THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

STANDARD PRACTICE GUIDE

SECTION:	General University Policies and Procedures	**Number:**	601.16
		Revised:	
SUBJECT:	Policy and Guidelines Regarding Electronic Access to Potentially Offensive Material	**Date Issued:**	7/10/97
		Attachment(s)	0
APPLIES TO:	Departmental and Systems Administrators		
ISSUED BY:	Office of the President		

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, 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 (for example, Usenet news) and the World Wide Web (WWW). 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. Material in a particular news group or on particular Web pages may be explicit and graphic in nature. Currently, such resources are generally identifiable and clearly labeled, indicating the nature of the information contained within, so that individuals may make knowledgeable decisions when accessing them.

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:

- Standard Practice Guide 601.1, "Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression"
- Standard Practice Guide 601.7, "Proper Use of Information Resources, Information Technology, and Networks at the University of Michigan"

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:

- Standard Practice Guide 201.89, "Sexual Harassment"

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.

B. 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.

C. 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 Office of the General Counsel must be contacted for a determination as to the material's legality.

D. 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, Proper Use of Information Technology Resources, Information Resources and Networks, or Sexual Harassment should contact the General Counsel's Office, the Information Technology Division User Advocate, or the Office of Human Resources and Affirmative Action, respectively.

IV. References

- Standard Practice Guide 201.89 -- "Sexual Harassment"

- Standard Practice Guide 601.1 -- "Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression"
- Standard Practice Guide 601.7 -- "Proper Use of Information Resources, Information Technology, and Networks at the University of Michigan"