

Why is academic freedom so important?

Insights from academic librarians



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Summary

As book bans and censorship escalate across the United States, safeguarding academic freedom is becoming increasingly crucial. Sage believes **free expression in all forms is a basic human right** and that librarians are crucial arbiters of knowledge.

We asked nine academic librarian thought leaders to address how they navigate current challenges through a series of questions:

- Why is academic freedom so important?
- How do you think book bans and other forms of censorship in higher education and books will impact the future of research, scholarship, and learning?
- How will it impact librarians more specifically?
- What do you want your colleagues in higher ed to know and what can they do to help?

We collected these answers in 2024

Read the responses from a diverse group of library faculty from across the US as they call on their coworkers, colleagues, and the public, to protect the freedom to read and learn.

The chilling impact of censorship in higher education

By **Laura Saunders**, professor and associate dean, Simmons University, School of Library and Information Science



Perhaps because college students are generally considered adults, and college and university campuses and classrooms have long been viewed as places to engage with and debate ideas, these campuses historically have been somewhat insulated from censorship challenges compared to other settings.

Recently, however, concerns over censorship have extended into higher education. While censorship in school and public libraries often takes the form of challenges to specific materials and programs, the approach on college and university campuses is more broadly focused on attempts to restrict intellectual and academic freedom.

One of the biggest concerns is that higher education is not being targeted by individual, or even coordinated, challenges to specific programs and materials. Instead, these challenges are taking the form of legislation that attempts to limit curricular content, especially related to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, including materials and programming related in any way to LGBTQIA+ communities, or related to what is often mistakenly labeled critical race theory. PEN America found that 29 of the 110 censorship bills proposed in 2023 targeted higher education specifically, and 17 attempted to restrict campuses' ability to carry out equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives, among

other things. Some of these bills include criminal penalties. If passed, these laws could severely impact a faculty member's ability to teach and conduct research, by limiting the kinds of materials they could assign in classes, the kinds of research questions they could ask or topics they could investigate, and even the kinds of discussions they could have with students.

But even when these proposed bills do not pass, and so far few of them have, they likely have a chilling effect, discouraging faculty from engaging with these contested topics. In fact, PEN America notes that these proposed bills **"have created an atmosphere of profound fear and anxiety for both public school educators and higher ed faculty."** Ithaka S+R found that the current political landscape impacts collection-building in academic libraries, that campuses are dismantling or re-envisioning EDI programs, and **"employees are scared, which is impacting the workplace."** That many of these bills are vaguely worded only exacerbates the problem.

While the situation is concerning, there are some steps faculty and staff can take to help:

- Everyone should try to keep abreast of the issues. Organizations like **Freedom to Read Foundation, Every Library** and **PEN America** can be helpful.
- Each campus should have clear, written policies related to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, and other relevant areas such as library collection development, campus protests, and so on.
- Institutions should avoid being bullied into self-censoring by over-interpreting laws or by restricting practices that are not explicitly addressed by law out of fear of being challenged. **As Jeremy C. Young and Jonathan Friedman wrote in *Liberal Education***, “Don’t do the censors’ work for them.”
- If appropriate, **institutions could issue public statements in defense of academic and intellectual freedom** and individual faculty and staff could write or speak about the topic.

- As appropriate, **individual faculty and staff could reach out to legislators to advocate for academic and intellectual freedom and against bills that restrict education**. However, depending on their individual institution and employment status, such actions might be seen as lobbying and constitute a conflict of interest for some faculty and staff. These individuals could still advocate within their institutions to be sure stakeholders are aware of the issues.

Finally, we should find and connect with allies. Allies in our institutions’ administration or our states’ legislatures as well as other stakeholders can help increase the impact of our messages and advocacy. But also, having allies among our colleagues can be a source of much-needed professional and emotional support when we are faced with these kinds of challenges.



**Don’t
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Laura Saunders is a professor at Simmons University School of Library and Information Science. She teaches and conducts research in the areas of user services, information literacy, and intellectual freedom. She has a strong interest in the connections between information literacy and social justice issues, as well as in the impact of mis- and disinformation.

She is the co-author, along with Melissa Wong, of the open access textbook ***Instruction in Libraries and Information Settings: An Introduction***. Laura has a PhD and a Master of Library and Information Science, both from Simmons College, and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Boston University. She is the 2019 recipient of Simmons University’s Provost Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching.



Academic freedom and censorship: Why librarians are better together

By **Janelle Zetty**, head of cataloging, Edith
Garland Dupré Library, University of Louisiana
at Lafayette

In 2023, the American Library Association documented 1,247 censorship cases with known locations. Of these cases, 2 percent occurred in academic libraries, 54 percent in public libraries, and 39 percent in school libraries. Although academic libraries face fewer censorship challenges, threats to academic freedom coincide with book challenges and bans in public and school libraries.

For example, legislators introduced seven library bills during Louisiana's 2024 regular legislative session. One of these bills, recently signed into law, removed the Master of Library and Information Science requirement for Louisiana library directors and allowed directors to have any graduate degree. The bill's author, Representative Josh Carlson, claimed there is a lack of MLIS degree holders to fill the director's position in his district's public library system. At Carlson's committee hearing for his bill, he stated that he had experience with the process of hiring a library director from his time as a former Lafayette Parish councilman. Carlson stated, "...[w]hat I've noticed is that when we have this come up, the current requirement to be a director of a library, you have to have a master's in library sciences. The problem I noticed is that so few people were actually receiving that master's degree that we were excluding who I would consider highly qualified people simply because of their degree requirements."

However, statistics from the 2023 academic year show that 6,906 library science degrees were awarded by universities across the United States, and Louisiana State University School of Information Studies granted 243 degrees during the 2022-23 school year. Carlson maintained he merely wanted to increase the applicant pool. It is important to note that the public library system in question has been gripped by controversy and legal battles and has lost three directors due to resignations and attempted illegal firing over the past several years.

Another bill, which did not pass committee, aimed to prohibit public employees from spending public funds with the American Library Association. Violators would have faced fines of up to \$1,000 or two years in jail. Critics of the ALA claimed that the organization is anti-American and Marxist and aims to expose children to sexually explicit materials, allegations arising from far-right groups. Passing the bill would have been

detrimental to Louisiana State University's School of Information Studies, the only ALA-accredited library school in the state. In this case, a bill presumably written to target public and school librarians would have affected academia and the profession as a whole.

Additionally, a bill excluding acts of civil disobedience from free speech protections on college campuses recently became law. The senator who introduced the bill also filed library-related bills during the previous legislative session. As Michael C. Dreiling and Pedro García-Caro, editors of the *Journal of Academic Freedom* have said, "Authoritarian societies across the world have historically demonstrated how censorship and closely watched political control of education play out." Academic freedom – freedom to research and publish in one's discipline, select course material and content, and publicly express oneself – is essential to a democratic society.

Academic librarians should defend our profession and academic freedom and support public and school librarians.



Authoritarian societies across the world have historically demonstrated how censorship and closely watched political control of education play out.

We can do this by educating stakeholders about our profession, becoming active in professional organizations, and researching and publishing articles about the current political trends in libraries to increase awareness and evolve our profession. Additionally, we can attend public library board meetings to show support for our colleagues. When our profession is devalued, it impacts us all.

Janelle Zetty is the head of cataloging at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She graduated with a B.A. in English and a minor in History from UL Lafayette in 2003. She earned her Master's Degree in Library and Information Science from Louisiana State University in 2008.

Janelle has been a cataloger with experience in public and academic libraries for 16 years. Her forthcoming journal article, "History of Library and School Material Challenges and Banning in Louisiana," will be published in *Louisiana Libraries*.

Advocating for and supporting academic freedom

By **Joanie Chavis**, department head for research, instructional and engagement services, associate professor at North Carolina A&T State University



Libraries are considered safe places, secure places to read and meet diverse (but sometimes like-minded) people who celebrate literacy by expanding different viewpoints on learning and the scholarship of research. Readers may be more apt to read when they see stories of themselves or books that share the same looks, backgrounds, or experiences, which gives readers of different backgrounds opportunities for a richer understanding of the world that we live in.

Censorship puts these ideals out of reach. Librarians serving in higher education institutions believe that censorship affects academic freedom, which allows for debate and argument, and leads to dynamic discussions and valuable dialogue. This gives thought to more robust teaching and learning instead of hindering the advancement of knowledge of world views and diverse communities. Academic freedom allows those from higher education institutions to press on, immersing those they serve in intellectual pursuits without fear of censorship, retaliation, or of losing their livelihoods.

Academic librarians in higher education institutions, like their peers, play a pivotal role in providing access to a wide range of data, facts, and resources. Their professional ethics bind them to fostering critical thinking and promoting diverse and creative thought, which is essential to a comprehensive universal education. Their commitment to promoting

diversity in literature is a testament to their professional dedication and the value they bring to the academic community.

As academic librarians, we are deeply committed to the values outlined in [The American Library Association Code of Ethics](#). This code embodies the ethical responsibilities of our profession in the ever-evolving information environment. It guides our actions and decisions, ensuring that we uphold the highest standards of professional conduct and service to our communities. We do not believe that there should be limits to academic integrity and intellectual freedom.

While some people believe in banning books they see as unsuitable for specific audiences, librarians believe it's their responsibility to teach how to be responsible stewards – and not gatekeepers – in the academic realm. Diverse authors bring different perspectives from other cultures, backgrounds, and



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identities, and by banning their works we miss creating a more inclusive and equitable society in which we all win; a greater understanding of ideas, traditions, and ways of thinking fosters a more open-minded approach to life.

To my colleagues in academic institutions, I know you are doing everything you can based on the code of ethics we are charged to follow. We are responsible for standing up against censorship and continuing to teach those who are for banning books that empathy and inclusion support us all.

As academic librarians and in higher education, we should stay abreast of our understanding and education concerning censorship, academic freedom, and book banning. We must join in arms with our colleagues and librarianship peers to provide any required support. As academic librarians, it may be easier for us to hold discussion forums with the public and teach these ideals and what it means to support academic freedom in classes to students and those in our communities. We should continue to write articles for the general population for better understanding or raise or secure funding to continue supporting those still oppressed and fighting the good fight against censorship in any way we can. These acts will continue to break down stereotypes and biases to promote a more inclusive worldview that supports all of us.

Joanie Douglas Chavis earned her Master's in Library and Information Science from the School of Library and Information Science at Louisiana State University after receiving a degree in Economics from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCAT). With a career spanning more than two decades, she has held various academic roles, including serving as an academic dean at a community college, contributing to areas such as leadership, online learning, student success, faculty instruction, and university accreditation.

Currently, she holds the position of department head for research, instructional and engagement services and is an associate professor at NCAT. Her research interests include leadership studies, student success and access, retention and transfer, and mentorship and succession planning for African-American women in library leadership.



Book bans and censorship are a threat to our universities. Librarians can help.

By **Dr. Christopher Shaffer**, dean of university libraries at Troy University

When I think about book bans, I consider the subject through a variety of lenses. I have taught English in a post-communist country, Slovakia. I have also been a history teacher. For the past 19 years I have been an academic librarian, 18 of them as an administrator.

My concern over book bans is about not only the books that are being censored, but also related to government overreach. Democratic governments should not tell their citizens what they must do or think. My concerns increase dramatically when extended to universities where the concepts of having freedom of thought and freedom of expression to explore a variety of ideas is fundamental to our mission.

When governments attempt to insert themselves into our daily lives and control our thoughts and belief systems, odd perversions can occur. In Slovakia, the textbook one of my colleagues was directed to teach from was published in the mid-1980s and was filled with pro-communist propaganda. One dictation that students were directed to recite concerned May Day celebrations in the U.S. and described how millions of Americans took to the streets annually to protest lack of work, unfair pay, and a variety of other untruths. He found a different textbook to use for his classes.

As a history teacher, I taught about the book burnings undertaken by the Nazis during the World War II era. The Nazis, of course, did not stop with just books. Modern art was viewed as degenerate and cultural organizations were frequently banned and replaced with state-sponsored Nazi associations. While visiting Germany on a fellowship, I was able to see the book burning memorial and sunken library at Bebelplatz in Berlin, which provides a visual reminder of the damage that authoritarian governments can do when they try to control the minds of their citizens.

As a librarian, I believe that the best way to deal with the current climate is through an open dialog with our campus communities. Over the past two decades my library has hosted dozens of programs on a wide variety of topics in which we hope to expose students and faculty to ideas and concepts that they might not have been particularly familiar with. It is important to me, though, that these events not be confrontational in any way. No one responds well to attempts to bully them

into a different point of view. However, if a topic is presented in a calm, rational way that shows another group's perspective, there is a much greater chance that someone with an opposing viewpoint might develop a degree of empathy.

Librarians are truly under fire at this moment in our history. However, we also have a tremendous opportunity to be the protectors of books and the guardians of knowledge and diversity of thought. We can do this through creative programming that consistently promotes a wide variety of ideas. At my library, we host a very active Banned Books Week, with different events each day that promote the freedom to read. Librarians should engage with university administrators through various committees that they are on, as well as with the university's government relations



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office. Finally, librarians, through state and national organizations such as the American Library Association, can become involved in legislative affairs through intellectual freedom committees and advocate for the concepts of freedom to read and freedom of expression to our legislators. All of these suggestions will take a thick skin, diplomatic skills, and a great deal of patience and understanding, but they are well worth pursuing.

A senior level library administrator with over 30 years of experience in education and considerable international experience, **Christopher Shaffer** is dean of Troy University Libraries. Prior to entering the library field, Shaffer spent 8 years as a history teacher in Georgia and one year teaching English as a second language in Slovakia. He received his MLIS from the University of Alabama in 2005 and his Ed.D in Educational Leadership, Policy, and Law from Alabama State University in 2014.

He has been published in several peer-reviewed journals, has considerable experience writing and implementing grants, and has presented nationally. In 2015 the Carnegie Corporation, American Library Association, *New York Times*, and the New York Public Library presented him the I Love My Librarian Award for his work in public outreach. Shaffer's memoir, *Moon over Sasova*, about his experiences teaching English in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia in 1993 was published in November 2021. In 2022, he received the Outstanding Southeastern Author Award for Nonfiction from the Southeastern Library Association.

The ripple effect of book bans on the academy

By **Alex Flores Glosson**, instruction and research librarian, William & Mary Libraries



It's not news to those in library-land that book bans and censorship in higher education have serious implications for the future of research, scholarship, and learning. We know that students and scholars need access to a wide range of perspectives for a comprehensive education, and bans restrict this, leading to a less critical and engaged academic environment, full stop.

For librarians, censorship directly impacts our ability to provide access to information (which is our whole job). It challenges our professional ethics and can lead to self-censorship, where we might avoid certain materials to deter conflicts, thus limiting resources for our users. This can be demoralizing and may dissuade people from pursuing careers in librarianship, which weakens our profession. (Lots of other things weaken our profession, too, but I'll stand on one soapbox at a time.)

Our colleagues in school libraries and public libraries have been battling book bans and censorship for years and have developed effective strategies to counter these challenges. **As book bans in public libraries continue to increase -- the American Library Association (ALA) reports a 92 percent rise in requests to ban books in 2023** – they have organized community outreach programs, engaged in advocacy efforts (**Unite Against Book Bans**), and have been called to continuously defend intellectual freedom (**shout out to Lisa**

Varga and my library colleagues across the Commonwealth of Virginia). While these numbers only reflect the cases reported to the ALA, they underscore a troubling trend – regardless of the type of library, no one is immune to the wave of censorship that has surged since 2021.

While academic librarians have also been fighting the good fight, I think it's disingenuous to pretend that I, as an academic librarian, know the breadth and depth of these challenges better than public or school librarians do. They have been on the front lines of this battle for a long time and have much to teach us. However, I do have some ideas to throw around (none of which are entirely new or revolutionary) – we must develop and enforce clear policies that protect academic freedom and ensure diverse collections in our libraries. A more practical step would be for institutions to provide support and training for librarians, library staff, and faculty to handle challenges to intellectual freedom effectively

(including about how to deal with it when the call is coming from inside the house – know what I mean?). Collaboration between the different parts of librarianship (academic, public, school, and special) can also strengthen our efforts as we can share resources, strategies, and support networks.

Additionally, strictly from the academy standpoint, faculty can incorporate diverse materials into their curriculum which encourages students to explore a broad range of perspectives. Publishers and vendors can ensure their diverse materials are affordable and accessible. Campus administrators can support these efforts by allocating funds for robust, diverse collections and ensuring collection development policies are in place to not only protect against censorship but to protect their staff as well ([with things like Project 2025](#) hanging over those of us in the US, this second bit seems more and more important). Students can get involved by participating in library advocacy groups and supporting intellectual freedom initiatives on campus.



Collaboration between the different parts of librarianship (academic, public, school, and special) can also strengthen our efforts, as we can share resources, strategies, and support networks.

Librarians and library staff are crucial in this fight, and we need the active support of the entire academic community to ensure libraries remain places where knowledge and ideas can flourish. By learning from our colleagues and working together, we can protect intellectual freedom and support an environment where not only scholars but also librarians and library staff can thrive.

Alex Flores Glosson is an instruction and research librarian at William & Mary Libraries and serves as the library liaison to the Psychology, Anthropology, and Biology departments.

Her research interests include the role of librarians in the university classroom, with a focus on incorporating critical perspectives in librarianship and enhancing equity among the student experience. What she loves most about being a librarian is the opportunity to empower students through the research process.



The coconut grove: Academic freedom and responsibility to the communities we live in

By **Carrie Hill**, digital scholarship librarian,
Auburn University Libraries

The January 2023 minutes of my local public library board's monthly meeting summarize in two sentences one woman's 45-minute tirade of complaints and calls for the removal of books that feature or relate to members of the LGBTQ+ community. Before that meeting, the library had never needed to limit how long a community member could have the floor during citizens' communications, but clearly, the time had come to set some boundaries.

Across the state where I live, public libraries have scrambled in the last two years to create or strengthen policies around responding to book challenges. Libraries that have never faced issues like this are now receiving requests for multiple books to be removed or relocated – sometimes without regard for whether the library even has the book in their collection.

Data from the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom reflect the meteoric rise in book challenges behind anecdotes like these. Between the years 2000 and 2020, the average number of unique titles targeted for censorship per year was 273. The last three years of documented challenges far surpass that: 1,858 unique titles challenged in 2021, 2,571 challenged in 2022, and 4,420 in 2023.

Still, with only 2 percent of documented challenges originating in higher education, you might be wondering what this has to do with

academic librarianship. To that I say, "You think you just fell out of a coconut tree? You exist in the context of all in which you live!" Although college and university libraries are least directly impacted by book challenges, we are in no way immune to their effects in the broader context of how they impact our communities.

We all know that a library is far more than its collection. Every library process – every reference interview, every interlibrary loan request, every instruction session—requires the work of library faculty and staff who form the backbone of our institutions. **A recent Ithaka research report** found that "library directors in certain states feel it has become more difficult to recruit and retain top talent, especially when prospective employees or their family members are LGBTQ+."

When news of book challenges in your community reaches potential employees, it may be the headline that shows them their

family won't be welcome there. In recruiting talent, we have to convince potential employees to believe in not just our college or university, but in the town they will live in if they accept a job offer. The same is true once a person has joined a library's workforce. Can anyone reasonably expect people to be happy living and working in a town, city, or state that's passing laws that limit their right to exist in the public sphere?

It's easy to be bogged down in the news we see every day of censorship challenges on the rise across our nation. Rather than letting it overwhelm you, I challenge you to see the power you have as a member of your community. Become an engaged citizen at a local level. Academic freedom protects not just your ability to choose what you teach and research, but also **your ability to speak freely as a citizen.**

Calls for inclusivity that come from national organizations are often seen as attacks from outsiders demanding that communities change their values, and the public and school librarians in your area are more likely to be barred from speaking publicly about the challenges presented where they work. In our local communities, we have not only the opportunity, but also the responsibility to speak up – if not for ourselves, then for our friends, coworkers, family members, and neighbors.

So go to library board meetings, and speak to your city council – not as an expert in your field of research, but as a local person who wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in the community they call home.



Academic freedom protects not just your ability to choose what you teach and research, but also your ability to speak freely as a citizen.

Carrie Hill works as the digital scholarship librarian at Auburn University Libraries, where she supports the digital research projects of faculty and students from departments that do not traditionally have high levels of technical support and training and leads student engagement in the library Makerspace.

She graduated with an M.S. in Information Science from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before returning to Auburn, her undergraduate alma mater. Her personal research focuses on digital project metadata, linked open data, and fandom studies. She's actively involved in advocating against censorship and book banning at the state and local levels, which she considers a necessary and important task for academic librarians in our current political atmosphere.

Exploring censorship through the lens of student protest and advocacy

By **Etana Laing**, library associate, Thurgood Marshall Library, Bowie State University



When considering how to approach censorship and book bans in relation to higher education, my mind went first to feeling that it is a minor issue in comparison to the onslaught of attacks on public and K-12 libraries. As I sat in/with this assertion, I was suddenly struck by images of encampments, Black Lives Matter protests, sit-ins, and student strikes of the '60s and '70s. With public and school libraries at the forefront of current conversation around intellectual freedom, the role of universities in this fight became muddled in my mind.

I begin by sharing my thought process as it serves as a useful grounding in how we, as academic librarians, find our footing in an increasingly restrictive intellectual country. I also think it is important to note that there is privilege in not immediately seeing universities as sites of attack (here, thinking about the cushion of living in a blue state). Holding space for these thoughts, I will now broach the questions: *What are your concerns related to book bans and censorship in higher education and for librarianship? Why is academic freedom so important?*

Each concern around book bans and censorship can, and should, be flipped into a call to action.

My initial blunder in failing to locate college campuses in the continuous struggle for intellectual freedom highlighted an opportunity to showcase the work of current and previous

generations. The resistance efforts mentioned at the beginning of this blog post can and should serve as beacons of hope. To make plain the connection between intellectual freedom and the university, I offer a broadened idea of what banned book displays can include. While it is important to purchase and showcase challenged and banned books, space can also be made to include books and articles that speak to the history (and ongoing work) of advocacy and resistance. Doing so shifts the needle to a place of agency and is a reminder that there is a legacy of speaking truth in the face of censorship attempts.

While I was wrong in failing to locate universities in the current book banning climate, it also highlighted that the fight has not reached us as intensely – yet. This thought illuminated the possibilities in preparing for challenges if and when they come, or battering

down the hatches, so to speak. Several ideas come to mind on how this can be done: connecting with local public libraries to gauge the severity of attacks on intellectual freedom in our areas, expanding retention policies to include books/e-resources containing targeted material, and purchasing banned or challenged materials (as budgets allow) to combat the chilling effects of censorship.

My largest concern does not have an immediate flip to action. Instead, I raise it as a question for the reader...how will we resist the efforts to censor databases with journals that discuss intersections of LGBTQIA+ and Black and Brown folks? The nature of databases does not easily allow the individual deselection of materials and could lead to disastrous domino effects in what academic resources can be available to the campus. As we sit in a space of more protection than our colleagues in public/K-12 libraries, I propose that we collectively decide what that call to action can look like.



The nature of databases does not easily allow the individual deselection of materials and could lead to disastrous domino effects in what academic resources can be available to the campus.

Etana Laing is an MLIS student at the University of Maryland-College Park and an acquisitions library associate at Bowie State University. She hosts a book club for Black women, femmes, and people with lived experience of misogynoir called Revolutionary Reads.

Her work is rooted in the belief that white supremacist hegemony must be actively named and resisted in all spaces she enters. The fight against censorship is one such avenue to carry out this task.



The academic librarian's crusade against censorship

By **Amanda Bosch**, director of digital pedagogy and scholarship, Catawba College

As an academic librarian in a small, private liberal arts college, I find myself at a crossroads of knowledge and censorship. I am often kept awake at night contemplating the book bans that threaten to eclipse our intellectual horizons. At my institution academic freedom is not just a buzzword but our lifeblood that we champion, but I can see other institutions – whether they be public schools, community libraries or public university and community college libraries – that are bearing the brunt of attacks on their collections, online resources and the very policies and workflows that allow the community to voice concerns over library materials.

Having academic freedom allows both students and faculty to build upon current scholarship wherever it may lead, possibly challenging long-held beliefs or ideals. Students and faculty can venture beyond the familiar, challenge convictions, and explore new intellectual territories. Having the space and freedom to review resources, discover thoughts and ideas from others, evaluate the validity of source materials, and refine critical thinking skills is a foundational component of a well-rounded education. Reactive responses are not helpful – we must have proactive strategies. A well-rounded collection, crafted with care by academic librarians, is critical.

Many of our students may not have used their local library and increasingly have not had the experience of having a library media

center in their K-12 school, especially as more and more schools face budget cuts and have to make devastating decisions which limit access to both library materials and to the expertise of a library educator who can empower students to find, evaluate, and use information effectively. For these reasons, our college library resources and collections are the one place on campus where every patron has equal access to print books, electronic database resources, and emerging technology and digital tools. This carefully curated collection is a mosaic of diverse voices – a collection of wide-ranging ideas.

“A truly great library contains something in it to offend everyone.” This quote, though it may be provocative, has been attributed to librarian Jo Godwin and is one of my

favorites. As libraries are responding to book challenges as well as attacks on the very structures in place to handle those material challenges, it becomes critical for academic libraries to continue to fight censorship and build diverse and engaging collections to support and affirm all people. Libraries are a bridge between ignorance and enlightenment, empowering our community to obtain greater knowledge.

Fellow academics, rally and support academic freedom and library initiatives! Use and promote library resources. Bring students to the library for classes and encourage them to use a wide variety of library resources. Challenge students to read banned books that may relate to your content area and discuss them. Foster self-directed learners, champions of empathy and seekers of truth. So, let the books clash, the ideas collide, and the minds expand.



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As director of digital pedagogy and scholarship for her institution, **Amanda Bosch** specializes in merging traditional educational approaches with cutting-edge digital technologies, pedagogical methods, and scholarly endeavors. Amanda's role encompasses spearheading initiatives to seamlessly integrate digital tools, resources, and methodologies across our academic landscape, supporting both faculty and students in their scholarly pursuits.

As a former high school English teacher and school media specialist in K-12 education, Amanda made the transition to working in academic libraries and has served in a variety of roles including curriculum materials center director in the School of Education and Digital Pedagogy and Scholarship librarian. In addition to her K-12 licensure areas in Secondary English and K-12 School Media, Amanda also holds state certification in Public Librarianship and serves as a substitute reference librarian in her local public library which allows her to continue her librarian service across the community.

Censorship in higher education: A censored academic librarian's perspective

By **Sara Hack**, reference and instruction librarian,
St. Petersburg College



Most of the book bans and major censorship issues occur in K-12 education, so I do not believe that research in higher education will be affected due to this type of modern censorship – yet. But it's heading down that road. Most forms of censorship in higher education seem to come from implanting certain singular personal beliefs and perspectives in people in positions of power within the institutions and silencing those who are trying to speak out about some type of worldly injustice. I don't think that's anything new – it's just happening more aggressively lately and due to our social media systems, we are seeing examples more frequently. This is a worldwide issue.

In this age, people only take a stance on issues when they become viral. When that stance becomes radical, people feel the need to censor something. With that being said, I think higher education (especially at the graduate level) gets to worry less about facing these issues personally on a literary level. Journals aren't leisure reading for typical censorship groups – they are mainly read by people in that field, and even then, it's quite rare (but not impossible) to withhold an article from being published because the perspective is not liked even if it is backed by facts. It will be open to criticism and another piece will come out with a rebuttal, or the journal will write a disclaimer, all of which we have accepted as part of the research experience. "Show me your perspective, back it up with credible

information, and see if you can change my mind." I think that's freeing, and if the editors of the journal want some circulation, they may add it in for the "spice."

Granted, censorship still exists, but in higher education there is a smaller population of people to deal with and the discussions typically happen at conferences, symposiums, or the like. It's less in our face compared to earlier education, and as lifelong learners, these people tend to be more open minded to conversations. Institutions may censor a person or group of people from speaking, protesting, trying to publish something, etc. – but it will start a long and hard battle, typically at the institution's cost. I would say faculty and staff worry about this more than students, and professionals know their job is

gone when they pick up the mic to speak up. The great thing about this country though, is that someone else will hire them because of it. The students on either side of the issue are paying a mental-health price for it, though, sometimes it affects their grades, gives them records with the judicial system, or even takes away the chance to graduate - but they are young enough not to care. We should allow for more civilized round table talks that actually bring about change in order to protect our next generation.

The level of scholarship that occurs in higher education allows us to be more aware of censorship issues. So, most of us in the library field are inclined to become “protectors of knowledge.” When we hear of censorship issues it naturally changes how we operate – we form groups and host discussions about how to tackle these issues. Many consortiums and cooperatives, however, have restrictions on even hosting types of events. It is not easy to create something diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility-based without becoming the enemy of a few.

Librarians should be anti-censorship by nature. It doesn't matter if we personally like the content of something, we should want to make information available to all. However, there are censorship issues within the field due to personal bias, which some may not even be aware of. Our demographic is not diverse, and by that I don't mean hiding behind only hiring males and people from the Anglo-queer community to cover the statistics



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and look good on paper. I say this a lot – if we hire people from different racial backgrounds and put them in meaningful positions, we will get different perspectives on our collections. However, these people need to be passionate about the field and have strong interests in collection development. Then tell them about all the library associations, roundtables, and groups they can join. That's where I really started to learn more about the system and gained a community of like-minded and passionate individuals. This is another area affected by a lack of funding. The threat of withholding money is typically how people are silenced in this economy. We can help tackle all these issues by funding the active groups, even by joining organizations, that's how we can make the most difference.

No one is perfect when it comes to conquering the censorship game... even I censored myself when writing this. I'm guilty too, but a girl's gotta eat. Do what you can where you can.

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