Chisa Uyeki [00:00:00]:

Read banned books to really look at these stories that in some places people don't have access to and learn about the lives of other people. It's one of the most powerful things that we can do to reduce polarization and bridge differences is to learn about other people and other people's experiences and also to utilize our imagination. Welcome to the Mt. San Antonio College podcast. I'm Chisa Uyeki, a Mt. SAC professor and librarian librarian, and I'm pleased to be your host for this season. Our goal is to keep you connected to our campus by bringing you the activities and events you may not have time to attend to share the interesting things our colleagues are creating and innovative ways they are supporting and connecting with Mt. SAC students. Join me as we explore Mt. SAC.

Ivan Sanchez [00:00:58]:

Welcome to the Mt. San Antonio College podcast. I'm Ivan Sanchez, a Mt. SAC professor in the sociology department, and I'll be one of your hosts for this season. The Mt. SAC Library and Mt. SAC Equity center partnered to host band book month to explore why access to books is a matter of equity and inclusion. In this episode, you'll hear from career Education librarian Monica Chavez speak about the reasons behind the numbers when it comes to book challenges and book bans. You'll also hear from collection development librarian Chisa Uyeki about the role of libraries in supporting access and what you can do to help ensure a diverse range of voices are represented in our libraries. Enjoy.

Romelia Salinas [00:01:45]:

I'm Romelia Salinas Dean of Library Learning Resources and Distance Learning, and it's my honor to introduce today's event. Thank you for joining us for this very special event as we kick off the band book month here at Mt. San Antonio College this year, the library is grateful to have the opportunity to Partner with the Equity center to recognize band book month. I'm going to turn it over to our first speaker, which is Monica Chavez. So hi everyone.

Monica Chavez [00:02:05]:

So hi everyone. My name is Monica Chavez. I am the Career Education Librarian and the current library department chair, and I'm here to talk about different statistics about banned books just to kind of set the foundation. So the first thing I wanted to talk about is that the statistics will often talk about challenge and bands. So I just wanted to quickly talk about the differences. So a challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials based upon the objections of a person or group.

Monica Chavez [00:02:40]:

So if something is challenged, it doesn't necessarily mean that it has been removed from a library or removed from the classroom. It simply means that it's being challenged by either an individual or a group and then a banning of course, is the removal of those materials. So if something's been challenged, it could potentially lead to a banning. One of the reasons why we consider book challenges to be incredibly important alongside book bannings is that challenged books do place a burden on libraries. It requires librarians and library staff to divert resources away from other services, such as, like, looking into what books we should do, providing different instruction sessions, different things like that. Right. Like the load or the job duties for librarians isn't necessarily designed to be dealing with tons of challenges. Right? Like, of course we'll talk about later.

Monica Chavez [00:03:32]:

We encourage the community to talk to us about our collections, but there seems to be a concerted effort to silence different voices in libraries, and that's one of the reasons why we're here today. Another thing to note, too, is that the ALA, which is the American Library association, does not consider weeding of an item, weeding of an item as removal of an item based on criteria defined in a library or school district's policy to be a ban. Norway do we characterize a temporary reduction in access resulting from the need to review materials to be a ban? So if a librarian looks at the collection and looks at a maybe a challenge or a request for a book to be removed, and they deem within their policy, or maybe whatever grade level it's at, if they don't deem it appropriate for that level, that's not considered a ban. It's considered removing a book based upon the criteria that's set by the library and the librarians. In 2000, there were 378 titles challenged in the US. So this doesn't necessarily mean how many times something was challenged. It's just a unique book that was challenged or could have been challenged multiple times across the United States. But there was 378 in 2000, and then if you look at this past year, there was 4240, which is an incredible jump.

Monica Chavez [00:04:46]:

We've reported the highest number of challenge book titles documented in 2023. There has been an incredible increase in the number of unique titles challenged in the US by year. So that's one thing that has caught our attention, is just how many titles are being challenged. And another thing, too, which we'll talk about a little bit more later, too, is that a lot of the times when book challenges have been occurring, usually they occur in school libraries, or at least traditionally, it has been that there have been school libraries, because I think there is a want for parents to make sure that the materials that their children are looking at are age appropriate or different things like that. So it tends to be or it has tended to be in school libraries, but the number of titles targeted for censorship at public libraries, which is open to the entire community. So children and also adults, has increased by 92% over the previous year, which accounts for about 46% of all book challenges in 2023, which is quite a jump. And then school libraries saw an 11% increase over 2022 numbers. So there has been increase in school libraries as well.

Monica Chavez [00:05:49]:

But we're seeing a lot more happen in public libraries, which is designed to be seen by all. So I just want to point also to the top five challenge books of 2023. We have genderqueer, all boys aren't blue. This book is gay. The perks of being a wallflower. And flamer. And flamer. The author of Flamer, Mike Curotto, will be one of our author speak.

Monica Chavez [00:06:12]:

As you can see, there is a thread throughout this list of five books. For each one of these books, one of the main reasons why they have been challenged is for. Because of LGBTQIA content. And across campus, we've been talking about other books that have also been challenged. So ones that are on the top list, but also just overall have been challenged. So if you look around campus, we have these signs. So thank you so much to the equity center and Studio 13 for putting these out there. It's an incredible reminder of just how many books have been challenged.

Monica Chavez [00:06:44]:

Challenged. And it also has a QR code on these signs, which point to a guide that talks about why these books have been challenged. So there's information about all those individual titles, but overall, titles representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA and BIPOC individuals made up 47% of those targeted in censorship attempts. So there is a clear indicator of the types of books that have been challenged in libraries, and it seems to be silencing voices of those who are either from marginalized groups or underrepresented groups, which is one of the reasons why we've been so thankful for the equity center, for working with us and being able to talk more about these experiences. Also want to talk a little bit, too, about challenges by state. So, in California in 2023, there were 52 attempts to restrict books, and with these 52 attempts, there were 98 titles that were challenged. But part of the reason why we've had such an increase is we have Texas, which has had 49 attempts to restrict books, and within those 49 attempts, they have looked at 1470 titles. So they have tried to restrict those from different libraries.

Monica Chavez [00:07:59]:

And then within Florida, people have challenged 33 times to restrict books, and it's been 2672 titles. And the reason that Texas and Florida are having these increase in challenges is they are having DEI laws which are around education, stating that certain content that is considered DEi cannot be shared with students. So that is a big part of the reason why there has been so many challenges in these areas. Additionally, there are, the American Library association calls them pressure groups. Someone use that term pressure groups have organized to go into different school districts within these states to challenge all the different books that are available in these libraries. I kind of want to talk about where the books are being challenged. So 54% are in public libraries. So even though the DEI laws are technically, and this is across the United States, but it is reflective of what's happening in Texas and Florida.

Monica Chavez [00:09:01]:

But overall, across the United States in 2023, 54% were in public libraries, which once again, are meant to be a community resource where both can be available for all and people can self select and choose what books they want to look at. Additionally, parents can see what their children are checking out, but 54% have been public libraries, and then 39% have been school libraries, and then 5% have just been in school. So I think, I believe that means just being able to teach that book, and then 2% have been in higher education within higher education, which is what, of course, our library is categorized underneath. Even though we only have about 2% that are challenged directly here. We do find it incredibly important because, as Doctor Salinas stated earlier, right, there's different ideas of intellectual freedom, you know, the exchange of diverse ideas. These are tenets of higher education that hopefully, in an ideal world, I think we're doing. I guess we always have to challenge ourselves to do better. But those are tenants that we consider as an integral part of higher education and academia, of being able to have.

Monica Chavez [00:10:08]:

Of that intellectual freedom and being able to have freedom to do academic inquiry. But of course, when communities are not able to see different materials, and when k through twelve students are not able to see different materials, that impacts us, because we do serve. We serve the community, and we serve students who end up graduating out of k through twelve. So that is one of the reasons why we're here today. And I'm going to go ahead and move it over to Chisa, who's going to talk more about the role of libraries.

Chisa Uyeki [00:10:37]:

Hi, everyone. Thanks so much for being here. I wanted to just take a moment to think about and talk with you all about what is behind the motivation. So Monica talked about how previously, historically, libraries have dealt with challenges for a long time, and oftentimes they were individual parents wanting to protect in what they believe is protecting somebody close to them from content. The change that we've seen recently, which Monica spoke to, is that people who are not in the community are attempting to have books removed from the libraries in those communities. So that is a big change. And that they are organized and coordinated efforts to attempt to remove texts from school libraries, from public libraries. And really, the trend that we see with that is that it is largely attacking or trying to silence the stories of persons of color, indigenous persons, the experiences and lives of LGBTQ folks, as Monica had mentioned.

Chisa Uyeki [00:11:49]:

So I'm going to talk a little bit about the role of libraries as it has to do with band, book, and censorship. I'm sure all of you know that the library is a place that you can access books and magazines, articles. Hopefully, you all know at our library, you can come in and ask us reference questions, ask us questions about how to do research. You're probably all familiar with school libraries and public libraries, but you may not be aware of the ethics and philosophies that are really the backbone to librarianship. I'm going to go way back to start, because we haven't always been champions around censorship in librarianship. In the late 18 hundreds, in early 19 hundreds, one of the first roles of libraries was to serve in the US, in the role of assimilating immigrants to the culture of the US, which at that time meant providing access to text to support a narrow idea of what it meant to be american. And frequently, it meant librarians deciding what was best for library users to be reading rather than providing a range of materials to be accessed. Of course, at that time, what was thought of as the culture in the US to assimilate to was that of white colonizers and ignored the cultures of people who had been enslaved and indigenous persons who lived here already, as well as cultures that other immigrants brought with them.

Chisa Uyeki [00:13:26]:

I wanted to share with you the library Bill of Rights. We have this hanging in the library. When you walk in, it's too to the right in our library, and this is a really important part of the work that we do in the library and that we work to uphold. And most libraries, most public libraries also adhere to this library bill of rights. And so there are a number of pieces to it, and I'm going to go through them all with you and then talk a little bit about it. So the first item in the Bill of Rights is that the libraries responsibility is to really provide the resources for all the people that the community serves. And so you really have to think about and that's why some libraries are going to be different than other libraries, right? Obviously, elementary school library is going to be different than our library because we're serving different communities. We don't exclude people or stories.

Chisa Uyeki [00:14:25]:

We are more interested in providing as broad an opening of stories that we can. It's also really important and part of the Bill of rights to present all points of view. This is very challenging. Often this is challenging because not all points of view are supported in the publishing world. So while we may want to and have that intent, it does take a lot of work to do that. There is a dominant culture that is presented, and we'll see that. I'm sure you all are aware of it in the news, but we also see that in publishing. But that's one of our goals, is to try and ensure that for any topic that we are selecting for that we're going to provide multiple views, and we do that in lots of different ways.

Chisa Uyeki [00:15:12]:

So we may do that in buying multiple books on a particular topic, but we also do that by ensuring that we are subscribing to resources that help us do that. So, for instance, newspaper databases that provide a range of low local to national to international news sources. I want to share with you this quote. That's one of my favorite quotes this Jo Godwin was a collection development librarian and also an editor of a library magazine, and I stand by this quote very strongly. A truly great library contains something in it to offend everyone. So with that as sort of a motto to go by, I wanted to share a little bit more about Ban Book Week, which started in 1982. At that time, there had been an increase in challenges, and so the American Library association with the Office of Intellectual Freedom decided that we would take this week to really focus on the freedom to read and how important it is this month at Mt. SAc, we are expanding that week longer because we had so many events that we wanted to try and fit in. So band booked week and month is all about ensuring that we are providing those multiple points of view.

Chisa Uyeki [00:16:34]:

So I am at Mt. SAC. I am a collection development librarian. So my main interest is looking at our collection and ensuring that it is meeting the needs of our students and meeting the instructional needs of our faculty. So the librarians work together to manage the selection and deselection of materials for our library. And honestly, if you can't find something in our library that you disagree with, that means we're not doing our job. You may not know, but we put a lot of time and consideration into the titles and resources that we purchase and subscribe to for our library. We have a very detailed set of collection development guidelines, and part of that are our collection development goals. I wanted to share just to give you a sense of the things that we're thinking about when we're doing selection and what we're striving for, for our collection at Mt. SAc.

Chisa Uyeki [00:17:34]:

And the collection is always changing, just like events are changing and our knowledge of histories is changing, and we are constantly changing what's in the library. So that means we're adding new things as well as we're deciding. Some things are no longer serving our students or our community. Very easy, obvious ones to pick of things that get deselected are, for instance, Monica takes care of our nursing collection, and they have a pretty strict timeline, after which, five years, they don't as much want things that are there. Of course, in literature, we're not following those same rules. The last five parts of the library Bill of Rights number three importantly states that libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment. So that is definitely something that we're doing. And Monica mentioned that only 2% of challenges happen in academic libraries.

Chisa Uyeki [00:18:36]:

But the work that we do to challenge censorship goes beyond just dealing with people coming to us and asking us to remove things from the library. Really, a lot of what we do to make sure the right things are on the shelf or a diversity of resources are available on the shelf. Those are also actions we take as librarians to challenge censorship. I'd say also that we do that in collaboration with the faculty at Mt. SAC who work with us to ensure that we have an understanding of the curriculum and are able to provide the resources that are needed. Libraries also collaborate a lot with other folks, and in part of it is to support free expression and free access to ideas. We broadly support free access to the library as well. And some college libraries do restrict access to the materials and to the building to members of the college community. So students, staff, faculty.

Chisa Uyeki [00:19:36]:

But as a community college and a public college at Mt. SAC, our library is open, and we do regularly serve community members. So the 6th item is about access. This is really frequently talked about in terms of public community rooms and public libraries. And then the 7th item I really wanted to mention, because I think it's not something that necessarily people are aware of, which is that librarians are really champions of your right to privacy and confidentiality. So our library systems are made so that when you've checked an item out, we know you have it, and that's so that we can ask you to bring it back if you've forgotten to do so. But once you bring it back, we don't keep track of what you have checked out. And in part, our systems are set up that way because we could be asked by subpoena to provide information about what people had checked out. And so we don't want to know, and it's really not our business to know what different people have checked out.

Chisa Uyeki [00:20:40]:

And this goes back to, if you think of the fifties and the Cold War and the red scare, where people might have been looking at who had been checking out books on certain topics, that continues to happen. There were challenges for libraries after 911 to provide information on people who had borrowed books on topics that were thought to be connected to, even very broadly, to folks who may be a threat. So that protection is really important to the librarians at Mt. SAC. The challenge for us, however, is that it means that we can't do the same kind of assessment, evaluation, and tracking that other areas can do because we disconnect the who with the what, but we do that on purpose. I just wanted to for a moment talk a little bit more about our selection of materials for our library, just to give you a sense of how we do it. So I mentioned we talk with faculty. We review what the curriculum is in detail. We also take lots of recommendations, and we research.

Chisa Uyeki [00:21:48]:

We research the authors. We read reviews that have been written on books. We look at book lists. Generally, what we do is what we teach our students to do, which is utilize our critical thinking and analysis, which are the main skills that librarians teach in determining if sources are good sources and whether we agree or disagree with the content is never part of our decision and is never a criteria that we use in selecting an item. I wanted to really highlight, really make sure that everyone heard this, which is that it's not my library, it's not Monica's library, it's not Romelia's library. This is your library. Mt. SAC library is a library not just for our college, but for our community. And so it's our job to make sure that we're providing the resources that are needed.

Chisa Uyeki [00:22:42]:

And an example of that, right, is I'm a vegetarian. So I might say, oh, all we need are vegetarian cookbooks. But thankfully, well, I wouldn't do that. I even have non vegetarian cookbooks at my home. But we have a great cookbook collection that includes all different types of foods and resources. So that's a little bit of the background of how libraries are your champions for intellectual freedom and freedom to read. So what can we do to take action around book bannings? And there are a number of things that we can do. The most important thing that we can do is if we can vote to register or pre register.

Chisa Uyeki [00:23:27]:

Pre registering is if you're not 18 yet. If you're 16 or older in the state of California, you can pre register, and then you will be registered when you do turn 18. Another thing I want to encourage you to do is to read ban books, to really look at these stories that in some places, people don't have access to and learn about the lives of other people. It's one of the most powerful things that we can do to reduce polarization and bridge differences is to learn about other people and other people's experiences and also to utilize our imagination. So many of the challenge or band books that we've talked about are ones that are about people's lived experience. However, we should mention that over time, books have been banned, like Harry Potter has been banned because people felt religiously against wizards and witches and so did not want there to be books about that. Other books have been banned that include even things like Winnie the Pooh because they were challenged, because people didn't like the idea of animals talking, because that doesn't really happen. So many of the things that have triggered bans are really utilization of imagination, even things like science fiction, which they may not be able to find in reality.

Chisa Uyeki [00:24:51]:

And so therefore, people didn't want others to have access to that information. The other piece that's challenging there is that it's really someone else making decisions about what you or I can read or our children can read, rather than allowing us to make those decisions. So it's really also important to learn about the motivation behind book banning. I was really surprised to see the numbers that Monica showed, particularly for the state of California. We're a big state, so it makes sense. We'd have a lot. But when I looked at what some of the reasons were that folks had tried to challenge books, one of the things that I found was that it was some folks were trying to protect their children or their communities from stories that they felt were racist or stereotypical. And so rather than as the ones that are the top five this year, you could see those were stories that were to be uplifting and affirming of people of color and LGBTQ folks.

Chisa Uyeki [00:25:52]:

But there have been instances of challenges happening. And again, I read about some in California where it was an older book and they wanted to not have it because they didn't like the language that was used in it to describe people of color. So that's also, I think, an interesting component that we can think about. You also can support access to books by standing up against censorship. So if you hear of a school board thinking about removing books from school libraries, if you know of a city that's looking at changing things in their libraries, even if it's not local, you still can write letters and write in support for those books being accessible. You also can do things to support broadening libraries at various schools. There was a study done a number of years ago that found that home libraries of kids in Beverly Hills were larger than the school libraries of kids in south central. And so looking at what we can do to ensure more equity and access to books is another really important component.

Chisa Uyeki [00:27:04]:

You know, part of being registered to vote and part of actually what the role of the library is, is to make sure that you are an informed member of the citizenry. So I would say also to help yourself gain access to information about what's going on and what you'll find on the ballot and how those might impact folks who have been targeted for oppression or folks whose stories have been limited by censorship. The final thing that I wanted to share about taking action is one of the things that you can do is learn more about the books, right? And so this is a great resource called book Resumes, and it's from an organization called United against Book bans. And I encourage all of you to check out United against book bans. They have some things that you can look at and other actions you can take. Ideas. If you were going to speak at a school board meeting, they have some talking point ideas. So it's a great organization.

Chisa Uyeki [00:28:09]:

The book resumes are something that they've put together because when we hear about books that are banned, we often hear about those things that the folks that challenge the book wanted to focus on, rather than the rich and important content that is really the center of the book. Right. And so the book resumes do a great job of recentering the stories that the authors wanted to share. So those are some actions that you all can take. And again, if you look at United against book bands, there's some other actions there as well. So as we close out, thank you all so much for coming today. I love being in this space with you. I'm so glad that you were here and cared enough to come and talk to us and listen to us about challenges to censorship and all that we're doing.

Chisa Uyeki [00:29:04]:

Thanks again to the Mt. SAC Equity center. For all of their support. It's been fabulous to work with them. And thank you all for being here. Thank you for listening to the Mt. San Antonio College podcast brought to you by Mt. SACks Pod office and created in partnership with Avant House Media. Original music created and edited by Neera Azira. Be sure to check out our growing library of over 230 episodes and let us know your thoughts. You can reach me chisauecki at cuyeki.edu.

Chisa Uyeki [00:29:49]:

wishing you an amazing year and happy listening.