

Computers, pornography, and conflicting rights.

Does one empowered individual who chooses to access information that may be considered offensive or threatening to another have the right to access it in a way that crosses beyond his/her own personal space and boundaries?

Information exists in graphic form; in text form; and some information consists of primarily sound. Sound can so readily permeate an environment that its potential for disturbance to others is obvious.

Reflections by a Ph.D. student:

“I should be able to finish my degree without having to feel uncomfortable and intimidated by those around me. When I look up from a my workstation, I see on a machine just two workstations away, pictures of nude females that I consider offensive and embarrassing.”

Does a university or college have any responsibility in this regard?

Such institutions have to proactively encourage individuals to think about the needs, rights, and values of others. By encouraging individuals to ask each other to be considerate of others' reactions to offensive material and to ask them to consider a less intrusive site for accessing it, is to encourage community sensitivity and social thinking.

Within each community, however, there are those who purposefully exposed others to material they may find offensive. Should we consider all such purposeful acts as harassment? No, what is offensive to one may not be offensive to another.

A young woman, though asked to stop sending electronic mail to an unwilling recipient, continued to send daily solicitations for lesbian sex, including increasingly intimidating descriptions of the acts to be committed, and the violence that would be involved. Should a university or college administrator intervene in these interpersonal conflicts?

This is not about an individual's right to access material. It is about another individual's rights to choose not to access or to be exposed to the materials.

It is a topic around which learning and teaching can be built. It is an opportunity to teach and reinforce essential liberties while empowering all individuals.