



**Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the American Library Association**

**Intellectual Freedom  
Round Table Meetings  
1995 Midwinter Meeting —  
PHILADELPHIA**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4**  
IFRT Bylaws & Organization Comm.  
9:30 pm–11:00 pm  
OMNI-Rm. 112

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5**  
IFRT Immroth Mem. Award Comm.  
8:30 am–11:00 am  
EMB-Tower Conf. Rm.

IFRT Membership Committee  
11:30 am–12:30 am  
MAR-Table 2

IFRT Executive Committee  
2:00 pm–5:30 pm  
MAR-Gr. BR Salon A

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6**  
Eli M. Oboler Mem. Award Comm.  
11:30 am–12:30 pm  
OMNI-Rm. 112

State & Reg. Award Comm.  
11:30 am–12:30 pm  
PCC-302

Membership Promotion Committee  
9:30 am–11:00 am  
WYN-Salon 1

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7**  
IFRT Executive Committee  
11:30 am–12:30 pm  
MAR-Gr. BR Salon D

- EMB.....Embassy Suites
- MAR .....Marriott
- OMNI .....Omni Hotel
- PCC .....Pennsylvania Convention Center
- WYN .....Wyndham Franklin

**Note:** Room assignments may change; refer to your official conference program for possible changes. Award committees may meet in closed session when discussing nominees.

**Who Cares About Intellectual Freedom?**

*Paul Vermouth, Chair*

The last year or so has been a busy one for the adversaries of intellectual freedom, and thus for its advocates. At the beginning of Banned Books Week last fall, the Office for Intellectual Freedom stated that in 1993 it had received nearly 700 reports of challenges to books and other library materials.

Data received by the OIF may be just the tip of an iceberg. Information released during the same week by the Library Research Service in Colorado indicated that in that state alone there were 337 challenges to 88 separate titles in 1993.

The November issue of the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* reported that People for the American Way, in its twelfth annual issue of *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn*, listed 462 challenges during the 1993–1994 school year, including 375 attempts at censorship. Censors were successful in 42% of the cases.

I would argue that in the other 58% of the cases, those challenging materials were successful at something else: they caused a number of busy, hard-working people to be diverted from their daily activities and to devote scarce time and other resources to answering the challenges.

In the midst of the ongoing struggle against censorship, the response of librarians and others nationwide to the ALAOIF intellectual freedom discussion list on the internet is good news. Members of the list have covered a wide range of topics, from very specific titles like Judy Blume's *Forever* to policy issues relating to the net itself. While not every thread or comment is of equal interest to every member, the existence of this forum in cyberspace is a positive sign.

With online access becoming more widespread, the net itself will be the focus of more and more censorship attempts.

As readers of this newsletter are aware, others have been working on policy issues associated with providing access to the net and its varied environment. At Midwinter, the Intellectual Freedom Committee will be holding a hearing on electronic access to information to gather input for drafting an interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*. Try to be there if you can.

Who cares about intellectual freedom? All of those unnamed individuals who helped to answer censorship challenges during the past year. And all who sat in committee meetings, drafted policies, put up banned books displays, participated in formal and informal discussions, or worked in numerous other ways to create a climate supportive of intellectual freedom.

All of us, or we would not have joined the IFRT.

# Electronic Intellectual Freedom

There will be an open hearing, Feb. 6, 2-4pm, at the Midwinter meeting of ALA to discuss creating an Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights* to cover electronic information. It will be interesting to see how broad a definition of "electronic information" comes out of this discussion. As libraries begin to offer Internet access, we confront an environment where anyone can create and publish information, even our customers. And it is in the area of this individual, amateur publishing that electronic information becomes both liberating and scary.

It is difficult to get a handle on specific problems and abuses that need to be addressed because accurate reporting of censorship in the electronic environment is rare. Oh, if you hang around the Internet, you'll soon hear someone's outraged story of being censored or denied access — but that's one side's partisan report of what happened. We lack standards of investigation in this arena where anyone can post accusations and get them spread far and wide. There is already a substantial body of Internet folklore about events that never really happened, and the ease of forwarding electronic communications insures they will resurface and be viewed with alarm by newcomers. Moreover, opinion varies considerably on what constitutes acceptable behavior both for users and system administrators. The Internet and the smaller bulletin boards have evolved customs where acceptable behavior is enforced by peer disapproval and sometimes backed up by access providers. These expectations may be spelled out in Acceptable Use Policies or the equivalent, but the geometric expansion of users and services keeps policy creation trailing behind.

Access to information is what libraries are all about. The *Library Bill of Rights Interpretation Regulations, Policies, and Procedures Affecting Access to Library Resources and Services* says "Publicly supported libraries provide access to information for all without imposing barriers which limit or prevent library users, including the indigent or the economically disadvantaged, from exercising their full constitu-

tional rights." The question which the many-to-many communication possibilities of electronic information raises is, did we mean "read only" access when we wrote that. If not, libraries will confront all the issues faced by other providers of Internet and bulletin board access. Our Acceptable Use Policies must conform to the *Library Bill of Rights*, while ensuring that those who use us for access do not so offend the rest of the electronic community that all our users are cut off from sources of information. We will be dealing with complaints from individuals, email lists, and newsgroups about abusive posts from our users and complaints from our users that groups refused to carry their messages. We will be asked to investigate the activities of users or deny them access to their accounts.

Even if we choose a "read only" interpretation of access, we will still be working with a medium where anyone can publish and where yesterday's content is no guarantee of today's. Some institutions recognize this by simply posting a disclaimer that electronic information is too volatile for traditional library selection, so use it at your own risk. Others try to create a sanitized annex by limiting what gets in and how users can get out. Typical of this is refusal to carry "alt" newsgroups since "alt" is the home of many of the sex discussion groups that seem to be all the news media can find on the Internet. Since formation of "alt" groups is more casual than the regular USENET process, this could be used as a selection criterion. But that would deny access to groups like alt.aquaria, alt.censorship, and alt.quotations, which would be valuable to library customers.

As libraries choose which tools will be available to access electronic archives, paths to specific hosts can be made easier or harder to find. In some ways this is like cataloging, and we've never written an interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights* that specifically says cataloging must enhance access, not impede it, though that is implied throughout the *Library Bill of Rights* and its interpretations. Nevertheless, the interconnectedness of electronic

information makes it virtually impossible to eliminate paths leading to anything available, at least for the sophisticated user. Of course, a library might choose to be a host site for specific archives it has selected, either in addition to or instead of allowing users to range freely across gopher or World Wide Web. But the virtue of electronic information is its immediacy, and that means a constant influx of new material. Collection development for electronic archives must begin with a decision about what is the basic unit of information — each file and email message or the archive as a whole. While host sites often add a "read me" file indicating the scope and purpose of an archive, these are rarely as thorough as a library collection policy, so confrontations arise when gifts of electronic files are rejected. This is one of the many areas where the *Library Bill of Rights* has much to offer the rest of the electronic information community.

Access by minors is the the hottest area of concern about electronic information and here the library community must deal with interpretations that were written for an environment where we had a lot more control over selection. While *Free Access to Libraries for Minors* has obvious implications for electronic information, *Access for Children and Young People to Videotapes and other Nonprint Formats* will become more important as the World Wide Web links us to archives with sound and pictures. We also need to recognize that for the next decade our most skilled users of electronic information may also be our youngest users.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation is fond of saying that on the Internet the First Amendment is just a local ordinance. Fortunately, in *The Universal Right to Free Expression* ALA endorsed articles 18, 19, and 20 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which gives us a basis for handling international and intercultural issues. But, electronic information will remind us that, diverse as the U.S. is, the globe is even more so. And, that raises the question of who are our customers, once we join the community of electronic information. What do community standards mean when anyone can gopher to your library?

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## Librarians, Ethics, and Censorship

One of the advantages of being on the Internet is the thought-provoking, not to say sometimes infuriating, discussions that arise. On our own ALA/OIF listserv, a current topic concerns professional ethics and censorship.

A law professor from California proposed a hypothetical question about the ethics of a librarian who removes some books from the library after being ordered to do so by her City Council. The law prof. states that it is not unethical because the council — her boss and collective representative of the taxpayers — had a right to order the elimination of parts of the collection.

Of course, this is not hypothetical; the incident of *Private Parts* and the library director who lost her job comes to mind. People from all over the country have responded. The First Amendment has been mentioned. A librarian's duty to maintain a collection with many points of view has been another familiar theme. Any of the people reading this article could repeat the arguments which we all have used forever.

The part of the whole discussion that is distressing is that we still have to make these points to members of the public who one would expect to be more enlightened. But even worse, we are reminded again of the terrible vulnerability of libraries to any official with a budget-cutting or thought-control zeal. Especially in the new national political picture, we must remember to reach out to find allies and supporters in our communities or our institutions and we who work in them will go under.

The most effective form of censorship is through the budget. The hopeful conclusion from the electronic chat is that so many of our colleagues recognize the importance of resistance. Our job is clearly to make sure the public understands and agrees.

— *Fay Golden*,  
Director,  
Liverpool Public Library,  
Liverpool, NY

## You Want to Display What!!!

We had an interesting time in my area this fall. A number of public libraries were asked to exhibit displays for "Reverence for Life" month (October). For the most part, the displays were described as focusing on child development and a celebration of life. In fact, the display that was actually offered to libraries in the area carried a strong anti-abortion message.

Libraries responded in a variety of ways. Some carried the displays and hoped no one would object. At least one neighbor library had several angry Board meetings with pro-choice residents demanding equal time. And some libraries refused to carry the display citing policies forbidding political or religious materials.

In August I informed the Board of the Downers Grove Public Library that we had received a request to exhibit a "Reverence for Life" display. I also reported that the request complied with our policy of exhibiting displays recognizing the activities of local organizations — although in the past this had meant a garden club display promoting composting. This was reported in the local press coverage of the Board meeting. We were immediately contacted by residents who wanted to sponsor a display on other choices available to women.

In October, the Library's 30 foot wide display window featured three displays: a "Reverence for Life" display, an "Options for Women" display, and a display of library materials on issues ranging from AIDS to animal rights. The "Issues" display included the following quote from Thomas Mann. "It is impossible for ideas to compete in the marketplace if no forum for their presentation is provided or available."

Downers Grove came out of this experience very well. We received a number of thank you letters for one or the other display, as well as comments from residents who simply expressed support for the way the whole issue was handled. And the few patrons who came in to complain about one of the displays were satisfied when they were shown the alternative display right next to it.

Of course we are wondering "What's next?"

It may be time for libraries to take another look at their display policies. Are you prepared to deal with a request to exhibit a display that is potentially controversial — we weren't. For example, have you defined "political?" Does it refer to a referendum issue, or do you really just mean a "hot topic?" — and who decides? It would be interesting to hear how your library responds (or would respond) to a similar situation. Why not send a short comment to this publication.

— *Christopher Bowen*, Director, Downers Grove (IL) Public Library

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### *Electronic Intellectual Freedom continued*

The ALAOIF listserv recently discussed whether it was necessary to respond to a challenge from someone outside the taxpayer base of the library. As library catalogs become accessible over the Internet, such challenges may well increase.

In the face of all these concerns it may seem simplest to withdraw from the fray and stay away from electronic information, but that is the one choice we don't have.

We can use the *Library Bill of Rights* to set a standard for access to electronic information or we can compromise our principles with the excuse that electronic information is too different for the old rules to apply. What we can't do is make electronic information disappear. We can only make libraries disappear by clinging to the past.

— *Carolyn Caywood*,  
Bayside Area Library  
Virginia Beach, VA

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The *IFRT Report* is an irregular publication of the Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the American Library Association and is sent to members of the Round Table. Membership information and/or correspondence about your subscription should be addressed to IFRT, Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611. The current editor of the *IFRT Report* is Sue Kamm, Inglewood Public Library, 101 W. Manchester Blvd., Inglewood, CA 90301, e-mail:inglewod@class.org. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

# Editorial: Librarians, Children, and the Internet

Among the many issues facing librarians in 1995 are those relating to the Internet. Who should have access? How can libraries provide it? What services should libraries offer?

A number of questions have been raised, particularly with permitting children to participate in the 'net. To many of us, these questions relate to the library's role in establishing a relationship with children. Current interpretations of the *Library Bill of Rights* affirm that it is parents — and *only* parents — who can determine what their children — and only *their* children—may use in the library. Therefore, librarians dealing with parents concerned about their children's use of the 'net (as well as other library resources) encourage those parents to visit the library with their children and supervise their use of its services and materials.

There is a privacy issue, too. Does a child's right to privacy interfere with parental control over his or her behavior? Many librarians are in

conflict about whether they should tell a parent whose child has received an overdue notice or bill exactly what the child has checked out, let alone what electronic resources that child may be using.

Some librarians and parents are concerned with children's access to newsgroups, particularly those dealing with explicit sexual language. Others fear that pedophiles may gain access to children through electronic media. Some libraries offering public access to the 'net may choose to block access to newsgroups such as alt.sex to "protect" children from sexually explicit material.

It is important for librarians offering (or contemplating offering) public access to the Internet to treat this new medium as they do any other resource in libraries. Not so long ago, videos, cassette tapes, and compact discs were new media. Librarians developed selection policies, based on their community's

needs, to choose appropriate titles for their collections. While there are some aspects of the 'net that do not lend themselves to positive or negative selection, libraries can choose what services they will offer and how.

This topic will be a hot one, not only at Midwinter but at Annual Conference as well. IFRT Chair Paul Vermouth has planned a program dealing with intellectual freedom and the Internet which people coming to Chicago will want to attend. Meanwhile, if you have views on the intellectual freedom issues relating to the 'net (or on any other First Amendment topic), feel free to write or e-mail the editor, whose addresses are shown below.

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