

# The library takes the lead

## Wichita State University Library proposes a university-wide Internet policy

by Beth A. Smith

What happens when the library takes the lead in creating the university's Internet policy? At Wichita State University (WSU), Ruth Jackson, dean of libraries, took the initiative to find this out. In spring 2000, she formed the "Ad Hoc Committee to Develop a Policy on Internet Access and Pornography." The charge was to review existing library policy and recommend a policy that would be uniformly applicable to the campus community. This article will discuss some of the processes we used to get through the rigorous process of drafting a university-wide Internet policy.

From earlier discussions among the library faculty, two common goals emerged regarding Internet use, which became the working values for our committee: to preserve academic and intellectual freedom and to protect patrons' right to privacy. By taking the lead, the libraries were able to create Internet policies and procedures from a proactive stance, rather than a reactive one, guaranteeing open access.

Jackson made a vital decision to include representatives from key technology service points, as well as representatives from the student body and faculty, on the committee. The 12-member committee included 8 library members, representing staff, faculty, techni-

cal services, reference, circulation, and interlibrary loan. In addition, University Computing, Media Resource Center, Student Government Association, and Faculty Senate each sent a representative. It was important, if the policy was to be accepted, that representatives from areas outside the library have a voice.

As the chair of the "porn" committee, as we came to be known, I decided to conduct informal meetings with the goal of creating an environment conducive to open sharing of experiences and opinions.

### Getting started

Each member left our first meeting in June 2000 with an information-gathering assignment. The areas we looked at included legal cases involving the Internet and libraries, pending legislation, library literature, Internet policies from other institutions nationally and locally (including academic and public), university policies, and technological options (i.e., privacy screens). A central reading file was created that continued to expand through the course of our committee work.

We also monitored legislation being considered at the time (including CIPA, COPA, and the McCain amendment) and court cases

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involving Internet access and libraries. I continued to monitor relevant cases and legislation to maintain a current awareness as the issues surrounding Internet access in public spaces continued to evolve.

Through our literature search, we found an article by Janis Dybdahl<sup>1</sup> that provided a list of elements that libraries in her study included in their Internet policies. We used this as a checklist to guide discussions about the types of things we wanted to include in our Internet policy.

### **Sharing perspectives**

The wide range of experiences of the group gave our committee a broader perspective of the issues than if any single group had written the Internet policy. For example, when researching the cost of placing privacy screens on each of the public terminals, one of our members recounted the experience of another library in the state that had tried this. The reference librarians at that institution complained that the privacy screens made it difficult to assist patrons with their work.

Therefore, in our final recommendations to the dean regarding library procedures, we suggested placing privacy screens on a small bank of computers. Patrons could use these computers to ensure their privacy or they could be asked to move to those computers if there were complaints regarding the material they are viewing.

Our Computing Center member had experience with filters at a small private college. The filters lasted 13 hours before the cry of "Academic Freedom!" was heard and legal action threatened. Ironically, the day after our first meeting, a patron approached me at the reference desk to inform me that another patron was viewing child pornography. At our second meeting, I was armed

with this information and able to share my experience with the committee.

### **Maintaining focus**

A clear charge was necessary to keep discussion on track, as we found ourselves bogged down in trying to consider procedures for the library. It was important for the committee to review its charge to focus the discussion. Our role was to recommend policy. We decided, as a committee, that procedures should be the responsibility of the individual departments. The library members on the committee did make some recommendations to the dean of libraries regarding procedures after the final draft of the policy had been completed.

In looking at WSU's existing policies, the committee discovered that the library and University Computing each had a policy, and that the campus e-mail policy was an entirely separate document from those. However, the library policy was outdated and University Computing's policy had never been discussed with the library during its creation. (The University Computing representative admitted to sending students viewing "objectionable" material to the library on occasion.)

In addition to assessing technology policies across campus, we reviewed the university's sexual harassment policy and talked to campus police regarding their policies and procedures.

Although the libraries' former Internet-use policy was too vague for the current environment, we felt the basic premise could be maintained. Our goal was to create a policy that gave more detail and examples of what was not "acceptable use."

### **Writing the policy**

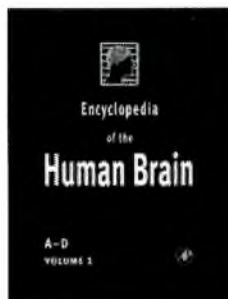
We looked at a wide range of Internet policies from academic libraries, public libraries, and institutions. Many were too restrictive or contained language that we considered vague, such as banning the viewing of "objectionable" material. We considered this as too subjective and something that would place librarians in the role of the Internet police.

Rutgers University's "Acceptable Use Policy for Computing and Information Technology Resources"<sup>2</sup> had the kind of detail

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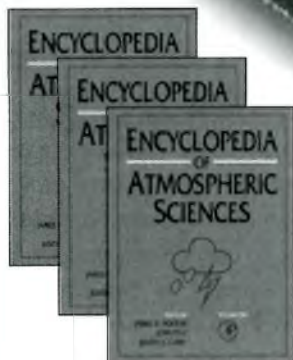
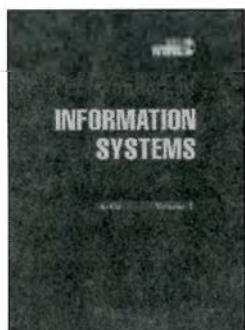
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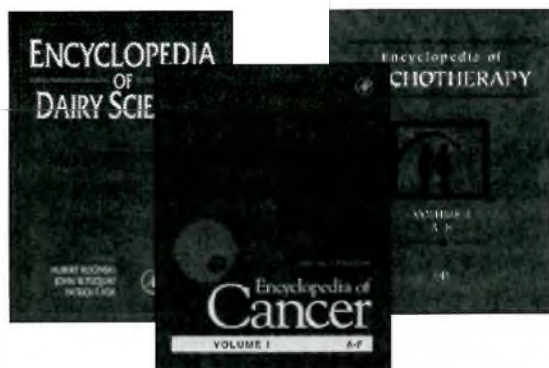
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fairly low number given the proportion of undergraduates to either faculty or graduate students. The other 7.5 percent of circulations are interlibrary loan and staff.

## Conclusion

The circulation data for this collection shows that these types of materials achieve high circulation figures and certainly break out of the traditional 80/20 model of library circulation. There is definitely a need for third-party manuals, particular for highly technical software that doesn't tend to come with manuals.

Unfortunately those who need the help the most, undergraduates, appear to be the least likely to use the collection. It would be interesting to look further at usage to deter-

mine how the usage of the various categories of materials reflects the user type.

## Notes

1. Third-party computer manuals are defined as those published by organizations other than the manufacturer or distributor of the software.
2. See <http://www.southernct.edu/~klassen/web4libsurvey.html> for a summary of the results of this informal survey.
3. So far, losses have been negligible.
4. Statistics were gathered from our SIRSI Webcat in spring 2001 and were analyzed by hand. They should not be considered rigorous statistics as some data was unavailable and it is not the purpose of this article to be a rigorous accounting of how these books were used. ■

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our policy was lacking, and, with the author's permission, we used it as our model. Rather than listing a vague statement that illegal activity is prohibited, specific actions are listed in the Rutgers' policy as being illegal by federal and state statutes, e.g., "to make more copies of software than allowed by license or to view, download, distribute, or possess child pornography. . . ."

A subcommittee of three librarians was selected to actually write WSU's policy. The first draft was completed in August 2000 and was sent to all members. The full committee met to discuss changes and subsequent drafts were sent as e-mail attachments. I kept meetings at a minimum until the final wrap-up session. After eight drafts, the final document was completed and unanimously approved by the full committee in November 2000.

By fall 2001, all levels of the university administration had accepted the policy. It has made its way through the Faculty Senate Library Committee, university counsel, several vice presidents, and the president of the university. In line with the committee's recommendation to consolidate all university Internet and information policies, Jackson has been appointed chair of the University Technology Subcommittee to Review WSU Technology Policies.

The creation of the university-wide Internet policy was a lengthy process, especially for the library representatives involved. Three key elements helped us to succeed: involving all the technology centers on campus, the thoroughness of our research, and maintaining a relaxed team atmosphere with a common goal.

What happens when the library takes the lead in creating the university's Internet policy? At Wichita State University the result is a uniform Internet-use policy that preserves intellectual freedom and protects individuals' right to privacy.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

1. Janis Dybdahl, "Internet use policy: some features to consider." *Colorado Libraries* (1999) 25:43-7.
2. "Acceptable use policy." Rutgers University, available at <http://rucs.rutgers.edu/acceptable-use.html>; accessed 2002, June 10. See also, "Acceptable use guidelines." Rutgers University, available at <http://rucs.rutgers.edu/acceptable-use-guide.html>; accessed 2002, June 10.
3. The author thanks the members of the Ad Hoc Committee to Develop a Policy on Internet Access and Pornography for all of their hard work. Thanks to David Duncan, Ted Naylor, and Sandy MacGill for drafting the policy. Special thanks to Janet Brown, Ted Naylor, and Kristen Sen for their roles in presenting the policy for the Kansas Library Association. ■