AVOIDING CONTROVERSY: ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE LIBRARY EXHIBIT

Mary Kandiuk, Visual Arts, Design & Theatre Librarian, York University
“My inspiration for this piece is the ongoing issue in Palestine where illegal settlement expansions have become common. These expansions come at the expense of uprooting century old olive trees, trees intertwined with the roots of the Palestinian people.”

Ahmad Al Abid, Artist
Paul Bronfman, businessman/leader in the Canadian film and television production industry/Director of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center

“anti-semitic” and “hate propaganda”
“It is the view of the York University Student Centre and the York Federation of Students that this artwork is not hateful and is the artist’s depiction of the resistance to the occupation of Palestinian land.”

Gayle McFadden, VP Operations, YFS
“The University understands and respects these concerns. Given that decisions with respect to the mural’s continued display are the responsibility of the governing body responsible for the Student Centre, which is a separate and distinct legal entity from the University, we sincerely hope that they will address the concerns which have been expressed. York University remains firmly committed to the values of freedom of expression, open dialogue and constructive discussion. We look forward to continuing the important dialogue around inclusion that has emerged.”

Dr. Mamdouh Shoukri, President, York University
CONTROVERSIAL LIBRARY EXHIBITS

- 1978 - Massacre of Armenians by Turks Exhibit, University of California/Berkeley Library

- 1979 - Ku Klux Klan Exhibit, Forsyth County Public Library, Winston-Salem, NC

Exhibit Spaces

BOSTON ART LIBRARY, EXHIBIT CASES

Description of space: One exhibit case in Gargan Hall and three exhibit cases in the entry level of the Library.

Policy for use of space: Exhibit space is used to highlight books in the collection and selected art works.

Contact: Laurie Hayville

BURNS LIBRARY

Description of space: Ford Tower (2 cases), Burns wall cases (4 cases).

Policy for use of space: Exhibits highlight collections in the Burns Library.

Contact: Barbara Hobard

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER, CAMPION HALL G13

Description of space: One well with bulletin board and two bookcases (approximately 11 linear feet)
LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill
“[T]he Articles of the Library Bill of Rights are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries…”

http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill
In developing library exhibits, staff members should endeavour to present a broad spectrum of opinion and a variety of viewpoints. Libraries should not shrink from developing exhibits because of controversial content or because of the beliefs or affiliation of those whose work is represented. Just as libraries do not endorse the viewpoints of those whose work is represented in their collections, libraries also do not endorse the beliefs or viewpoints of topics that may be the subject of library exhibits. (p. 126)
The library should not censor or remove an exhibit because some members of the community may disagree with its content. Those who object to the content of any exhibit held at the library should be able to submit their complaint and/or their own exhibit proposal to be judged according to the policies established by the library. Libraries may wish to post a permanent notice near the exhibit area stating that the library does not advocate or endorse the viewpoints of exhibits or exhibitors. (p. 127)
LIBRARY EXHIBIT POLICIES

- Purpose
- Criteria
- Academic Freedom Statement
- Disclaimer
- Dispute Resolution
It is the purpose of the Exhibits Program to support the Library’s mission by providing information in alternative forms, and enriching community knowledge on a large array of varied subject matter, featuring a broad spectrum of opinion and viewpoints. Exhibits may provide informational and artistic materials, including artwork, music, and other forms of entertainment.

http://library.csus.edu/exhibits/LibraryExhibitsPolicy.doc
CRITERIA

Exhibits should have associated learning outcomes and often, but not always, require considerable research. Learning outcomes do not need to be formal and specific to information acquisitions. Because library exhibits serve as an open educational environment, learning outcomes will focus on an affective change in the audience – a change of feeling, a motivation to learn more, etc.

http://library.wlu.edu/about/exhibits/exhibitmanual/
Western Libraries subscribes to the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights as it applies to exhibit spaces, specifically:

_The library should not censor or remove an exhibit because some members of the community may disagree with its content. Those who object to the content of any exhibit held at the library should be able to submit their complaint and/or their own exhibit proposal to be judged according to the policies established by the library._

[http://www.library.wwu.edu/exhibits_art](http://www.library.wwu.edu/exhibits_art)
The library supports all campus and community groups’ right to express their opinions, and aims to create a safe place for appropriate display of controversial topics. However, exhibits in the Library are prepared by and reflect the opinions, interests, and efforts of individual University persons or organizations or members of the wider community. No official University or Library endorsement is expressed or implied.

https://library.humboldt.edu/about/policies/libraryexhibits.html
Challenges of a display, exhibit, or printed materials posted or displayed in a UW library may be sent in writing to the Associate Dean of University Libraries for Research and Instructional Services for areas in the Suzzallo and Allen Libraries, the Director of the Odegaard Undergraduate Library for space in that library, and the library director or head in other libraries. The Libraries will respond to written statements as follows:

- The individual will be notified that the Libraries has received his/her written statement of concern.
- A copy of the statement is to be forwarded through the supervisory chain.
- A review process will be conducted in a timely matter by Libraries Administration in response to an individual's statement of concern.
- While a concern is being considered, there will be no change in the status of the display, exhibit, or printed materials.
- Upon completion of the review process, the appropriate administrator will notify the individual of the Libraries' decision.
- The individual may appeal the decision to the Senior Associate Dean of University Libraries.

“Most American librarians today take it for granted that our profession stands for the unequivocal defense of intellectual freedom, freedom of speech, and a number of other very fine principles. It is surely among the best things about us that we now see ourselves as being almost definitionally committed to democratic values. But in the last decades we have perhaps grown too used to casting our profession in this heroic mold, as if historically it has always been true that librarians as a profession and en masse have opposed censorship, bigotry, and intolerance and held tenaciously to intellectual freedom as our cardinal professional value.”

Mark Rosenzweig (1991)
It is acknowledged that some subjects and their public exhibition may be controversial in nature to some people. While the Library supports academic freedom, the Library reserves the right to accept and/or refuse a perceived controversial exhibit.

Exhibits which portray movements or events from a non-partisan historical point of view, or which makes incidental use of religious or political symbolism in connection with an ecumenical or non-partisan event or observance will be considered. In order to avoid giving undue prominence to particular points of view on controversial matters the Library will not house religious or political exhibits which focus on the tenets of individual sects or parties.

[http://library.csus.edu/exhibits/LibraryExhibitsPolicy.doc](http://library.csus.edu/exhibits/LibraryExhibitsPolicy.doc)
LIBRARY EXHIBIT REQUIREMENTS

The Libraries reserves the right at its sole discretion to approve or disapprove all exhibit requests, to have final approval for the layout of the exhibit, and to make all decisions regarding length of exhibit duration, placement of the exhibit within a library, and content of publicity. Some factors that the Libraries apply in evaluating exhibit proposals are listed below. This list is not exhaustive, and not all exhibits will meet all criteria.

In addition, all exhibits must adhere to the following requirements:

- When the topic is controversial, an objective presentation is required.
- Does not promote the partisan political, religious, or social doctrines of any single person or group.
- Does not promote the financial profit of any individual, organization, or commercial enterprise and does not display items for sale.
- Satisfies public safety considerations, e.g. free standing displays, hands-on exhibits, etc.
- Exhibitor agrees to sign a loan agreement with the Libraries.

http://library.unc.edu/about/policies/hosted-exhibits/
The University Library supports academic freedom and the free expression of opinion. The Libraries will not exercise any censorship of materials such as books, images, labels, catalogs, or promotional literature that do not violate the guidelines as expressed in the University Libraries Exhibits Guidelines or local, state, or federal laws.

http://library.unc.edu/about/policies/hosted-exhibits/
CENSORSHIP?

All library exhibits are guided by the library’s mission, values, and vision and by campus policies on freedom of expression. Our galleries are not a public forum, and all exhibits must be suitable for view by the broad community of people who visit the library. Accordingly, the library discourages proposals containing sexually explicit imagery, nudity or graphic depictions of violence.

http://lib.calpoly.edu/events-and-exhibits/exhibits/exhibit-policies/
Exhibits should not advocate the personal point of view of the exhibitor. Topics for exhibits may include controversial issues only if such issues are presented from a neutral or non-partisan point of view.

http://libraryguides.missouri.edu/librarypolicies/policy33
On Wednesday, March 4 the Peterborough Coalition for Palestinian Solidarity (PCPS) was told by Richard Clarke, the University Librarian, that the group’s poster in the library’s display case, advertising Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), had to be removed or covered. In an email later in the day he also asked that PCPS “voluntarily remove or replace the other copies of the poster… that have been posted around campus. If you are unwilling or unable to do this, the University may undertake to carry out this task.” Clarke writes that the image in the poster, which shows a child in a walled area with ‘Gaza’ written beneath him having a missile shot at from a helicopter with the word ‘Israel’ written on it, “communicates an inflammatory message, and does not promote the positive discourse on the Palestine-Israel question that the University wishes to encourage.” He adds, “temporarily modify[ing] the existing poster by removing the… image and replacing it either with more text, or with imagery of a non-controversial nature, will be acceptable.”
The display case at the entrance to the Bata Library is a central and prominent area on the Symons Campus for displaying information about programs, events and services offered or presented by University Departments, Programs or student groups. The Library has enabled a self-service booking procedure through the University Room Booking module for internal university departments and groups. The Display Case must be booked by a Trent student, staff or faculty member using a Trent login. Please see the Terms and Conditions for booking the display case....

The Trent University Library is committed to academic freedom – no censorship of exhibit material will be imposed by the Library. If there is concern over the subject matter of a display, it is advised you contact the university group mounting the displays and not the Library.

Approved by the Librarian’s Committee: June 2014.

https://www.trentu.ca/library/about/display_case_policy
“Whose favored epistemologies are used to interrogate representations?”

Gwendolyn J. Reece (2005)
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Viewpoint 1: Objective Truth
- All representations of conflict and all debates should be balanced.

Viewpoint 2: Privileges the Subject Position
- Calls for the voice of the disempowered to be heard.

Gwendolyn J. Reece (2005)
“Calls into question the possibility of an ‘objective’ and ‘balanced’ portrayal of controversy, largely because power and access to forums for representation are not equally distributed.”
“In the political and philosophical sense in which I use the term here, neutrality is impossible. In any situation there exists a distribution of power. Overtly endorsing or contesting their distribution are, of course, political choices; such positions are not neutral. But to take no explicit position by claiming to be neutral is also a political choice, particularly when one is given the resources that make it easy to evaluate the consequences of that distribution of power and potentially affect its distribution.”