

LEGISLATURE

Mississippi libraries ordered to delete academic research in response to state laws

Lawmaker says the removal of scholarly material from library databases would provoke backlash in a state where minorities have fought for equal access to education.



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A state commission scrubbed academic research from a database used by Mississippi libraries and public schools — a move made to comply with recent state laws changing what content can be offered in libraries.

The Mississippi Library Commission ordered the deletion of two research collections that might violate state law, a March 31 internal memo obtained by Mississippi Today shows. One of the now deleted research collections focused on “race relations” and the other on “gender studies.”

The memo, written by Mississippi Library Commission Executive Director Hulen Bivins, confirmed the scrubbing of scholarly material from a database used by publicly funded schools, libraries, community colleges, universities and state agencies. The database, MAGNOLIA, is funded by the Mississippi Legislature.

Bivins’ memo was emailed to a small group of library and academic administrators who oversee the state-run research database, telling them state laws affecting library collections prompted the deletion.

“In this challenging time with many different viewpoints concerning library materials and material content your willingness to work with these issues is appreciated,” Bivins wrote. “The deletion of these two databases

shall be permanent until such time as when the Legislature changes their position regarding the content of materials made available in Mississippi libraries.”

The memo did not cite the specific state laws that prompted the deletion of research material related to race and gender. But in a phone interview, Bivins cited a [2023 law](#) that regulates digital resources available to minors in public libraries, focusing on “obscene materials.” Bivins said there were other laws that warranted the deletion, but he could not remember all of the specific laws when asked.

Bivins said the Library Commission received a tip in late February or early March that the two databases might violate state law. By the end of March, the material had been deleted.

“In all cases we comply with state law,” Bivins said. “We’re not acting fast. We are acting as we discern.”

The two research collections state officials ordered for deletion included material from professional journals, conference papers, books, student dissertations, periodicals and newspaper articles.

The [Gender Studies Database](#) included academic content from 377 peer reviewed journals. Subjects include, “Gender inequality, Masculinity, Post-feminism (and) Gender identity.” The other deleted database, titled [“Race Relations Abstracts”](#) focused on a wide range of subjects, including “Ethnic studies, Discrimination, Immigration studies (and) Ideology.”



A screenshot of the MAGNOLIA website. Credit: Special to Mississippi Today

A current employee at a public library, who was granted anonymity by Mississippi Today to discuss internal orders handed down by state officials, said the research collections are compiled by librarians in a process that can take months. Students and academics use the collections to wade through a vast assemblage of research, a process that could now be upended based on political motives, the employee said.

“You have to know what you’re looking for rather than clicking on the guide and having all this information here where you can go through it,” the employee said. “That’s the big problem, it’s crippling a lot of the research. It takes so much more time to have to individually go through every book.”

In his memo, Bivins said individual libraries could potentially maintain two databases at their own cost through EBSCO, the platform that feeds information into MAGNOLIA, the state run database. But library employees were left uncertain about what sort of academic material might violate state law, and what other research could be wiped from the state database without warning.

Democratic Rep. Jeffrey Harness, a Black lawmaker who has spoken out against a recent law passed by the Legislature to ban diversity, equity and inclusion programs, said the removal of scholarly material from library databases would provoke backlash in a state where minorities have fought for equal access to education.

“There was a lot of sweat and hard work put into this research. This is an attempt to erase history and make history the way they want it to be interpreted,” Harness said. “When you do things like this, take away that important content, they’re creating a powder keg. I’m just going to tell you, the Republicans are creating a powder keg. People are not going to stand for this.”

The memo was sent out on the same day Mississippi lawmakers filed their final version of House Bill 1193. The measure bans diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, programs and a list of “divisive concepts” from public schools across the state education system.

The **DEI ban approved by the Legislature** had been a subject of public debate for months. The measure is headed to Gov. Tate Reeves, who is likely to sign the bill into law and let it take effect on July 1. Bivins said he had not heard about the state DEI ban and that it did not influence his memo.

The wiping of academic material unfolded at the same time lawmakers were at loggerheads over the state budget. They ultimately adjourned their regular session without passing a budget to fund state entities, including the Library Commission, which receives about \$1.3 million to operate the MAGNOLIA database.

The Commission has asked for another state appropriation to maintain the database, but hasn’t received any assurance their request would be honored.

