

Conable Conference Scholarship Report
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This year I had the privilege and honor of being the fifth recipient of the Gordon Conable Conference Scholarship sponsored by The Freedom to Read Foundation. Since starting my career as an archivist I have been intrigued by the complexities of access and its correlation with social justice, collective memory, ethics, and authenticity – which are all aspects of intellectual freedom. These topics became of interest at Simmons College while working on the Martin Luther King, Jr. papers at Boston University and led to my current position at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, DC. At the American Library Association annual conference, members of the FTRF and OIF exposed me to the vastness of intellectual freedom issues that frequently plague communities across the nation. I learned about the current filtering trends and techniques used in public schools and libraries to block internet access of pro-LGBTQ and religious websites, and the legal efforts of first amendment advocacy organizations. Privacy as it relates to personally identifiable information (PII) was another area that caught my attention. NARA has a strong policy regarding the protection of PII documented on records, which includes social security numbers, date and place of birth, address, telephone number, and email address. The notion of public libraries selling patrons information to vendors is absurd and unethical. A library's overall obligation is to provide access to readily accessible information; however, it should never be the PII of users. This jeopardizes their safety, well-being, and trust. As public servants we have to maintain a high standard of conviction and responsibility. We can't afford to compromise our values in order to fit in with emerging technology and social media companies, such as Google and Facebook.

During the conference I was blessed to experience several highlights. One in particular stands out. At the FTRF reception I had the opportunity to meet Russell Shank. We spoke about my career with Presidential libraries, NARA, and living in D.C. Even though our conversation was less than ten minutes, Mr. Shank showed a genuine interest in my goals and encouraged me to see them through. A few days later his daughter, Sue Shank, informed Candy and I that he passed away. It was a great honor to meet Mr. Shank and gain his advice. His impact is one that I will cherish both professionally and personally. Another highlight of the conference included being a mentee of Candy Morgan. She exemplified what it means to be a mentor. Candy was helpful, caring, considerate, and knowledgeable. I couldn't have asked for a better-rounded individual. Her spunk, tenacity, and passion for intellectual freedom rights are commendable. I look forward to learning more from her in the future.

The meetings and programs I attended solidified some preconceived notions about archival intellectual freedom. First, there is a clear lack of understanding within the archival community that libraries also struggle with privacy, access, and censorship issues. A feedback loop has to be created in order to bridge the great professional divide, and facilitate dialogue. Second, archivists have to become activists. The time to speak up is now. Big problems are on the horizon as repositories transition from analog to digitized and born electronic records. Discussions must occur with the research community, stakeholders, and watchdog organizations about the feasibility of providing access to records via the World Wide Web, and the sustainability of digital preservation. Last but not least, archivists have to do more to promote themselves as change agents and advocates. This can be accomplished by building partnerships with mainstream organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and through research about the trends of archival access.

Since the conference I have contemplated ways to contribute to the FTRF and intellectual freedom as an archivist. I would like to do a collaborative project with Audrey Barbakoff, the 2011 Conable Scholar, to look at the similarities and differences of access to information in archives and libraries in the 21st century and present the findings. Another idea is to approach the Issues and Advocacy Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists about holding a session on the relationship between library and archival censorship. Lastly, I would like to develop an outreach mechanism to expose members of the archival community to FTRF and their important role in information access. I am grateful for the opportunity to receive such a prestigious award and hope I can continue to help promote and advance the legacy of Gordon Conable and FTRF.