

## 809. Conduct in the Library: A Special Policy Review

Due to a Board request, staff has reviewed the Conduct Policy as it relates to the issue of sleeping in the Library.

### Proposal:

Recommend changing the Conduct Policy to prohibit sleeping in the Library except for attended children.

### Issues:

Sleeping in public libraries is an often-debated topic. A conversation about sleeping often turns into a discussion of serving homeless people because many assume that sleeping people in a library are homeless; that may be true in some instances but not all. In fact, if we choose to address the behavior it must be enforced equally with no regard as to whether or not a person appears to be homeless or if they are a perfectly-groomed twenty- year- old taking a nap during a study session. There is little doubt in my mind that when we receive complaints about people sleeping in the Library the perception is that it is only homeless people who are sleeping, and if a ban is enforced some people will be upset when it is applied to them.

Much of the literature addresses the need for libraries to be a safe haven and provide a learning environment for users of all ages regardless of their social and living status. We support that sentiment, and believe that libraries play a role in promoting sensitivity among the public toward the homeless. We want to encourage their library use, recognizing that some people have many obstacles to overcome. We work with Shelter House and provide library cards to their residents. Staff discussions have included many statements expressing compassion for people who have no place else to go and hope that we can be a part of Iowa City efforts to provide safe places for people.

In 2001 during a regular Conduct Policy review the staff recommendation included banning sleeping in the Library. The recommendation was based on concerns expressed by patrons about people sleeping in the Library. The Board chose not to make the change at that time. Concerns about sleeping have continued to increase and are often expressed to Library staff and the Board. I have no doubt that library use is affected by people sleeping. People are uncomfortable being in close proximity to a sleeping person, and some parents are reluctant to allow their children to come to the library because of the sleeping issue. In a busy facility with only a limited number of seats a person sleeping inhibits the use of furniture around them. The fact is that our mission-related services are negatively impacted because we allow sleeping.

A quick survey of larger public libraries in Iowa reveals that five of the seven who responded ban sleeping. That is very common in most urban areas. Typically a sleeping person is awakened once, reminded of the policy, and told if they need to be awakened again they will have to leave for the day.

I am attaching several articles related to this topic. Many others are easily found. It is a difficult issue with no easy solution.

Staff Recommendation:

Adopt the proposed change to ban sleeping in the library.

Prepared by:

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