

Perspective on Tenure for I.U. Librarians: How Do We Define and Support Tenure at I.U.?

by Andrea M. Morrison

In a 2011 Indiana University Libraries Faculty Council (IULFC) ballot, librarians voted that promotion and tenure procedures will become campus-specific. Some campuses are in the process of developing procedures and some already have them. No matter how our final procedures will vary campus to campus, we share the bond of academic status and tenure for librarians, and, especially now, we need to think about what these principles mean to us individually and as a faculty. Although our shared criteria for promotion and tenure remain as stated in the *Indiana University Faculty Handbook*, even those may change as the result of our in-depth review of the tenure process.

Moreover, we lose the common bond of the *Indiana University Library Faculty Handbook*. At its November 22, 2011 meeting, IULFC voted to move to a new model of publishing policies for I.U. librarians and not to revise the *Handbook*. As librarians, we will have the opportunity to provide input and vote on all proposed changes. Thinking about what tenure means for librarians will help us prepare for these changes. It is important that librarians maintain their engagement in tenure issues and be knowledgeable in order to build for the future!

This article is the first of two; it will discuss benefits and rewards of tenure for librarians in selected literature. It will also discuss literature on the concept and rewards of tenure for librarians and specific support programs, but not procedures or criteria. Most importantly, this article is a call for faculty to stay engaged in the tenure process! The second part, in the next *InULA Notes*, will provide feedback from working and retired librarians on tenure status: what does it mean to them and how has it affected them in their careers? Information from working and retired librarians will be solicited – so look for the opportunity to share your ideas with your colleagues!

Defining tenure

Tenure provides librarians with academic freedom. By providing tenure, the institution demonstrates confidence in the faculty, who will fill an important role in support and governance of the institution. What is tenure in the broadest sense? The historical meaning of tenure and its current purpose in academia is described by Melvin DeFleur in his 2007 article, “Raising the Question #5 What Is Tenure and How Go I Get It?”:

The term “tenure” is an ancient one. In 1215, as described in Magna Carta, the term originally referred to the right to hold property. In later centuries it also came to mean that a person in a particular position, such as a judge, or an individual in a civil service position, could not be fired arbitrarily. As will be noted, the term “tenure” in the case of professors is of 20th-century origin. In contemporary times it is a status that is granted for a faculty member, normally after a probationary period of several years. Tenure protects the individual from dismissal, except for cause; that is, for serious misconduct or incompetence (usually as judged by the faculty senate). The purpose of such a safeguard is that it allows a teacher, researcher, or scholar to study and to

make public*either in the classroom, in print, or in other ways*forms of knowledge, conclusions or beliefs that may not be popular with those in authority (DeFleur, 2007, p. 106).

The importance of academic status for academic librarians is formally recognized by the Association of College and Research Libraries; however, not all academic institutions provide academic status for their librarians. For those that do, ACRL supports faculty rank, status, and tenure for librarians and has developed guidelines supporting the concept in its *Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians*, last revised in October 2011. These standards include: professional responsibilities; participation in library and university governance; appointment by written contract; academic salary scale; promotion in rank, with a peer review system; leaves and research funds; academic freedom; and access to due process for dismissal or grievance. Under tenure, the standard simply states “Librarians should be covered by a stated tenure policy” (ACRL, 2011, para. 7).

After a short, non-comprehensive literature review, I discovered that much of the literature on librarians and tenure focuses on practical ways for librarians to meet the criteria of appointment, promotion and tenure at their institutions. Many articles briefly define tenure. One of the earliest mentioning library workers and tenure was W.E. Henry's 1911 article, "The Academic Standing of College Library Assistants and Their Relation to the Carnegie Foundation." In 1991, Parks and Riggs reported on a 1989 national survey of tenure and promotion policies for academic librarians and in 1996, Cubberley published a tenure and promotion guidebook for academic librarians. InULA articles and documents on tenure are still relevant and useful to review. A few recent articles, in particular, discussed the definition of tenure for librarians, benefits and rewards of tenure, and support programs.

ACRL's A Guideline for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians

However, our best current source defining tenure for librarians is the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL)'s, *A Guideline for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians*, approved by the ACRL Committee on the Status of Academic Librarians, June 2010. The *Guideline* proposes criteria and procedures for appointment, promotion in academic rank, and tenure (continuous appointment) for use in academic libraries. ACRL recommends that institutions should conform to these guidelines as a minimum in their policies for faculty and administration. Section III (para. 1) provides definitions:

- a. Tenure, or continuous appointment, is defined as an institutional commitment to permanent employment to be terminated only for adequate cause (for example, incompetence, malfeasance, mental or physical disability, bona fide financial exigency) and only after due process. Tenure (continuous appointment) shall be available to librarians in accordance with provisions for all faculty of the institution.
- b. The criteria for tenure are closely allied to the criteria for promotion in academic rank. The relationship between tenure and rank shall be the same for library faculty as for other faculty in the institution. These criteria include performance, scholarship, and service.
- c. A candidate for tenure shall be reviewed according to established institutional regulations, which shall be similar to those described above for promotion in academic rank (ACRL, 2010).

The *Guideline* Section IVB (ACRL, 2010) defines the grounds for termination of appointment by the individual and by the institution. These strict guidelines help us understand how protected tenure or continuous appointment is and the gravity with which any termination must be considered. ACRL guidelines state that the individual has the right to terminate their own appointment and that termination by the institution should only be affected for adequate cause, which includes true financial exigency by the institution. A faculty body should participate in the decision and all alternatives should be explored. The termination of an academic program is the primary responsibility of the faculty, and the termination criteria and the individuals whose appointments are to be terminated should be identified by the faculty. A faculty member has the right to appeal and have a full hearing before a faculty committee. Also, the institution should make every effort to place the faculty member concerned in another suitable position. In summary, other possible termination of a tenured appointment may occur as the result of:

1. Bona fide formal discontinuance of a program or department of instruction not mandated by financial exigency.
2. Based upon clear and convincing medical evidence that the faculty member, even with reasonable accommodation, is no longer able to perform the essential duties of the position because of a physical or mental disability, and the faculty member is accorded the right of consultation during the process and review of a faculty body upon request. A grievance procedure to appeal the decision should be part of the process.
3. Adequate cause, related, directly and substantially, to the fitness of faculty members in their professional capacities as librarians. Dismissal should not be used to restrain faculty members in their exercise of academic freedom, and minor or severe sanction (suspension) should be considered if the conduct does not warrant dismissal (ACRL, 2010).

Why is it so difficult to terminate faculty status? Because, as the *Guideline* states: "Utilizing these criteria and procedures will insure that the library faculty and, therefore, library services will be of the highest quality possible" (ACRL, 2010, para. 1). It benefits the institution when faculty has academic freedom to contribute at the highest level. We have seen evidence of this in IU Libraries when IU Bloomington Libraries won the 2010 ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award for university libraries, a national tribute. Out of the eleven university library awardees since 2000, I believe many of them have tenure status for librarians.

Finally, Section X 'Academic freedom and protection against discrimination' of the 2010 ACRL *Guideline* concerns the academic freedom of the individual that permits them to strive for excellence.

1. All members of the faculty, whether tenured or not, 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 American Association of University Professors.
2. All members of the faculty, whether tenured or not, are entitled to protection against illegal or unconstitutional discrimination by the institution, or discrimination on a basis not demonstrably related to the faculty member's professional performance, including but

not limited to race, sex, religion, national origin, age, physical handicap, marital status, or sexual preference (ACRL, 2010).

Librarians with academic status on the tenure-track value this academic freedom and protection against discrimination. Ultimately this freedom allows creative professional development that reflects positively back on the institution, and motivates librarians to develop their careers and serve the profession. InULA literature had some excellent insight on tenure for librarians related to professional growth and service to the community.

InULA literature on tenure

InULA was founded to improve professional status and it played a major role in the development of tenure status for librarians in the I.U. system. In the InULA Program and Social Committee 1997/1998 annual report, Chair Charlotte Hess reported on their search of the InULA archives. “We learned that it took IU librarians more than five years of struggle, debate, committee reports, votes and more votes to achieve faculty status. I.U. trustees voted to grant librarians faculty status on July 1, 1973. But the tenure-track ranks were not instituted until July 1, 1974” (InULA Program and Social Committee, 1998, para. 3). The Committee digitized InULA’s important historical documents relating to tenure, which are available on the InULA website at <http://www.indiana.edu/~inula/documents/core/index.html>. Furthermore, the 1997/1998 Program and Social Committee also organized the InULA 25th Anniversary Celebration, held May 21, 1999, to celebrate twenty-five years of faculty status and academic freedom for librarians.

Charlotte Hess also offered some thoughts on tenure in an article in the same issue, ‘Crafting a Profession: Personal Reflections on Faculty Status.’ She quoted Barbara Halporn, one of her mentors, in her article:

One of the greatest strengths of the faculty status system at Indiana is its ability to create a climate for professional growth, to support the aspirations of its librarians, and to encourage them to participate in the development of our field (Hess, 1998, para. 1).

Charlotte was impressed with the “twofold nature of this perspective on faculty status: the symbiotic relationship between the inward and outward aspects of professional life” (Hess, 1998, para. 2). She described two important benefits of tenure as self-fulfillment through creative investigation and discovery in day-to-day work, and giving back and adding value to the profession. She stated that some of her most fulfilling work was developed out of a sense of inquiry and the uninhibited pursuit of answers to questions. She gave examples of her own and other librarians’ creative investigation that advanced the field of librarianship and served the community. Do we take full advantage of learning about and being inspired from our own colleagues’ work? I think we need to stop and take a look at our collective accomplishments as librarians in order to appreciate our own academic status and tenure.

Tenure-track librarianship supports research, although it is not the only model that does. One benefit of supporting scholarly inquiry for librarians is the increased collaboration among colleagues and ultimately, productivity. In a recent article, one author describes an annual peer

support retreat to motivate librarian research (Lieberthal, 2009). In 2010, Exner and Houk stated that “the tenure process is a proven motivator for publication among librarians. But beyond that, finding ways to support and promote scholarship--especially among new librarians--is a more complicated question” (p. 178). Tenure may be a motivator for librarian professional development at I.U., which benefits both the institution and the individual. This leads to questions about how we promote and support scholarship among new and tenured librarians. What more can we do to improve it? Exner and Houk’s article has an interesting answer: academic writing groups!

Revised tenure standards leads to academic writing group for librarians

Exner and Houk discuss the effect of revised tenure standards at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and the F.D. Bluford Library at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Both are part of the University of North Carolina system, in Greensboro, North Carolina, and have faculty-status librarians on the tenure track. Recent changes to campus criteria for tenure to more rigorous scholarly standards affected library tenure standards, which were revised to require more scholarship authorship, presentations and high-level service in professional organizations. Publishing became a serious concern for librarians, and the mentoring programs were not sufficient to support library faculty. Therefore, a library at each institution established a different type of academic writing group for librarians.

“Jackson Library's academic writing group was inspired by and based on the agraphia group described by Paul Silvia in his book *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* ... [which] aims to help people in academia become more productive writers” (Exner and Houk, 2010, p. 180). A librarian in the faculty mentoring program spoke to an administrator who arranged for this book to be given to each tenure-track librarian and set up the voluntary group. Librarians discuss writing goals at regular meetings. Participants had to account for their progress, create a routine for writing, schedule time for writing, and meet with the group. The advantages were increased motivation, peer support for writing and editing, and productivity. A disadvantage of the group was the deliberately short meetings did not allow for lengthy review or discussion of topics.

The Bluford Library group, called the “Pub & Grub,” meets weekly during the lunch hour to discuss topics and write. The group is optional and informal. Its strength is that it provides mutual support and exploration in a loose structure, although the structure does not provide much time for writing. Advantages included increased motivation, encouragement, sharing experiences, and having a support group.

At both libraries, many tenure track librarians were participants in the academic writing group. The author emphasized critical factors for success in adopting either model. There should be no penalty for failing to write, rather, there should be an incentive or obligation to participate. Time to write should be made available, and administrative support for librarian scholarship and the perception of its value is critical to success.

Exner and Houk conclude that “the ideal group would be a fusion between the two approaches--and others as well--with emphasis on the aspects that best meet the culture of each library. Some

way of providing the sense of weekly accountability in an easy-to-attend, brief format could be combined with less frequent but longer support and discussion group meetings. Weekly Agraphia model short meetings combined with monthly BYOB Pub & Grubs might be the ideal format for success, if the time can be arranged” (Exner and Houk, 2010, p. 182).

Peer partnership provide librarians research support

In another recent article, “Surviving the Tenure Process: A Model for Collaborative Research” (Nall, Nail, & Gustavson, 2010), the authors discuss a peer partnership to give librarians research support and confirm the benefits of tenure for librarians. They confirm that “Librarians in tenure-track faculty positions have responsibilities beyond basic librarianship” and give examples from East Carolina University, where “tenure-track librarians are expected to publish in scholarly journals, present at conferences, and demonstrate service to the profession on a local, state, and national level. Many librarians find the publishing process and professional presentations stressful” (Nall et al., 2010, p. 1). Tenure-track positions require 70-80% teaching, 10-15% service, and 10-15% research at their institutions. In order to encourage and support librarian research, the authors developed a collaborative research model technique using peer collaborators. They developed and successfully used this technique since 2008. It includes four steps: planning for collaboration, setting a meeting schedule, organizing with a wiki, and completing a project.

This technique was developed in part because the authors considered research a very intimidating requirement of the tenure process and selecting a topic and initiating a project were particularly daunting. The technique comprises two colleagues meeting weekly to work on a research paper, after brainstorming a few times, a research project was started in earnest.

The authors found that the peer partnership provided many benefits, and ultimately, it boosted research productivity. Collaborators were accountable in a collaboration agreement to meet regularly, be accountable to each other, and use a wiki as a repository for ideas, current projects, deadlines, and research. They found the wiki to be an effective project management tool. “The reutilization of the research and writing process results in less stress and greater productivity” (Nall et al., 2010, p. 5). It is important librarians stay engaged in meeting tenure criteria and take advantage of new models, but we must keep our eyes on standards and how they are changing. They will affect our tenure criteria.

Changing standards for tenure for law library directors

For example, Christine Stouffer (2011, p. 11) discusses the definition of tenure for law librarians as essentially ‘lifetime job security’ and states that proponents of tenure view it as “absolutely essential to protect academic freedom in teaching, speaking, writing, and the expression of unpopular positions or opinions. Tenure is also a fundamental way of imparting to faculty a role in the shared governance of the institution.” However, she finds that tenure for law librarians is under threat because the recently proposed changes to the American Bar Association Law School standards for law school accreditation would weaken the ABA’s position on tenure for library directors. Christine’s conclusion warns us that in many professions lifetime job commitments are fading into the past. “What looms ahead could be a society free of job security, but one that may

be shackled by its own unintended consequences” (Stouffer, 2011, p. 13). We need to be good governors of our own tenure process. This may be a warning sign that we need to stay engaged in our I.U. tenure process and review of standards!

A Discussion about the philosophy of tenure

At IUB recently, a model for a faculty discussion about the philosophy of tenure was suggested as one way to stay engaged. At a Bloomington Library Faculty Council (BLFC) meeting, Jennifer Laherty proposed engaging a small group of librarians to enter into conversation about the philosophy of tenure with individual librarians. Although this was not an official BLFC project, Jennifer was encouraged to continue and on May 23, 2011, she sent a message to IUB librarians. It began: “Dear colleagues, I invite you to join me in a grassroots endeavor in search of an IUB Librarians Philosophy of Tenure. At the March 3 BLF meeting I raised the questions – ‘Why do we believe we have tenure/faculty status? What is our philosophy of tenure?’ following Julie Bobay’s presentation regarding the academic status of librarians” (Laherty, 2011, para. 1) She gathered a small working group and has reported back to BLFC. A statement on the philosophy of tenure was written and submitted to library faculty. It was disappointing to hear that few responded in the discussion, but perhaps individual discussions will be more fruitful. Jennifer has posed readings on her blog to inspire the discussion, <http://intrepidlibrarian.wordpress.com/>.

Conclusion

Tenure is a statement that the institution is committed to its faculty librarians. It has confidence that we will support its mission and engage in the responsibilities of faculty to its benefit. Tenure benefits us – we must *stay engaged* in this change process! Your feedback may significantly improve the procedures now and in the future! What can you do, especially if you don’t serve on a committee or your campus has settled its procedures? What if you are untenured, and feel as if you have no say? What if you have lost interest because of retirement or other factors? Read the proposed procedures and announcements, attend meetings, and discuss this wonderful thing we call ‘tenure.’ Once we finalize our campus-specific promotion and tenure process, the first full year under the process will highlight needed changes. For Bloomington and many other campuses, that will probably be the year 2013. Follow and provide input as requested in writing and in library faculty meetings. Go to InULA meetings about tenure. Librarians on campuses with settled procedures, I challenge you to read up on other campus procedures. Perhaps you can adapt new ideas or ways of stating the process for your handbook. Finally, stay informed, because we all need to work towards finalizing the language of our tenure criteria in the IU Academic Handbook. Everyone’s say is important.

References

Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL). (2010). *A Guideline for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians*. Approved by the ACRL Committee on

the Status of Academic Librarians, June 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/promotiontenure>

Association of College and Research Libraries. (2011, Oct.). *Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians*. Approved by ACRL Board, June 2007. Revised October 2011. Prepared by the ACRL Committee on the Status of Academic Librarians. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardsfaculty>

Cubberley, C. W. (1996). *Tenure and promotion for academic librarians: A guidebook with advice and vignettes*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company.

DeFleur, M. L. (2007). Raising the question #5 What is tenure and how do I get it? *Communication Education*, 56(1), 106-112.

Exner, N., & Houk, A. (2010). Starting the write way: Comparing two library scholarly development programs. *Library Leadership & Management*, 24(4), 178-82.

Henry, W. E. (1911). The Academic standing of college library assistants and their relation to the Carnegie Foundation. *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, 5, 259-263.

Hess, C. (1998) Crafting a profession: Personal reflections on faculty status. *InULA Notes*, 14,(2). Retrieved from <http://www.indiana.edu/~inula/notes/v14/no2/hess.html>

InULA Program and Social Committee. (1998) What's behind us, what's ahead? *InULA Notes*, 14,(2). Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~inula/notes/v14/no2/program_social.html

Laherty, Jennifer. (2011, May 23). RE: IUB Librarians Philosophy of Tenure [Electronic mailing list message].

Lieberthal, S. P. (2009). Perspectives on peer support for tenure-track librarians: The annual "juniors" retreat at Stony Brook University. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 1(2), 30-47.

Nall, C., Nail, A. & Gustavson, A. (2010, May). Surviving the tenure process: A model for collaborative research. *Endnotes* 1(1), 1-18.

Park, B., & Riggs, R. (1991). Status of the profession: A 1989 national survey of tenure and promotion policies for academic librarians. *College and Research Libraries*, 3, 153-168.

Stouffer, C. M. (2011, Sept./Oct.). A job for life?: Tenure and other sticky situations. *AALL Spectrum*, 16(1), 11-13. Retrieved from <http://www.aallnet.org/main-menu/Publications/spectrum/Vol-16/No-1/tenure.pdf>