

Welcome to *Tuesday Topics*, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to the [IFC committee](#).



March 2018 Tuesday Topic: Free speech, disagreeable ideas, and meeting room policies

Free speech is for ideas we hate.

A recent event at the Eugene Public Library (EPL) brought this thought to mind. On March 4, [Derrick Jensen](#) gave a talk in a meeting room he had rented according to EPL's [meeting room policies and procedures](#). Jensen is an environmental activist and author. He had been scheduled to speak at the [Public Interest Environmental Law Conference](#), held at the University of Oregon Law School. He was, however, dis-invited when conference organizers learned of his alleged transphobic views. It was then that he rented the room at EPL. Though his talk at EPL was about his current and forthcoming books, all on environmental issues, protestors from [United Front: Families Resisting and Organizing Nonviolently Together](#) disrupted the event, also protesting the perceived anti-transgender viewpoints of Jensen. One protester was arrested by Eugene Police. The Eugene Weekly ran [this story](#) on the event and protest, largely giving the arrested protester's point of view. Jensen's organization, Deep Green Resistance (DGR) posted [this response](#) a few days later. Jensen and DGR believe they are victims of "free-speech attacks."

Several free-speech issues in this story deserve thoughtful reflection. One common theme, perhaps, is the concept that free speech exists for ideas we hate, as well as for ideas we support. EPL is to be commended for providing a space in which Jensen could deliver his views, however repugnant some may find them. A clear, publicly-stated meeting room policy provided this author and speaker a venue to discuss his views when others had censored them. It also provided clear guidance to library staff to ensure all library users (including meeting room users) are treated fairly and equitably. [The Library Bill of Rights](#) calls for all librarians to "challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment." It's easy to challenge censorship when we agree with the ideas being censored. It becomes more of a challenge when we might agree with the protestors.

Do your library's policies provide equal protection and access to viewpoints you disagree with? What about your own work? Serving patrons and providing access to information with which we disagree challenges us to put our professional ethics to the test. What have you done this week to protect access to or expression of ideas with which you disagree?

Resources and information on these and related intellectual freedom issues are available in the Oregon Library Association (OLA) Intellectual Freedom Committee's [toolkit](#). ALA's [Meeting rooms: an Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#) provides a good starting point for considering (or reconsidering)

your library's meeting room policies. Intellectual Freedom Committee members will be tabling during the upcoming OLA conference in Eugene and would be happy to discuss these or other issues with you. We look forward to seeing many of you there.

Free speech is for ideas we hate as well as those we love, and even those where we don't care one way or another. What are you and your library doing to ensure that everyone has a place to be heard?

Steve Silver

OLA Intellectual Freedom Committee member

Library Director