

Restricted Access to Library Materials: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

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*.

Some libraries [block access to certain materials by placing barriers between the user and those materials. For example, some libraries] place materials in a “locked case,” “adults only,” “restricted shelf,” or “high-demand” collection. [Some libraries restrict access based on computerized reading management programs that determine a reading level and limit choice to only those materials on the program’s reading list. Some libraries have removed materials from the collection that are not on the reading management program list. Some libraries have applied filtering software to their Internet stations to prevent users from finding targeted categories of information, much of which is constitutionally protected.] ~~Some libraries have applied filtering software to their Internet stations to prevent users from finding targeted categories of information, much of which is constitutionally protected. Some libraries block access to certain materials by placing other barriers between the user and those materials.~~

Because restricted materials often deal with controversial, unusual, or sensitive subjects, having to ask a librarian or circulation clerk for access to them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring the materials. Requiring a user to ask for materials may create a service barrier or pose a language-skills barrier. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. (See also "Labels and Rating Systems.") Because restricted materials often feature information that some people consider objectionable, potential library users may be predisposed to think of the materials as objectionable and, therefore, be reluctant to ask for access to them.

Limiting access by relegating materials into physically or virtually restricted or segregated collections or restricting materials by creating linguistic, economic, psychological, ability, grade, or age related barriers violates the *Library Bill of Rights*. [The chronological age or grade level of users is not representative of their information needs or total reading abilities. If collections are organized by reading level, ability, grade, or age level, users may feel inhibited from selecting resources located in areas that do not correspond to their assigned characteristics.]

However, some libraries have established restrictive policies to protect their materials from theft or mutilation, or because of statutory authority or institutional mandate. Such policies must be carefully formulated and administered to ensure they do not violate established principles of intellectual freedom. This caution is reflected in ALA policies, such as "Evaluating Library Collections," "Free Access to Libraries for Minors," "Preservation Policy," and the ACRL "Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians." In keeping with the "Joint Statement on Access" of the American Library Association and Society of American Archivists, libraries should avoid accepting donor agreements or entering into contracts that impose permanent restrictions on special collections. As stated in the "Joint Statement," it is the responsibility of libraries with such collections, “to make available original research materials in its possession on equal terms of access.”

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[Because of federal and state legislation, some libraries that accept specific types of state and/or federal funding are required to install filters that limit access to Internet resources for minors and adults. Patrons have the right to request that sites be unblocked to allow access to legal information. Procedures must be in place to ensure that patrons may receive information and that filters do not prevent patrons from exercising their First Amendment rights.

A primary goal of the library profession is to facilitate access to all points of view on current and historical issues.] All proposals for restricted-access collections should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that the purpose is not to suppress a viewpoint or to place a barrier between certain patrons and particular content. [Libraries that limit access to physical resources based on subjective rationale fail to serve the diverse needs of their users and violate users' First Amendment right to receive information.] ~~A primary goal of the library profession is to facilitate access to all points of view on current and historical issues.~~

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