SPG U-M Standard Practice Guide

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Standard Practice Guide Policies

Electronic Access to Potentially Offensive Materials 601.16

Applies to: All Faculty, Staff, Students, and Departmental and Systems Administrators

I. BACKGROUND

Members of the University of Michigan community—faculty, staff, and students—are able to access information via electronic means from a range of sources that is growing exponentially. Information in the form of text, graphics, images, video and sound is available for a variety of purposes: teaching, research, learning, and even entertainment.

Users of information technology at the University of Michigan value the extensive resources and technical expertise provided through electronic sources such as news services and the internet. Most of the information may be described as academic and encyclopedic and is not sensitive in nature.

However, as has been the case with information in hard copy form, some of the electronically-received information may be found to be offensive and perhaps pornographic by some members of our community. Individuals may be particularly offended if they are exposed to the material unwittingly. And as described further in Part II.C. below, there are some contexts where unfettered access to materials may be inconsistent with mission or safety.

II. POLICY

A. Freedom of expression and an open environment for sharing information are valued, encouraged, supported, and protected at the University of Michigan. Censorship is incompatible with the goals of an institution of higher education. Research and instruction take many forms. Therefore, information accessible on the network may not be restricted through censorship.
Related information on this topic may be found in the following policies:

1. Standard Practice Guide 601.01 (/policy/601.01), Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression

     2. Standard Practice Guide 601.07 (/policy/601.07), Responsible Use of Information Resources

B. Individuals should not be unwittingly exposed to offensive material by the deliberate and knowing acts of others. The University is a community of individuals with diverse values, beliefs, and sensitivities. Individuals must be allowed to choose what they wish to access for their own purposes.
Related information on this topic may be found in the following policy:

     1. Standard Practice Guide 201.89-0 (/policy/201.89-0), Sexual Harassment

C. Notwithstanding the above, there are some contexts—for example, childcare centers, Michigan Medicine sites, and summer camp programs—where unfettered access to University information technology may be inappropriate, inconsistent with safety or mission, or both. Units responsible for sensitive contexts may seek approval from the President to implement policy and technological frameworks appropriate to their contexts. Proposals for such frameworks will be vetted with the Offices of the Provost, General Counsel, and Chief Information Officer, with priority given to the continued ability of University scholars to conduct academic research of their own choosing and with minimal disruption. Ultimate authority for whether and what frameworks are adopted reside with the President.

III. GUIDELINES

A. Departments and units should take steps to protect individuals' choice to access information without censorship. While there may be some computing resources within departments that are dedicated—for example, those set aside only for research or class use—system administrators will have to guard against making judgments as to the appropriateness of the content of another person's work. Research and instruction take many forms and may not be restricted through censorship. Departments and units should take steps to protect individuals' choice to not be unwittingly exposed to offensive material that may have been accessed by others. Sensitivity to others in an environment of shared resources is important. Departments and units should review any practices that may result in offensive material from electronic sources being left on machines or shared printers, purposefully forwarded to others who are unwilling recipients, or displayed in such a manner as to create an abusive work or study environment for others. Potential safeguards begin with education encouraging responsible management of information that is accessed for personal use and may also include screen-saving devices on public machines and front-screen warning messages advising people of potentially offensive material. Departments and units should encourage individuals who are inadvertently or purposefully exposed to unwanted materials to tell the sender that they do not wish to receive the materials and ask the sender to stop. Individuals who are exposed to unwanted materials should inform their supervisor.

B. Illegal material, such as child pornography, from any source will not be tolerated or further distributed within the University community. If reports or complaints regarding possible illegal material are received, the Department of Public Safety and Security must be contacted immediately.

C. Those who need assistance in judging a particular behavior or who wish to report possible violations of the University's policies on Freedom of Speech, Responsible Use of Information Technology Resources, or Sexual Harassment should contact the General Counsel's Office, the Information Technology User Advocate, or the Office of Institutional Equity, respectively.

IV. REFERENCES

1. Standard Practice Guide 201.89-0 (/policy/201.89-0), Sexual Harassment

2. Standard Practice Guide 601.01 (/policy/601.01), Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression

3. Standard Practice Guide 601.07 (/policy/601.07), Responsible Use of Information Resources

File Attachments

Printable PDF of SPG 601.16, Electronic Access to Potentially Offensive Materials (https://spg.umich.edu/sites/default/files/601X16.PDF)

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Applies To:

All Faculty, Staff, Students, and Departmental and Systems Administrators

Owner:

Office of the President

Primary Contact:

Office of the CIO

Related Policies:

Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression (/policy/601.01)

Responsible Use of Information Resources (/policy/601.07)

Sexual Harassment (/policy/201.89-0)

Related Links:

Information Technology Policies and Standards (http://cio.umich.edu/policy)

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