



Support for University Librarians

Approved by the Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education

January 24, 2025

In light of the 2024 decisions by the administration of Columbia College Chicago to lay off much of their library staff, and of the administration at Western Illinois University to lay off *all* tenured and tenure-track faculty librarians,¹ the Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education asks the IBHE to support and publicly promote the retention of professional librarians as fundamental to any institution of higher education in the state through endorsement of the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) Statement on the Importance of Librarians in Academic Libraries.

University librarians with a Masters of Library Science (MLS) degrees—some with tenure in faculty lines—have long been core to the mission of any college or university. They are not dispensable. University librarians and libraries support IBHE’s *A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth*:

1. Librarians and libraries are key in the ability to practice “scholarship and research that creates new knowledge.”²
2. Sustainability, equity, and economic growth—key goals in *A Thriving Illinois*—all depend upon faculty and students having reliable access to library databases and the many support services that are curated and sustained by professional librarians.

In addition to supporting the state’s strategic plan, professional librarians are expected with regard to IBHE approval of new academic degree programs.

3. In Illinois’ Administrative Rules Section 1050.30 “Criteria for Approval” of new units of instruction, research or public service at public universities describe expectations regarding libraries and their maintenance:

¹ Because WIU librarians are members of UPI, the layoffs of many do not take effect until May 2025. The librarians are advocating to save their jobs: savewiulibrarians.org

² See page 5 of *A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth*.

From 1050.30(a)(4)(C), "Library holdings and acquisitions, owned or contracted for by the institution, that are necessary to support high quality instruction and scholarship in the unit of instruction, research and public service, are conveniently available and accessible, and can be maintained."³

4. Beyond the IBHE's own approval processes, national accreditation and reviews for specific academic and professional degree programs require proof of sufficient library resources. Meeting with professional librarians is part of site visits for degree program accreditations and reaccreditations.⁴ Without librarians to develop and maintain library resources for a higher ed institution's degree programs, programs are in danger of not securing or retaining programmatic accreditation. For example, there is a social worker shortage in Illinois, so a loss of library resources could impact social work program accreditation which is a crucial component for student recruitment and graduates' job placement. Another area in which librarians play an important role in the accreditation process is in the health professions, such as Nursing and Surgical Technology. These are also areas in which Illinois is also experiencing worker shortages. Librarians do a tremendous amount of work to prepare for visits from accreditors in these areas.

More broadly, the removal of professional librarians undermines higher education and negatively affects students, faculty, staff, and the wider public in the following ways:

5. Deprofessionalizing the library faculty involves either eliminating what they **contribute to a higher education institution or assigning their job functions to library workers with minimal training**. This is parallel to hiring adjunct faculty to replace all tenured lines. Many university librarians hold advanced degrees in addition to the MLS. It is already common for librarians to hold an additional masters in a subject field and is becoming increasingly common for librarians to hold doctorates in subject fields.
6. Professional librarians conduct their own research and **support the research of faculty and students**. A Ph.D. is required for faculty librarian status at public universities, or an ALA accredited master's degree in Library Science with an additional advanced or professional degree. One of the Standards for Libraries in Higher Education from the Association of College & Research Libraries, is that "Library personnel contribute to the knowledge base of the profession" (8.4).

³ 1050.50(a) is for "Units of Instruction Approved after December 23, 2008."

⁴ To take just one example, the Council on Social Work Education for initial accreditation and reaccreditation includes in its standards that "The program has sufficient access to library resources that provide social work and other informational and educational resources to achieve its mission" (4.4.3). More examples of HLC and program accreditation expectations regarding the professional support of librarians can be found here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DtFVteqK-YH_BRrqKFqE5ivdu_fPufMxXR3fMqWUooo/edit?gid=0#gid=0

7. **Without librarians, maintenance of library databases, on which faculty and students depend, and the updating of the holdings catalog will not be possible.** Without professional librarians, unreported database problems will occur, and crucial catalog updates will not be implemented. Academic databases and catalogs are not static; they require regular updating and repair.
8. Scholars and researchers depend upon professional librarians not only to **maintain access to databases and collections (including archives), but also to manage digital scholarship, and to access research-related resources and continuing education about technological and design changes to databases or collections.** Librarians are also instrumental in assisting with intellectual copyright and patenting, and in helping to manage Open Access at their institutions (this can include letting researchers know about opportunities open to them).
9. The expertise of professional librarians is vital for all areas of information services and **information literacy** for students, faculty, staff, and the wider public. They support the development of research skills among students, including finding peer-reviewed sources and bibliographical instruction. Without access to library databases and knowledge of how to use them, students will be more likely to turn to non-academic resources, with negative impacts.
10. Academic librarians do a lot of work to **ensure that online students receive equitable access** to collections, services, and information literacy instruction. Without professional librarians, it is likely the needs of that student population would be ignored.
11. **Librarians play a leadership role in the development of Open Educational Resources initiatives at many institutions.** Professional and faculty librarians are leading initiatives that are saving Illinois students money and helping retain students for whom textbook expense is a considerable barrier.
12. By removing professional librarians, the cost of accessing appropriate information in terms of the time and energy for students increases significantly. Librarians lower the opportunity cost of quality information because librarians aid students in seeking the information they need or educate students in retrieving information for themselves. Without librarians, the library becomes effectively unusable for many, perhaps most, students. By removing professional librarians, a library becomes a warehouse at best. If a library is confusing or indifferent to student usage, it becomes a hindrance to learning. Libraries become more and more indifferent to students when fewer professional librarians are physically present to help answer information literacy questions and academic concerns. Indifference greatly increases opportunity costs—as students are

left on their own to navigate research libraries.

13. Likewise, the state of Illinois awards MAP and other grants to Illinois students, and the state legislature expects Illinois colleges and universities to retain these students it has invested millions of taxpayer dollars in. Creating a less useable library will not aid student retention efforts.
14. Librarians bring their expertise to many committees and group at universities.
15. Librarians who are part of faculty unions cannot be eliminated, and their labor outsourced to others, without violating a union contract, triggering lawsuits. This financially harms the state.
16. **Much of what professional librarians in higher education do is invisible, but will be felt if their presence vanishes.**
17. For these and other reasons to support faculty librarians at a university, see The American Library Association's Association of College and Research Libraries [Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians](#)

For all these reasons, the Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education encourages the IBHE to continue to expect that Illinois degree-granting higher education institutions will hire and retain professional librarians in order to fulfill its mission and meet library program needs.⁵

Toward this end, FAC asks for the IBHE to support The Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)'s Statement on the Importance of Librarians in Academic Libraries <https://www.carli.illinois.edu/membership/Importance-of-Librarians>:

On August 9, 2024, state university Western Illinois University (WIU) laid off all its librarians (except for the library dean), nine faculty librarians in total, effective May 2025.^[i] This follows Columbia College Chicago's May 2024 decision to lay off five staff, including the director, four of whom were librarians.^[ii]

What has happened at WIU and Columbia is part of a growing national climate of budget cuts, mergers, and closures in higher education, for colleges and their

⁵ For more information, The Association of College & Research Libraries describes [Standards for Libraries in Higher Education](#). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions also provides [trend reports](#) on how the work of librarians is evolving.

libraries.^[iii] CARLI members seek to participate in the conversations around the impact of shrinking access to information services in higher education on students, faculty, and other stakeholders. With this statement specifically, CARLI emphatically proclaims the importance of librarians in higher education libraries. Librarians (and libraries) are not an excisable luxury that is somehow detached from an institution's educational excellence but are instead critical components of campuses and the academic experience. Their work is inextricably interwoven with student success and well-being for the duration of the student's academic career, and they are important colleagues who contribute to the essential work of faculty.

Librarians **serve the interdisciplinary teaching and research mission of higher education institutions**. Every interaction with a student, undergraduate or graduate, is aimed at student success; that is, producing a successful, skilled scholar or professional who is informed by perspectives both within and beyond their course of study. Librarians also enhance the work of faculty in the roles of co-educators and partners in research.

Librarians connect students and faculty with available resources and services. They ensure that patrons can discover and access carefully curated collections that are scoped to the institution's mission, curriculum, student needs, and faculty interests. Without librarians making these connections, students and faculty would be left without navigators. Professional faculty librarians are skilled in these areas in a way that staff are not. Campuses need human beings who can leverage technology to align with the mission and population of the school. Technical solutions will never be plug and play. Library staff are experts in using systems for immediate patron needs, but professional librarians use library systems for higher-level, specialized functions such as managing electronic resources, and configure systems, and create policies to support research, instruction, and collection management.

Academic librarians are on the frontlines of the information revolution. Access to global networks of scholarly communication is important for the economic health of our communities. Such access is also necessary for our students and faculty to contribute to vital political and cultural discussions that will shape the future of our world. Digital technologies have decentralized communication networks in ways that hold both promise and peril for the future. Academic librarians fill important leadership roles as campuses respond to new technology such as generative AI, Open Educational Resources, and the open access movement. ^[iv] ^[v] They are building healthy communities to collectively negotiate for an information ecosystem that is both equitable and affordable. Librarians also serve as advocates for intellectual freedom and the role of academic freedom in research and scholarship. For decades, academic

librarians have anchored the complex information needs of campuses, and that need for information professionals is more pressing now than ever.

The role that academic librarians fill is not immediately visible without a deepened understanding of the work that is happening every day in every library, a day that includes contact with a spectrum of patrons from a variety of backgrounds who have needs ranging from deficits in basic information skills, to social and life needs, to deep exploration of niche subject areas and the communication of innovative ideas. Today's academic libraries make resource discovery and access seamless for students and faculty. Library services and spaces are critical supports for academic success, career preparations, and student well-being. Professional-level library personnel are essential for the development of resources, systems, services and space that reflect the radical and transformative changes which are occurring in higher education and in society. Libraries are a vibrant, central piece of every campus.^[vi] CARLI and its members see firsthand the library's value and contributions to learning, creativity, retention, graduation, and skill development. Our members' contribution to Illinois higher education is lasting and intertwined with their parent institutions' missions.

For all these reasons, CARLI asks all stakeholders within the higher education community to advocate for protecting academic librarians so they may continue contributing to the robust environment of learning and innovation within Illinois. We want Illinois students to be the most highly educated and engaged population possible. Such an aspiration points to high employment, innovative approaches to problem solving, and an understanding of diverse viewpoints. ^[vii]