

INTRODUCTION

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; of abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Source: Constitution of the United States, Bill of Rights, Amendment I

Intellectual freedom is the cornerstone of our societal freedoms: the freedom of thought, the freedom of belief, the freedom to read and the freedom to express our ideas. All of these freedoms are protected by the Constitution of the United States and specifically guaranteed by the First Amendment.

In the introduction to the *ALA Intellectual Freedom Manual*, the American Library Association describes the role of libraries in protecting these freedoms as follows:

“Now, more than ever, librarians need to be mindful of the special role libraries play as centers for uninhibited intellectual inquiry. Librarians have taken upon themselves the responsibility to provide, through their institutions, all points of view on all questions and issues of our times, and to make these ideas and opinions available to anyone who needs or wants them, regardless of age, background or views.”

Source: *ALA Intellectual Freedom Manual*, 2010, Introduction

The freedom of expression guaranteed by the First Amendment and the corollary of that freedom, the freedom to read, is uniquely fulfilled by the library.

But intellectual freedom cannot bring itself into existence. Individual librarians and library staff members must apply these principles in our daily activities, activities such as materials selection, reference and circulation services, collection evaluation, collection building, providing access to electronic resources and acquiring material from other organizations and institutions, in a nondiscriminatory manner.

The flow of information is essential in today's complex societies. Information, however, is not useful unless we are able to access it through every medium in which it is offered, books, magazines, newspapers, the World Wide Web, video, databases or other formats. One must also be mindful that access and availability do not mean that a library endorses the information provided. Diversity of views is a desirable goal and libraries should reflect and support disparate points of view.

Although the MLA Intellectual Freedom Manual contains information about intellectual freedom for all types of libraries and provides guidance for addressing the many issues libraries face today, its primary objective is to encourage libraries to make every kind of information available and accessible to each individual who uses a library.



Works Cited in this Article:

“Constitution of the United States of America.” 1787. Legal Information Institute. Cornell Law School. 14 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.billofrights.html>>.

“Intellectual Freedom Manual.” 2010. American Library Association. 14 Feb. 2006