

The Right to Read

UNH celebrates Banned Books Week

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TOP 10 MOST FREQUENTLY CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2015

“Looking for Alaska” by John Green

“Fifty Shades of Grey” by E. L. James

“I Am Jazz” by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings

“Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out” by Susan Kuklin

“The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time” by Mark Haddon

The Holy Bible

“Fun Home” by Alison Bechdel

“Habibi” by Craig Thompson

“Nasreen’s Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan” by Jeanette Winter

“Two Boys Kissing” by David Levithan

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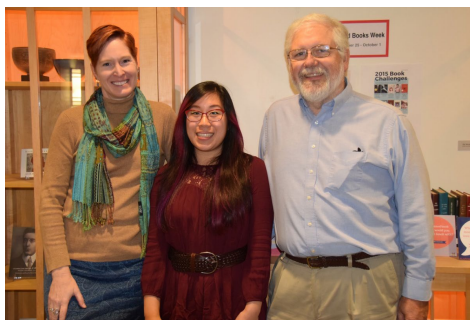
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“To Kill A Mockingbird,” “Gone With the Wind” and “Call of the Wild” were among the many once-banned classics on display at Dimond Library during Banned Books Week, an annual nationwide event that celebrates the freedom to read, promotes open and accessible information and draws attention to the negatives of censorship. Part of what is celebrated is that these books are still available.

UNH librarians Bill Ross, special collection; Katherine Aydelott, reference; and Eugenia Liu, health and human services, recently shared their thoughts on Banned Books Week with UNH Today.

UNH Today: I read books in high school that have been on banned lists. How is that possible?

Ross: These books must not have been challenged in your school. You must have had a community of librarians, teachers and parents who were willing to go to bat for the right to read-- which is really an extension of the First Amendment. However, it changes from community to community. A place that's in northern Minnesota is going to have a different attitude than a place in suburban New York. A lot of it has to do with community standards.



LIBRARIANS KATHERINE AYDELOTT, REFERENCE; EUGENIA LIU, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE; BILL ROSS, SPECIAL COLLECTION.

UNH Today: What kinds of issues lead to a book being banned?

Liu: Some individuals and groups of people may feel offended by particular topics like violence, drug use, sexuality or profane language. Other times, they may want to ban uncomfortable or sensitive topics such as suicide, racism, rape and abortion. Banned books also include topics that challenge some people's belief systems or cultural norms—books that contain homosexuality, transgender characters, and religious or political viewpoints.

UNH Today: Have you noticed a shift toward seeking to ban books focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals, people of color and religious minorities?

Liu: The answer is yes. Challenges jumped from four out of five in 2013 to eight out of 10 in 2014 and now nine out of 10. I think because diversity has become such a hot topic, some people are offended and don't want them on the shelves.

UNH Today: Who is advocating for these specific books to be banned?

Aydelott: It tends not to be the teachers. It tends to be parents and older people who have conservative views. Censoring books in general is typically a conservative practice. Here in the Northeast we may see pockets of censorship around diversity because we tend to not be a very diverse community.



PART OF DIMOND LIBRARY'S
BANNED BOOK WEEK DISPLAY.

UNH Today: Why don't libraries remove banned books from their shelves?

Ross: It's really at the core of librarianship and the American Library Association to defend people's right to read. I

believe you find that even

more in a university setting where there are many different points of view. There's not an orthodox of what you have to believe or what you should believe. We don't have the same challenges, literally, that you might find at a smaller library. For example, religious institutions, Catholic schools or Baptist colleges are going to have different points of view. Books used to be banned because they were said to be unAmerican or too sexual.

Increasingly, books about homosexuality and transsexual themes are now being banned. It changes; you're not going to have the same challenges now that you had 10 years ago or 50 years ago.

UNH Today: Why are books related to diversity being banned?

Aydelott: There are a lot of different kinds of challenges. Some of them are for drug use, sex, or what could be construed as a cult practices. One of the most well-known series of books that is often challenged is "Harry Potter." Certain areas of the country feel that

the Potter series is advocating Satanist or cult views. Some people are uncomfortable with LGBTQ friendly books and believe they shouldn't be in publically accessible places. As librarians, we feel if there is a book that could help somebody relate to a story or help them in their own life, they should be welcome to that book.

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