ACRL Standards for the Employment, Promotion, and Tenure/Continuing Appointment of Academic Librarians

Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 27, 2026.

These standards consolidate and update the previous ACRL Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians, ACRL Standards for Academic Librarians Without Faculty Status, and the Standard for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians.

Executive Summary

In brief, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) support faculty status for academic librarians and the "corresponding entitlement to rank, promotion, tenure,[1] compensation, leaves, and research funds." ACRL affirms that academic librarians must be able to exercise independent judgment, academic freedom, and agency in the performance of professional duties. Librarians will adopt an academic form of shared governance within their libraries similar in manner and structure to other non-library faculties on the campus. Sabbatical and other scholarly activity leaves/release time will be available to academic librarians consistent with institutional standards for non-librarian faculty. Regardless of role and status, academic librarians will be eligible for funding to support their professional development, scholarly, and service activities.

The hiring and appointment process for academic librarians shall follow the same procedures for others of similar rank and status at the institution. Librarians are to be assigned responsibilities matched to their competencies and the needs of the institution. Librarians will have latitude in fulfilling their responsibilities within the parameters of their position. Librarians' work performance will be regularly reviewed according to the requirements of their position, which often include both their job performance and contributions to the profession through scholarly activities and service. Tenure/continuing appointment, promotion, and review standards and procedures will

be published and uniformly applied, reviewers must have access to all relevant documentation, and reviewers may include both peers and those higher in rank positionally and hierarchically. Librarians must also have access to grievance procedures.

Introduction

Academic librarian status varies widely within community colleges, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral granting institutions. ACRL and AAUP Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians supports faculty status for academic librarians and the "corresponding entitlement to rank, promotion, tenure, compensation, leaves, and research funds." To ensure that their rights, privileges, and responsibilities reflect their integral role in the mission of their institutions, ACRL has developed the following standards for employers of academic librarians.

[1] ACRL recognizes that not all academic librarians have access to tenure, despite its clear importance. For the purposes of this document, use of the word tenure is inclusive of tenure-like statuses that academic librarians hold, such as continuing appointment.

These standards are intended to serve as guidelines and may need minor adjustment to conform to existing institutional procedures. Any contractual procedures must be observed, and titles may vary by institution. ACRL's Statement on the Terminal Professional Degree, Certification, and Licensing for Academic Librarians complements this document.

Academic Freedom

As stated in the ACRL Statement on Academic Freedom and ACRL Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians, "Academic freedom is indispensable to librarians in their roles as teachers and researchers." Without academic freedom, librarians are limited in their ability to develop collections, provide access to resources and information, teach information and data literacy, provide safe spaces to scholars of all levels, contribute to publishing and open access efforts, and pursue their own research.

Academic librarians are entitled to the protection of academic freedom, regardless of rank or status. Censorship of any type is unacceptable whether individual or organizational. Academic librarians must be free to provide access to information regardless of content. Furthermore, academic librarians who hold faculty status, regardless of tenure or full-time status, are entitled to academic freedom as set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, formulated by the Association of American Colleges and the AAUP.

Governance

Academic librarians will adopt shared governance in their libraries similar in manner and structure to non-library faculties in the institution. As librarians advance the enhancement of the institution's mission, strategic priorities, curriculum, and governance, they will also hold membership in the faculty senate or equivalent governing body. They are to have the same degree of representation as non-library faculty on all college or university governing bodies. Maintaining equivalent representation affirms librarians' roles as teachers and researchers and supports communication and collaboration with governance bodies. Librarians will participate in the development of policies and procedures for their library and their institution including the hiring, review, retention, promotion, and tenure/continuing appointment of their peers.

Support for Professional Development and Scholarly Activity

Sabbatical and other scholarly activity leaves/release time will be available to academic librarians consistent with institutional standards for non-librarian faculty. Regardless of role and status, academic librarians will be eligible for funding to support their professional development, scholarly, and service activities. In particular, if a librarian's role or path to promotion requires a level of professional development, scholarship, or

service, funds will be available to support these efforts at the level necessary for them to achieve these career milestones.

Hiring and Appointment

The hiring and appointment process for academic librarians shall follow the same procedures for others of similar rank and status at the institution. Measures will be taken to ensure a fair and equitable review of all candidates in relation to the stated qualifications for the position, including the appointment of academic librarians to the search committee.

The terms and conditions of every appointment will be stated and confirmed in writing, and copies of all relevant documents, including the official document of appointment, shall be given to the appointee. Subsequent extensions or modifications of an appointment will be stated and confirmed in writing. Librarians applying with previous experience and/or degrees may negotiate an appointment at a rank or tenure/continuing appointment status in line with the stated requirements thereof, including time toward tenure/continuing appointment as appropriate. Contracts for non-tenure-track academic librarians/library faculty will be renewed in an equitable manner, following similar guidelines to non-tenure-track, non-librarian faculty.

Salaries and fringe benefits will be equal to others of similar rank and status at the institution with equivalent education, experience, or responsibility. Salary scales will be adjusted in an equitable manner to align with the contract period and full- or part-time status, as indicated. Academic librarians will be appointed by a written contract of no less than one academic year, unless it is for a short-term replacement, such as a visiting professor appointment, parental or medical leave, or to meet a temporary staffing need. The contract will state the terms and conditions of service and grant security of employment for the contractual period. Academic librarians who assume additional responsibilities within the organization for an interim period will have job descriptions, compensation/release time, and workload adjustments granted.

Probationary terms and appointments

Academic librarians typically serve a probationary period, though the type and duration vary by appointment type. Librarians in staff or non-tenure-track roles with probationary periods will have a clearly defined initial period during which dismissal procedures may differ. Librarians with faculty appointments are generally considered probationary until they achieve tenure, continuing appointment, or an equivalent status. However, probationary appointments, even for a fixed or stated term, carry an expectation of renewal until the end of the agreed upon term (e.g. a 2 year temporary appointment) or conversion to a permanent employment status, such as tenure/continuing appointment.

Promotion and Tenure/Continuing Appointment

The basic criterion for tenure/continuing appointment and/or promotion in rank is to perform professional level tasks that contribute to the educational, research, and service

mission of the institution, often augmented by contributions to the profession as a whole. While practices will vary from institution to institution, academic librarians will be evaluated based on a combination of job performance in librarianship (often substituted for the teaching requirement non-library faculty have), service, and scholarly activities appropriate to the needs of their position and institution. The evaluation process often includes input from library peers or colleagues of a higher rank and may include external review by qualified library professionals outside of the librarian's institution. There will be flexibility and fairness in addressing a request to apply for tenure/continuing appointment and/or promotion earlier or later than the candidate's expected timeline.

Evidence of satisfactory job performance may be judged by librarian colleagues, members of the academic community outside the library, and/or professional colleagues outside the academic institution according to the standards of the institution.

Examples of scholarly activities and service that may be included in the evaluation can be found in the ACRL Framework for Impactful Scholarship and Metrics.

Promotion

Academic librarians will be eligible for promotion through ranks based on their professional proficiency and effectiveness regardless of faculty status, and in alignment with institutional standards. While promotion practices and ranks (e.g. assistant/associate/full librarian, librarian I-IV, etc.) will vary from institution to institution, academic librarians will be evaluated based on a combination of job performance, service, and scholarly activities appropriate to the needs of their position and institution. Should an institution not have a promotion structure in place, it is strongly recommended that they create one to properly recognize the increasing expertise of librarians who have been working at the institution for multiple years and those who join the institution with experience and expertise.

Tenure / Continuing Appointment

Academic librarians will be covered by a stated tenure/continuing appointment policy equivalent to that of non-librarian faculty. Tenure, or continuing appointment, is defined as an institutional commitment to permanent employment to be terminated only for adequate cause (for example, incompetence, malfeasance, financial exigency) and only after due process. The relationship between tenure/continuing appointment and rank shall be the same for library faculty as for non-library faculty in the institution.

Termination and Sanctions

Termination of Appointments by the Institution

Termination of an appointment may be made by the institution for just cause and through academic due process. ACRL recommends that any termination process involve adequate notice, peer review, a written statement of adequate cause, and

access to a grievance procedure. Dismissal will not be used to restrain librarians in their exercise of academic freedom.

In cases where termination is due to institutional financial exigency, there will be librarian representation on the governance body that participates in the determination that a condition of financial exigency exists or is imminent, and that all feasible alternatives to termination of appointments have been pursued.

Non-reappointment

As most appointments carry an expectation of renewal, an academic librarian will be explicitly informed of a decision not to renew an appointment at the earliest possible date. The academic librarian will be given a statement of reasons for non-reappointment by those responsible for the decision and an opportunity to be heard by the appropriate grievance committee.

Procedures for imposition of sanctions

If the conduct of a librarian does not constitute adequate cause for dismissal but is sufficiently grave to justify imposition of a severe sanction, such as suspension from service for a stated period, there will be a proceeding to impose such a sanction.

If the conduct of a librarian justifies the imposition of a minor sanction, such as a reprimand, the librarian will be notified of the basis of the proposed sanction. The librarian will have an opportunity to persuade the appropriate governing body that the proposed sanction should not be imposed. A librarian who believes that a major or minor sanction has been incorrectly imposed may appeal to the appropriate grievance committee for reconsideration.

Grievance procedures

If an amicable resolution to a concern or issue cannot be reached, the institution will provide a grievance procedure to ensure fairness and due process. The process must be accessible, clearly defined, impartial, and equitable. Decisions will be based on facts, documentation, and testimony. Librarians must be informed of grievance procedures, their rights, and applicable institutional policies or collective bargaining agreements. Librarians are protected from retaliation. The process must be transparent, timely, and confidential.

About the Standards

This statement consolidates and updates three prior standards (ACRL Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians*,* ACRL Standards for Academic Librarians Without Faculty Status and the Standard for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians). This work was undertaken by a joint subcommittee of New Roles and Changing Landscapes and Value of Academic Libraries members chaired by Amanda Koziura. Members included:

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