

Faculty Status for Academic Librarians

Faculty status for academic librarians has been a contentious issue throughout my time as an academic librarian. Shortly after I became a librarian, the American Association of University Professors at their 1972 Annual Conference issued a Joint Statement on Faculty Status for College and University Librarians. The statement recognizes the “unique and indispensable” role that librarians play in the educational process. The AAUP feels that this role deserves the protection that faculty status and tenure grant to members of the academy. Many academic institutions in North Carolina have a long tradition of faculty status for librarians, while others do not. East Carolina University for example, granted faculty status and tenure to librarians almost from its earliest days. Other universities and colleges had similar arrangements by the early 1970s. However the flagship institutions in North Carolina (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, Duke and Wake Forest) tended to not provide tenure and rank to their librarians. These institutions instead provided annual or multi-year renewable contracts that for the most part mirrored some of the benefits of academic tenure.

Recently, budget issues have forced colleges and universities to re-examine the granting of faculty status and tenure to librarians. Some have questioned that there might be a better model of librarians. In fact, in July, 2013, the Governor of North Carolina signed a budget bill that eliminated tenure for all public school K-12

teachers. Some state universities, notably the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington have eliminated tenure for most of their professional librarians. Other institutions are looking at hybrid models that provide some librarians with tenure track positions while other new hires are given one-year-fixed-term slots. The idea here is that if budgets

tenure and faculty status for librarians that already have them, the long range plans seem to be to develop other “models” that encourage the hiring of more and more non-tenure track librarians. These reasons are the primary cause of the decline of faculty status among college and university librarians in North Carolina. Similar plans are afoot nationally in community college systems to reduce the

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get tight, the librarians on one-year contracts can be let go when their contracts expire, while the tenure track staff has multi-year or tenured contracts. Faculty at academic institutions have long been required to carry a three-part work assignment consisting of teaching, research and service. Some librarians do not wish to do some parts (primarily the research and service aspects) of these assignments and instead only want to focus on “being a librarian.” Another reason for threatening the faculty status and tenure of librarians may be a more ominous political one: going after librarians, politically speaking, may be a safe way to begin a more general dismantling of tenure elsewhere in the university system.

I won't go into the details of why administrators think librarians are a good target to pick on, but I will say that have done this in the past, and probably will try it again in the future. Since they can't simply revoke

number of new full-time faculty and replace them with part-time non-tenured employees. These new models tend to reduce the number of traditional librarian jobs for new librarians in academic libraries.

I believe it is time for academic librarians and their university colleagues who may be next in line for the tenure axe to stand up against any administrative plans to erode the faculty status or tenure of librarians. It's time to stop picking on us and get back on the tenure track. It's long past time for the Executive Board of the North Carolina Library Association to speak out on this issue. Instead of looking at picking on librarians, administrators should re-affirm the need for librarians to have the security that tenure and faculty status provide. We need to have what the AAUP calls the enabling of “men and women of ability to earn a living.”

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