
Volume 3
Number 4
*Sex in the Library: Internet Access Issues in
Oregon (Winter 1998)*

July 2014

Update on policies for the use of public internet workstations

David Burt
Lake Oswego Public Library

Recommended Citation

Burt, D. (2014). Update on policies for the use of public internet workstations. *OLA Quarterly*, 3(4), 7+. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1459>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Update on *Policies for the Use of Public Internet Workstations*

by David Burt

Information Technology Librarian
Lake Oswego Public Library

It has been over a year since I wrote "Policies for the Use of Public Internet Workstations" for the PNLA Quarterly. That article led to the creation of the Public Library Internet Access Policies Page on my library's homepage at <http://www.ci.oswego.or.us/library/poli.htm>. At the suggestion of several librarians, I submitted the article to Public Libraries, and a much revised version of "Policies..." was published in the June, 1997 issue. I initially authored the webpage and the articles because librarians had a real need for such information. Messages asking how libraries deal with various Internet polices were being posted to the public library listserv Publib on an almost weekly basis. The primary areas of concern a year ago were such things as chat rooms, time limits, and printing costs.

What a difference a year makes.

In February of 1997, the mayor of Boston ordered the Boston Public Library to install CyberPatrol on the library Internet terminals. This event had a dramatic effect on library Internet access policies and on library administrators considering Internet access. Suddenly, filters and complaints about pornography were no longer theoretical debates. Public librarians everywhere realized that if the pornography on the Internet controversy could lead to a major political flap in an urban, liberal place like Boston, it could happen anywhere. And it has. Communities across the country have grappled with the issue, leading to hundreds of news stories about local controversies. The "Filtering Facts" News Archive at <http://www.filteringfacts.org/news.htm> contains over 70 on-line news stories alone.

Public library Internet policies appear to have become more restrictive in response. The policy archive site now arranges policies by date. The number of libraries which state that they filter has increased from 0% of policies written in 1995, to 3% of policies written in 1996, to 4% of policies written in 1997. It should be noted that there are several libraries with policies on the site that are known to filter but do not say so in their policies. Many of these libraries are concerned about negative publicity in the library community and the threat of law-

suits, so the percentage of libraries that filter may be underrepresented.

A much more noticeable change can be seen in so called "tap on the shoulder policies" which mandate a "tap on the shoulder" by library staff when a patron is seen viewing "inappropriate materials." The number of libraries with "tap on the shoulder" policies was only 8% of all policies written in 1995, and leapt to 25% for both 1996 and 1997.

These "tap on the shoulder" policies are often being implemented as a compromise to filters. Some examples are the Osceola County (FL) Public Library's policy that says "A patron found to be sending or receiving inappropriate materials will be disconnected from the Internet, and will not be allowed to use it at any future time." The Appleton (WI) Public Library forbids users from "sending, receiving, or displaying, text or graphics which may reasonably be construed by Library staff as offensive to the public." Librarians I have spoken with about "tap on the shoulder" all report that library staff spend very little time enforcing them. Open placement of Internet terminals combined with strict policies seems to deter most would-be porn surfers.

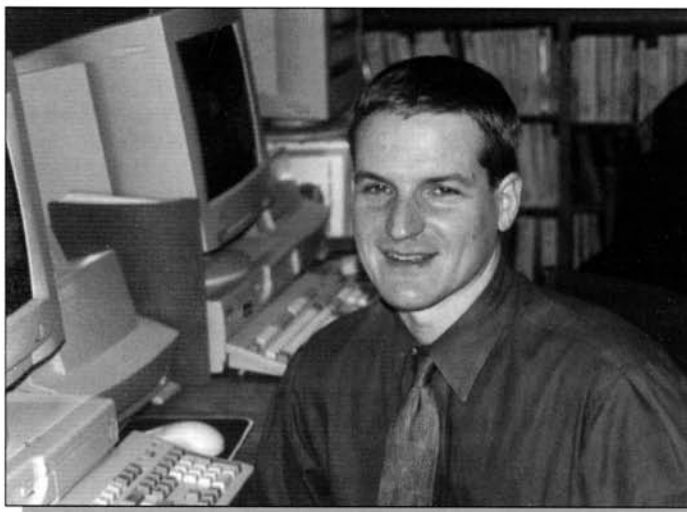
The biggest change in library Internet access policies has been in the area of age restrictions. Age restrictions are defined in two ways, first as rules for using the Internet only with the parent's permission, as does the Bloomingdale (IL) Public Library:

For Patrons Under the Age of 18:

As the parent or guardian of _____
I give permission for my child to use the Internet Computers at the Bloomingdale Public Library, with the understanding that I am responsible for monitoring their appropriate

See Policies Update page 16

David Burt



Policies Update

(continued from page 7)

use of the Internet Computers and that I am responsible for any damage that may occur.

The other way age restrictions are defined is in rules that state that a child may only use the Internet in the company of a parent, as does the Arlington Heights (IL) Public Library:

"Children age 7 or younger must be supervised by an adult while using the Online Room."

Some libraries combine both policies for children of different ages, as does the Rockbridge (VA) Public Library:

Users Under 14: Children under 12 will be permitted to use an Internet computer only if

accompanied by an adult 18 years or older. Twelve- and thirteen-year-olds may use an Internet computer by themselves only if a parent or guardian has come to the library and signed a permission slip.

When the number of libraries practicing either policy is combined and duplications subtracted, the totals for policies written in 1995 are 25%. For policies written in 1997, it is a striking 39%.

What seems clear to me is that as the publicity and political battles regarding Internet pornography in public libraries has increased, public library Internet access policies have become more restrictive in response. **Q**

Jackson County

(continued from page 10)

What has been the patron and staff reaction to the filtered workstation? Almost none. Patrons seem to consider it obvious that the children's workstation would be filtered. The filter doesn't keep children from finding answers to their reference questions. One adult who was browsing music sites was blocked from accessing a rock musician's homepage, but it wasn't pertinent to her research and she didn't care.

Teenagers have been overheard saying "Let's go upstairs and use the one up there. It's more fun, it doesn't have SurfWatch." But one father, obviously unfamiliar with the Internet and leery of it, was reluctant to let his daughter use the workstation until he realized it was filtered. Then he seemed relieved and permitted her to get acquainted with this new information resource. **Q**

Oregon Public Schools

(continued from page 13)

School librarians continue to wrestle with the issues of providing access to information on the Internet and of how district policies can limit that access. It's such an exciting advancement in the areas of international connections and idea sharing.

I like Alan H. MacDonald's comment, "The nature of the telecommunications stream is such that it would take the equivalent of a national telecommunications lobotomy to fully control the flow." **Q**

REFERENCES

MacDonald Alan H., 1997. Quest for balance: intellectual freedom, censorship and community standards in the global village. *IMPACT, the Journal of the Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada* January 8-17.

Truett Carol, 1997. Censorship and the Internet: a stand for school librarians, *School Library Media Quarterly* 25:223-227.

Editor's note: Rebecca Macy was recently named OEMA Media Specialist of the Year.