

Challenged Materials in Colorado Public Libraries, 2006

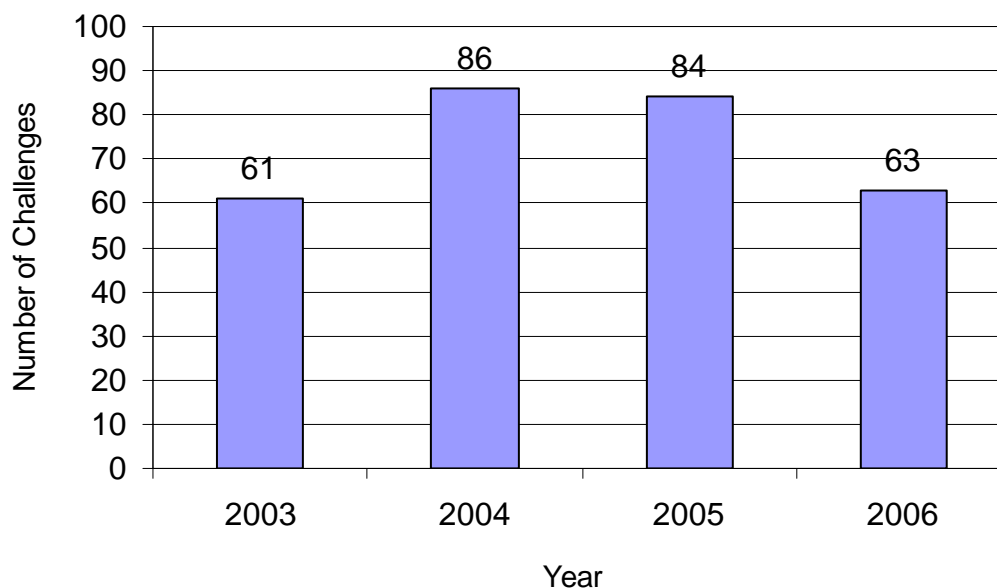
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December 6, 2007

According to the American Library Association, a challenge is “an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group . . . thereby restricting the access of others.”¹ The Library Research Service annually collects data on challenged materials as part of the Colorado Public Library Annual Report.

In 2006, out of the 115 public libraries in Colorado, 23 reported that they received a formal challenge during the year. There were a total of 89 individual challenges to books, materials, events, exhibits, and Internet-related services in the state’s public libraries. Challenges to Internet content or access policies are reported separately from materials and event challenges. There were 63 challenges to materials and events. This was the lowest number of challenges to materials and events since 2003 (see Chart 1).

Chart 1
Colorado Public Libraries, 2003 - 2006
Number of Challenges to Books, Materials, Events,
and Exhibits Reported



In 2006, six Colorado public libraries reported challenges to Internet content or access policies. A total of 26 individual challenges were reported. This is nearly four times the number of Internet-related challenges reported in 2005.

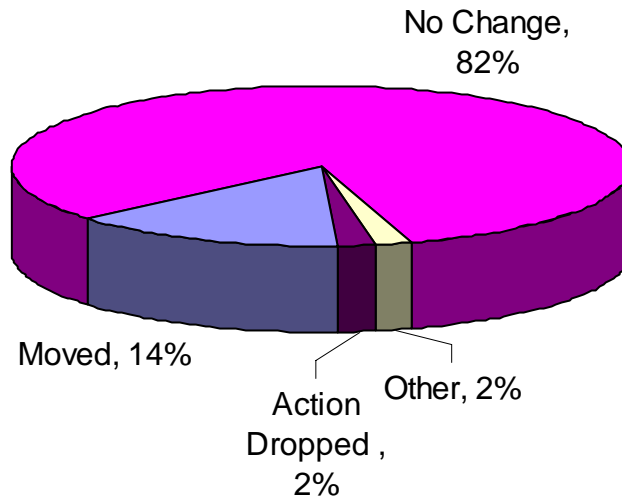


A follow-up survey was sent to all 23 libraries who reported a formal challenge. This survey requested the title, author, format, reason for the challenge, action taken by the library, and the date of the publication or incident regarding each challenge. Twenty of the twenty-three libraries responded to the follow-up survey.

Actions

The follow-up survey received detailed information for 49 challenges to books, materials, events, and exhibits. Of these challenges 40 (82%) resulted in no change being made by the staff regarding the location, availability, description, or classification of the item (see Chart 2). Seven items (14%) were moved to another part of the library or reclassified. The action was dropped by the individual who filed the challenge in one case (or 2%).

Chart 2
 Colorado Public Libraries, 2006
 Challenges to Books, Materials, Events and Exhibits
 by Type of Action Taken



Of the 26 Internet-related challenges reported in the Public Library Annual Report, the follow-up survey received information for 13 challenges. Six cases resulted in no change, in three cases the action was dropped, and in two cases the Internet-related matter was restricted. For the remaining one case, the reporting library chose other for the action but did not provide more detailed information.



Formats

Following the trend of the previous years, books were the most challenged format in 2006 according to the result of the follow-up survey. Almost half (47%) of all challenges in Colorado public libraries involved books (see Chart 3). Less than one-quarter (22%) involved Internet-related services (i.e. computer) and video materials accounted for less than one-fifth (17%) of the challenges. Challenges involving music CDs, periodicals, activities, and audio books together totaled over one-tenth (12%) of all challenges.

Chart 3

Colorado Public Libraries, 2006
 Formats of Materials Challenged

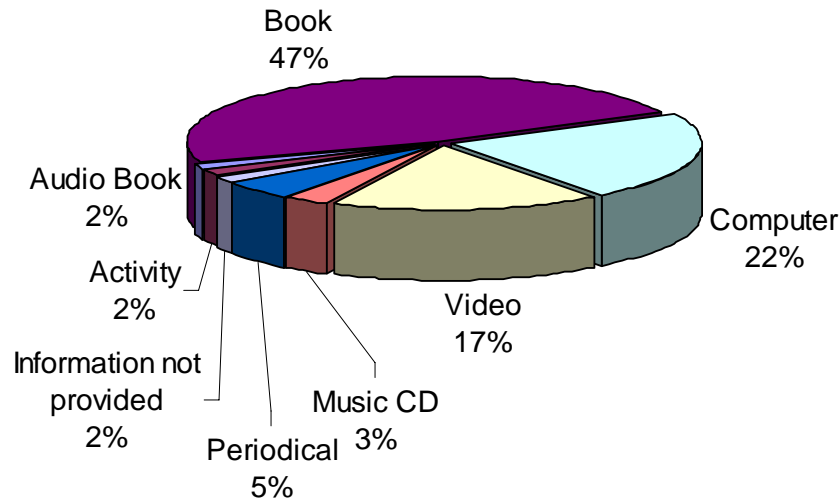
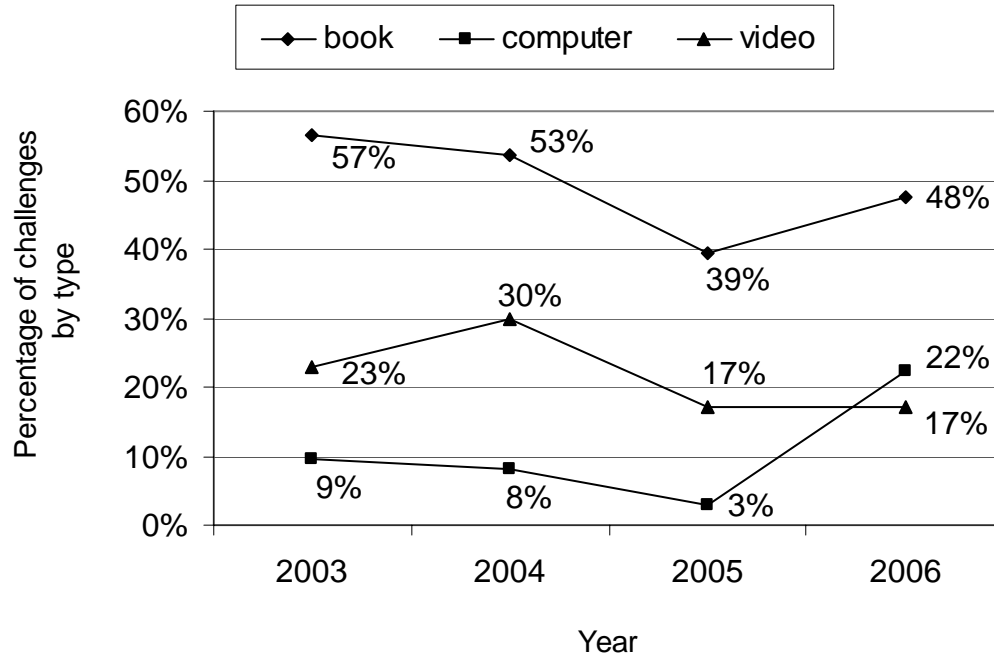


Chart 4
 Colorado Public Libraries, 2003 - 2006
 Book, Computer, and Video Challenges
 as a Percentage of Total Challenges by Year



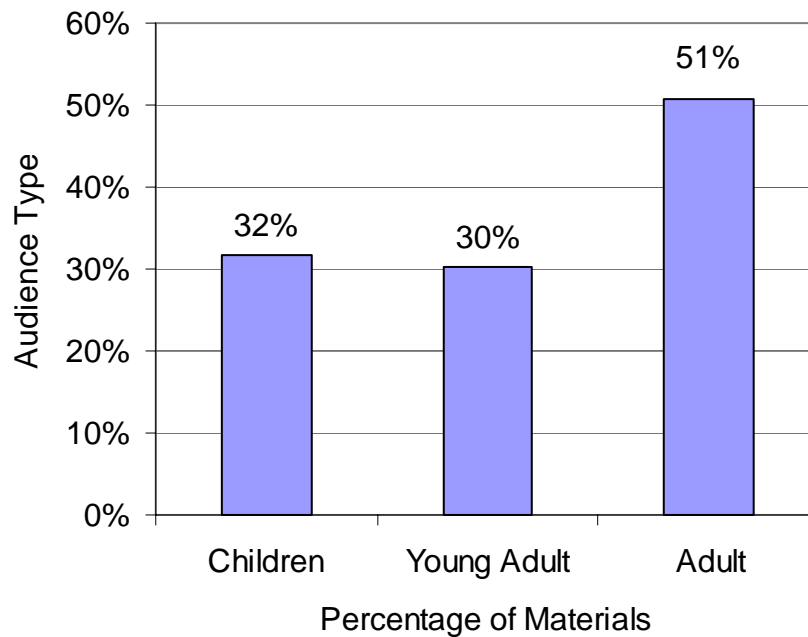
In 2004, the figures indicated a possible trend in which videos would begin to account for a greater proportion of challenged materials. However, a more recent examination of the types of materials challenged indicated that computer (i.e. Internet-related) services are increasingly being challenged. The percentage of Internet-related challenges rose dramatically from 3 percent in 2005 to 22 percent in 2006. In spite of these fluctuations, books continue to be the most challenged format.



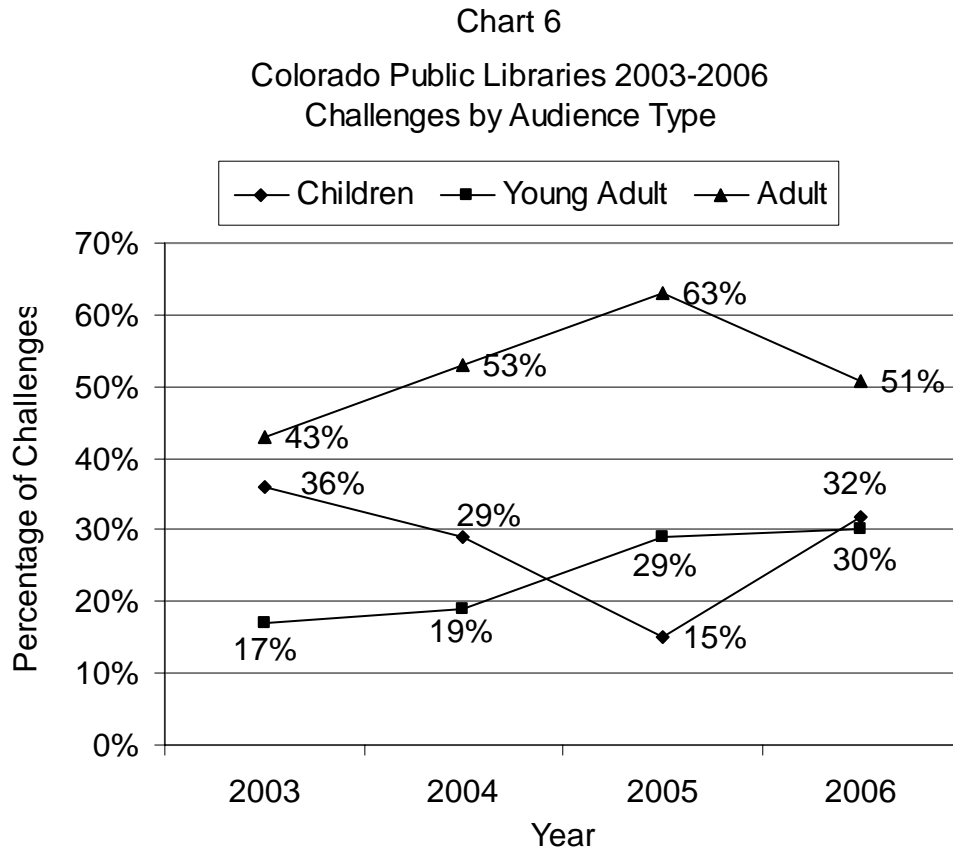
Audience/Age Group

In the follow-up survey, more than one audience/age group type may be chosen for each formal challenge. More than half (51%) of all challenges for 2006 were considered challenges to adult materials (see Chart 5). In 2006, there was only one more challenge to children's materials (20) than to young adult (19) materials.

Chart 5
 Colorado Public Libraries, 2006
 Challenges by Audience Type



Although challenges to adult materials fell from 63 percent in 2005 to 51 percent in 2006 (see Chart 6), they continue to be challenged more frequently than materials in other age categories. Interestingly the percentage of challenges to children's or young adult materials fluctuates rather more from year to year. The proportion of challenges to young adult materials grew steadily from a low of 17 percent in 2003 to 30 percent in 2006. Whereas challenges to children's materials went from 36 percent in 2003 to a record low 15 percent in 2005, and then rose again in 2006 to 30 percent.



Reasons for Challenges

Responding libraries are also asked to report the patron's reason for the challenge. Multiple reasons can be selected. In 2006, the reasons most commonly cited were due to materials being sexually explicit or unsuited for the intended age group (See Table 1). The "other" category includes reasons not listed on the follow-up survey.



Table 1
Colorado Public Libraries, 2006
Challenges by Reason

Reason for Challenge	Frequency of Reason
sexually explicit	29
unsuited to age group	29
nudity	15
homosexuality	11
offensive language	10
violence	5
insensitivity	4
anti-family	4
other	3
political viewpoint	2
religious viewpoint	2
drugs	2
racism	1
sexism	1
sex education	1
occult/Satanism	1
anti-ethnic	0
abortion	0
suicide	0

Challenged Titles

The only title to be named multiple times in a formal challenge to non-Internet related materials in 2006 was Justin Richardson's *And Tango Makes Three*. This title was mentioned in two separate challenges. Richardson's book was also the most frequently challenged book nationally in 2006 according to the ALA.²

The remaining 61 challenges to books, materials, events, and exhibits were a variety of individual titles.

Go to

http://www.lrs.org/documents/plstat06/challenges_details_06.pdf to view the entire Challenges to Materials at Colorado's Public Libraries report for 2006. The challenge reports for previous years may also be viewed at http://www.lrs.org/pub_stats.php.

Sources:

¹ ALA Challenged and Banned Books page (accessed October 12, 2007)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/challengedbanned/challengedbanned.htm#wbc>

² ALA. "And Tango Makes Three" tops ALA's 2006 list of most challenged books. March 6, 2007 (accessed November 13, 2007)

<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=News&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=151926>

Challenges to Materials at Colorado's Public Libraries, 2006 (accessed October 12, 2007)

http://www.lrs.org/documents/plstat06/challenges_details_06.pdf

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Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

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