Colorado Association of Libraries

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Intellectual Freedom in Colorado

When it rains, it pours. Colorado libraries and librarians have had a wealth of "challenging" issues to deal with in the past few months. From school to public to academic institutions, nobody has been immune. Fortunately enough, we have a very strong intellectual freedom community in the state, as well as a new forum within which to share information and ideas for dealing with such issues.

One of the more inflammatory occurrences of recent months occurred in the Norwood, Colorado, school district, where the book Bless Me, Ultima, by Rudolfo Anya, was challenged for profanity and pulled from high school shelves. Parents asked the Superintendent of Schools whether they could burn the two dozen or so copies of the book, and were granted permission to do so (although the burning did not actually take place). Following a sit-in by students protesting the decision, as well as a fair amount of media attention, Superintendent Bob Conder agreed to form a committee to review the title. CAL has issued the following statement regarding this incident:

CAL Response to Norwood Schools and Book Banning

The Colorado Association of Libraries is a membership organization of 1200 librarians. CAL endorses the mission of schools and academic institutions to provide access by students to information that represents a variety of viewpoints. As part of its duty to take a stand when events require a response on behalf of libraries, the Colorado Association of Libraries (CAL) makes the following statement regarding the book banning in the Norwood schools.

This event occurred when the book Bless Me, Ultima, being used in a classroom assignment, was removed following a complaint about its suitability. Although this occurred not in a library, but in a classroom, the same freedom to read principle is at stake. CAL acknowledges and upholds a parent's right to object to materials in the school curricula. It also recognizes that school districts have an obligation follow established review procedures when evaluating challenged materials, whether that challenge is with classroom materials, such as this, or with library materials. Reconsideration policies should be in place in all schools to assure that disparate points-of-view are represented when decisions are made to allow such materials to be used in a school, or not. Adhering to established procedures ensures a balanced curriculum, intellectual integrity in the classroom, and allows for fair and open discussion of all sides of the issue when controversy arises.

CAL understands that the policies and procedures that were in place were not followed in this instance, but that steps to correct the oversight have been taken. The superintendent who initially pulled the book appears to have rectified the situation by apologizing for the hasty actions and has turned the matter over to a committee for further review. CAL supports this return to the

review process, and welcomes open discussion by schools and communities when controversial issues such as this occur.

Libraries, whether school, academic, or public, should be neutral grounds for sharing information on controversial topics that may not always be agreeable to everyone in a community. This same spirit of openness to different ideas and beliefs forms the foundation of this country's rights and freedoms. Therefore, CAL supports free and open access to information and all efforts to ensure the intellectual freedoms on which this country was founded.

The following resources contain more information about censorship, intellectual freedoms, and reconsideration policies:

CAL-IFC's "General Guidelines for Policies on Requests for Reconsideration" http://www.cal-webs.org/ifhandbook.html#requests

ALA's information on "Book Burning"
http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bookburning/bookburning.htm

ALA's "Freedom to Read Statement"
http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ftrstatement/freedomreadstatement.htm

Another delicate situation that has received plenty of national attention is the controversy surrounding tenured University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill, whose 2001 essay regarding the attacks at the World Trade Center and Pentagon has raised considerably more than eyebrows. Churchill's future at the University is unclear. Although not strictly a library issue, academic librarians and others in Colorado are following developments closely because of their potential chilling effect on academic freedom.

Further information and discussions on these and other Colorado intellectual freedom issues are housed at the Colorado Web Junction discussion forum:
http://webjunction.org/forums/forum.jspa?forumID=108

New Dates for CAL Conference

Those of you who attended the CAL/MPLA Joint Conference in October 2004 know that, lovely as it is, the Denver Marriott Tech Center is a bit snug when two conferences are happening there at the same time! Because CAL was facing the same situation this year - as well as the prospect of losing many of its members to the national AASL conference -- the dates of the annual conference have been changed to November 10 (Thursday) - November 13 (Sunday), 2005. This year's theme will be "Rockin' with Colorado Libraries: Takin' Care of Business."

New Interest Group

I'm very pleased to report that my colleague, classmate, co-editor (and all around nice guy) Dan Lawrence, Instruction Librarian at the University of Northern Colorado, is Chair of the newly-formed Distance Support Interest Group of CAL:

The purpose of the DS Interest Group is to serve as a forum for fostering statewide communication among academic, K-12, public, and special libraries interested in supporting the distance learner. This forum will provide a mechanism for discussing and/or cooperatively developing new initiatives for distance education. The DS interest group also has potential as a vehicle for encouraging the use and marketing of distance education opportunities to CAL members. (http://www.cal-webs.org/distance.html)

Dan is a fellow doctoral student in the Educational Technology program at UNC, as well as a member of the Intellectual Freedom Committee. He and I are co-editing a focused issue of Colorado Libraries that will give us an overview of the ways technology is supporting our increasingly-shared user population at all levels in our state.

Capitol Event for AskColorado

State legislators, aides, and visitors learned more about statewide library services on January 26, when AskColorado set up a demonstration site in the State Capitol. From 7:30 to 9 a.m., library staff working on the collaboration provided PowerPoint shows and distributed information. The emphasis was on the multitude of educational benefits of AskColorado and Live Homework Help. An estimated 60 people received background. Later each legislator got a packet of information in order to let constituents know about the service. (http://www.cde.state.co.us/libnewsletter/slcent2005/slcent021105.htm)

State Librarian Retiring

In April, the face of librarianship in Colorado will change considerably as Nancy Bolt, State Librarian, will leave that position for what we all hope are further, enjoyable pursuits. Although Nancy's official retirement date was July 31, 2004, she has stayed on in a consultant capacity. Nancy has been a major force in Colorado librarianship, having played a key role in such cooperative ventures as ACLIN (now the Colorado Virtual Library -- http://www.aclin.org/) and the Colorado-Bulgarian library partnership interest group of CAL http://www.cal-webs.org/bulgaria.html

Another Milestone for Prospector

On November 11, 2004, the Colorado School of Mines became an official part of the Prospector union catalog and resource-sharing system. Why a milestone? The Prospector database runs on software from Innovative Interfaces, Inc., and the School of Mines uses Voyager, a system developed by Endeavor Information Systems. Although staff at the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries have had prior experience with building crosswalks between systems (the Denver Public Library uses CARL software), Voyager presented quite a challenge. Ultimately, however, the integration of Mines' records into the system was successful, making access to an even wider variety of materials a few clicks away for patrons of member libraries.