

Appendix B: Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights

Although the Articles of the Library Bill of Rights are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries, questions do arise concerning application of these principles to specific library practices.

Following are those documents designated by the Intellectual Freedom Committee as Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights and background statements detailing the philosophy and history of each. For convenience and easy reference, the documents are presented in alphabetical order. These documents are policies of the American Library Association, having been adopted by the ALA Council and can be found at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/statementsif/interpretations/default.cfm>

Access for Children and Young Adults to Non-print Materials

Library collections of non-print materials raise a number of intellectual freedom issues, especially regarding minors. Article V of the Library Bill of Rights states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."

Access to Digital Information, Services, and Networks

Freedom of expression is an inalienable human right and the foundation for self-government. Freedom of expression encompasses the freedom of speech and the corollary right to receive information. Libraries and librarians protect and promote these rights by selecting, producing, providing access to, identifying, retrieving, organizing, providing instruction in the use of, and preserving recorded expression regardless of the format or technology.

Q&A: Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks

Following the initial adoption by the ALA Council of Access to Electronic Information, Services and Networks: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights in January 1996, the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee produced a sample set of questions and answers to clarify the Interpretation's implications and applications.

Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, or Sexual Orientation

The American Library Association stringently and unequivocally maintains that libraries and librarians have an obligation to resist efforts that systematically exclude materials dealing with any subject matter, including sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Challenged Materials

The American Library Association declares as a matter of firm principle that it is the

responsibility of every library to have a clearly defined materials selection policy in written form that reflects the Library Bill of Rights, and that is approved by the appropriate governing authority.

Diversity in Collection Development

Intellectual freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored. Toleration is meaningless without tolerance for what some may consider detestable. Librarians cannot justly permit their own preferences to limit their degree of tolerance in collection development, because freedom is indivisible.

Economic Barriers to Information Access

A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free, equal, and equitable access to information for all people of the community the library serves. While the roles, goals and objectives of publicly supported libraries may differ, they share this common mission.

Evaluating Library Collections

Continuous review of library materials is necessary as a means of maintaining an active library collection of current interest to users. In the process, materials may be added and physically deteriorated or obsolete materials may be replaced or removed in accordance with the collection maintenance policy of a given library and the needs of the community it serves. Continued evaluation is closely related to the goals and responsibilities of all libraries and is a valuable tool of collection development. This procedure is not to be used as a convenient means to remove materials presumed to be controversial or disapproved of by segments of the community.

Exhibit Spaces and Bulletin Boards

Libraries often provide exhibit spaces and bulletin boards. The uses made of these spaces should conform to the Library Bill of Rights: Article I states, "Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." Article II states, "Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." Article VI maintains that exhibit space should be made available "on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use."

Expurgation of Library Materials

Expurgation of Library Materials: Expurgating library materials is a violation of the Library Bill of Rights. Expurgation as defined by this interpretation includes any deletion, excision, alteration, editing, or obliteration of any part(s) of books or other library resources by the library, its agent, or its parent institution (if any).

Free Access to Libraries for Minors

Library policies and procedures that effectively deny minors equal and equitable access to all library resources available to other users violate the Library Bill of Rights. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users.

Importance of Education to Intellectual Freedom

(New as of the 2009 ALA Annual Conference)

Through education programming and instruction in information skills, libraries empower individuals to explore ideas, access, and evaluate information, draw meaning from information presented in a variety of formats, develop valid conclusions, and express new ideas. Such education facilitates intellectual access to information and offers a path to intellectual freedom.

Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries

A strong intellectual freedom perspective is critical to the development of academic library collections and services that dispassionately meet the education and research needs of a college or university community. The purpose of this statement is to outline how and where intellectual freedom principles fit into an academic library setting, thereby raising consciousness of the intellectual freedom context within which academic librarians work.

Labeling and Rating Systems

Libraries do not advocate the ideas found in their collections or in resources accessible through the library. The presence of books and other resources in a library does not indicate endorsement of their contents by the library. Likewise, the ability for library users to access electronic information using library computers does not indicate endorsement or approval of that information by the library.

Minors and Internet Interactivity

(New as of the 2009 ALA Annual Conference)

The digital environment offers opportunities both for accessing information created by others and for creating and sharing new information. The rights of minors to retrieve, interact with, and create information posted on the Internet in schools and libraries are extensions of their First Amendment rights.

Questions and Answers on Labels and Rating Systems

The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee developed this Q&A to work in conjunction with Labels and Rating Systems, adopted July 13, 1951, by the ALA Council; amended June 25, 1971; July 1, 1981; June 26, 1990; January 19, 2005. Like Questions and Answers on Privacy and Confidentiality and Questions and Answers: Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks, this document will be revised as appropriate.

Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource

library-initiated programs support the mission of the library by providing users with additional opportunities for information, education, and recreation.

Meeting Rooms

Many libraries provide meeting rooms for individuals and groups as part of a program of service. Article VI of the Library Bill of Rights states that such facilities should be made available to the public served by the given library "on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use."

Privacy

Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association. See also Questions and Answers on Privacy and Confidentiality.

Questions and Answers on Privacy and Confidentiality

Complements Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Restricted Access to Library Materials

Libraries are a traditional forum for the open exchange of information. Attempts to restrict access to library materials violate the basic tenets of the Library Bill of Rights.

Services to People with Disabilities

(New as of the 2009 Midwinter Meeting in Denver, CO)

ALA recognizes that persons with disabilities are a large and often neglected part of society. In addition to many personal challenges, some persons with disabilities face economic inequity, illiteracy, cultural isolation, and discrimination in education, employment, and the broad range of societal activities. The library plays a catalytic role in their lives by facilitating their full participation in society.

The Universal Right to Free Expression

Freedom of expression is an inalienable human right and the foundation for self-government. Freedom of expression encompasses the freedoms of speech, press, religion, assembly, and association, and the corollary right to receive information.

