong and the truth in the midst of a kind of overwhelm of misinformation, malinformation, disinformation, right?

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Yeah, now for a little background on the people who actually participated in the project. I won't read out all of their names but I do just want to mention again, Rachel kind of talked about this, we are really a kind of interdisciplinary group. We have librarians from the National Gallery. She – Soo – she prefers to be called Soo. Jung Soo Bae is a metadata librarian which is something that I'm not really familiar with. We have people from public libraries. We had our

resident public school librarian teacher. And then me, I kind of work in the information literacy/academic space.

So, this, really, at the kind of formation of this project, was interdisciplinary in nature. We've seen some great programs here while we've been here and kind of realized that we kind of even need more input from different librarians, I think particularly prison librarians, which is something that we totally did not consider at all until Rachel heard it talked about yesterday.

So, the project itself is a living document. It's going to be constantly updated, hopefully for the rest of time. So, yeah. That kind of like, you know, adding stuff is kind of like central to the project itself.

And now, if you could all get out your phones and scan the QR code – QR code. And that should take you to the actual website. And I think Rachel is going to talk you through some of the features.

>> RACHEL PATTON: Right. So, we all kind of came to the syllabus with our own flavor of librarianship, right, what we do from day to day. So, there is a section – well, I'm going to start at the beginning.

We started with the Intellectual Freedom Handbook as like the primary text for the syllabus. And while it's kind of organized like a course that somebody would take in library school as a preservice librarian or a library professional, really, the goal was that it becomes kind of a collection of resources for any type of librarian, whether, you know, they're working in a public library or academic library or school library, and that those resources continue to evolve and grow to meet the needs of librarians and to meet the needs of kind of all stakeholders in the library.

So, we started with the Intellectual Freedom Handbook and then also kind of split the resources up by, you know, school libraries or data libraries, social justice. Michael mentioned the need for it to continue to grow and kind of fill the holes that are there.

We had only like less than a year, well over, yeah, six months. Six months to kind of put this together. So, when we first started talking about the syllabus, somebody mentioned like oh, we should talk about – we should talk about libraries

in prisons, in jails. And we quickly realized that we simply didn't have that particular type of expertise amongst us, and we also didn't have the time.

But I don't know how many of you attended the panel yesterday morning and Lesley Garrett asked us to not forget how book bans are affecting incarcerated individuals. You know, while I think our tenure with the Intellectual Freedom Syllabus is kind of over, it really is my hope that as we hand it off, that there are areas to focus on like that particular area.

So, that definitely kind of inspired both of us to choose that as the focus going forward with the Intellectual Freedom Syllabus.

So, you can look. If you take a deeper look at the syllabus, if you're looking at it on your phone or your device or maybe you want to look at it later, you can look at all of these different areas, access, censorship, school libraries, social justice, meeting rooms, you know, what intellectual freedom means in each of these spaces and places.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Also included, I thought this was a really nice add-on, is sort of questions and activities you can do with your students depending on what kind of students they are. So, there's a sample assignments button. Feel free to click through that.

Yeah, so I think that's basically –

>> RACHEL PATTON: I actually do some of those assignments with my elementary school students. I moved away from Banned Books Week and it being kind of a, you know, a celebration, to trying to empower even elementary students to think about, you know, how censorship shows up and whose story is not being told, and how they need to be looking for ways to ensure that they're uplifting one another.

So, those assignments, you know, we made them – we didn't make them. We collected them for librarians, but I end up using them with kids and they really respond to it. So, I think that these are, you know, a lot of these resources really cross those kind of invisible boundaries that we have set on things.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Yeah, okay. So, I think we're basically done, but before questions, I do have to plug the Merritt Fund.

Who here has heard of the Merritt Fund? Raise your hand. Who has donated to the Merritt Fund? Raise your hand.

I have not, so don't feel guilty. I plan to at the end of this though.

So, the Merritt Fund, it's a sort of fund to – let me pull up the slide so I can get the information.

Yeah, so, it's basically a fund for librarians who have been – the screen is going crazy. One second.

Awesome, yeah. So, it's for librarians who have been denied employment rights or discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, color, creed, religion, age, disability, or place of national origin, or denied employment rights because of the defense of intellectual freedom.

The Merritt Fund is solely supported by donations from people like you and us. And the step to donate can be found on the next slide.

Some more interpretive dancing.

Yeah, so, there's two ways – yeah. We'll go to the – yeah – next slide, yeah.

So, there's kind of two ways to do it. There's the GIVE ALA Online, but if you're familiar with that, it's kind of complicated, so I don't recommend that. I recommend that you scan this QR code right here which will bring you directly to the Merritt Fund link.

I think that's it. Please consider donating. Yeah?

>> AUDIENCE: Yesterday in council, they announced that in a normal year, the Merritt Fund has a single request for support. This year they have had nine. They need your dollars.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Yeah, thank you. Yeah. I guess we'll open up the floor for questions, if anyone has any.

>> AUDIENCE: So, I'm an elementary school librarian as well and I've been reading a little bit on the ALA about how parents are starting to demand the history of what children have read, and I just wondered if you would talk a little bit about that.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Yeah, I think Rachel can cover this because I think she has some direct experience.

>> RACHEL PATTON: So, they are, yes. And you know, this book banning effort isn't just about banning books but it is about looking into children's checkout history, to limiting what students can check out. There was a big kind of blowup with Follett last year in the summer because they had implemented this extended module onto their checkout system where it would allow parents to access their students' accounts and to limit what they could checkout. No LGBTQ books, my child can't check those out.

And so, you know, the student would get up to the checkout and it would buzz, you can't check that out.

So, there was a lot of pushback from librarians and authors about that and Follett walked it back. But it's kind of too late, right? The cat's out of the bag. So, these organized efforts to kind of delegitimize the expertise of librarians are super effective in small and big ways.

In middle schools and in high schools and in elementary schools, students' checkout records are protected by FERPA. I am also an elementary school librarian so lots of times I have students who are four years old in pre-K, and their parents will come and be like, I don't know what they checked out. I can't find it. I don't even know what I'm looking for.

So, I have to kind of navigate that tricky line for my youngest students, but for students that are older and more independent, yeah, they're protected by FERPA and I do fall back on that all the time. Like, when it – you know, maybe ask your child what they checked out and see if you can find it or figure it out.

I have had parents ask me to limit what their child can check out. I had a parent say that they only wanted their eight-year-old boy to be checking out boy books. I don't even know what that means.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: That's very weird.

I can't speak to it on a personal level. I don't work in school libraries. But I guess my biggest take away from this entire sort of like happening is just that it's a universal problem. We tend to, I think, kind of think of these things as

like, red state, blue state issues, and I live in a blue state. Totally untrue. It's happening everywhere and it's a crazy phenomenon. Yeah.

>> RACHEL PATTON: Purple states. They're purple states. So, it's coming up. It's coming up everywhere. And you know, they are super organized. So, check your process manuals. Check your policies. Make sure that your administrators know what your policy is so if an angry parent goes to them and says that librarian wouldn't even tell me what my kid had checked out, that you can point to something that is on paper, clearly stated.

But yeah, it's a thing everywhere. I live in New Mexico. It's a very blue state. It's happening.

>> AUDIENCE: Sorry. I would just say that that might be different in your states, whether it is protected under FERPA or not. So, I am on our – the Iowa Intellectual Reading Committee and something similar came up and our resident school librarian said those records are part of their educational record and are accessible to parents. And so, check with your own state associations, laws, et cetera.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Thank you, Amanda. Yeah?

>> AUDIENCE: So, part of it too is you can, in your circulation system, you can set it up so it doesn't keep the history. And then if you do that, you don't have it. So, you can't provide it. So, that's always been a – that's what I learned in library school was a best practice. And so, I think that's just one possibility of a recommendation.

>> MICHAEL KIRBY: Thank you for that. Yeah.

>> AUDIENCE: Don't assume the parents are your enemies. You know, make sure that you identify – my name is Deborah Doyle. I'm with United for Libraries. And sometimes we forget the friends and trustees and foundations and things, so I'm here to talk about that.

Really, they are your best friends. Make sure they know what your policies are. If your commissioners or your Board of Trustees don't know what your policies are then the people out there aren't going to know what they are. You have to talk to them and you have to bring them in and the kids too. Make sure,

make sure, make sure you have the civilian support that you need and work on it now.

   >> MICHAEL KIRBY: Thank you, thank you. Anymore questions, comments? We'd love some feedback if you have any. As you can kind of tell, the actual website is a little rudimentary. We don't have much experience in that. So, if you are good at website design and want to donate some time, please get in touch.

   >> RACHEL PATTON: Yeah, we just hope that this is a resource for anybody who needs it, and actually, we all kind of need it right now rather than when problems arise. It's really hard after you already have a challenge or you already have an issue, to seek those out.

   But that's it. Please take buttons.

   >> MICHAEL KIRBY: Thank you. Please take buttons. Please, please, please.