

A Delicate Balance

In this issue of *College & Research Libraries* we feature four articles on library security, a matter of increasing concern to all academic librarians. Three articles derive from addresses presented at the 1976 ALA Conference and discuss library security from a variety of viewpoints: the institution, the professional association, the law enforcement agency, and the law. They present methods libraries may use to better protect their resources, detail some of the techniques employed by thieves, describe the assistance law enforcement agencies may give, and discuss applicable laws.

In his article Alex Ladenson summarizes provisions of recent legislation in the state of Virginia which gives separate consideration to library theft. He relates this new law to shoplifting legislation already enacted in many states. Describing elements of such laws, Mr. Ladenson points out the opposing principles that are present—the right of property as against the right of the individual to be free and unmolested. He acknowledges that this is “an area of law that is extremely sensitive. Freedom from false arrest, freedom from unlawful search, and the right to privacy are all involved here.” As he emphasizes, “what we need, of course, is to strike a delicate balance.”

The fourth article, by a university student and an academic librarian, derives from a survey of attitudes on book theft in a university library. The focus in this article is on the day-to-day thievery of library materials, some of which may be subject to intensive use but which, in general, do not represent items of great expense. There is agreement that such theft is wrong, principally because it hinders the academic achievements of one's fellow students. Even so, there remains the overall unwillingness to recognize that such a crime, if committed in an academic library, should be subject to the same penalties as one might expect for a similar crime committed off campus. As the authors state, “students view book theft as an academic crime only.”

As we work to maintain the delicate balance to protect both the rights of property and the rights of the individual, we must recognize the new dimension brought to this problem in our college and university libraries. With the introduction of the concept of “academic crime,” we must consider how it will affect this balance and what it may mean for the protection of the resources of our nation's libraries.

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