

Academic Freedom & the Liberal Arts Librarian

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Hi! Hello!

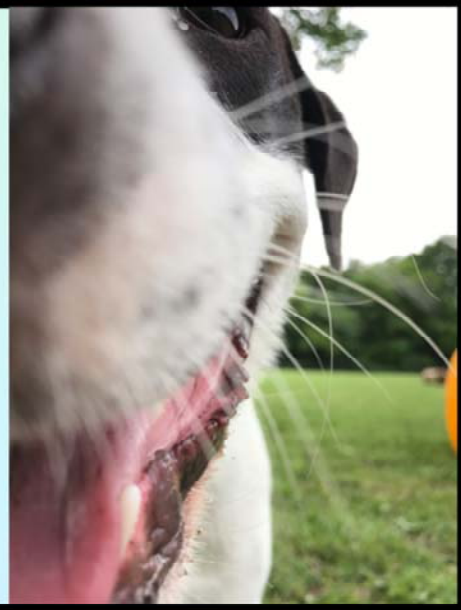
I am Meghan Dowell

she/her

tweets @librarianmegs

#LiberalArtsAF

#capal18



First, I would like to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 4 Land as guests and colonizers.

My name is Meghan. I use she/her pronouns. I'm a librarian at Beloit College in Southern Wisconsin where I teach the course, Information Economy, in the Interdisciplinary Studies department. I am also a PhD student at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, School of Information Studies. If you're tweeting the conference, here are a couple hashtags to use.

This research was conducted over the spring semester of 2018 and is personal in that I am a staff librarian at a liberal arts college. A liberal arts college in the United States is typically a 4-year residential school with students graduating with a BS or BA, although some of graduate programs. The faculty focus is on student-professor research collaborations rather than research output.

This is my first pass at the data collected and the results are not exhaustive.

What I'll cover

1. Academic freedom statements
2. Brief overview of neutrality in librarianship
3. Research questions
4. Findings
5. Recommendations


An overview of the AAUP and ACRL statements on academic freedom.

A brief overview of neutrality in librarianship.

The questions that drove the research.

My findings.

And finally my recommendations.

A graphic consisting of a white speech bubble with a black border, containing the text 'AAUP Statement of Academic Freedom'. The background behind the speech bubble is a vertical gradient from light green at the top to light blue at the bottom.

**AAUP
Statement
of
Academic
Freedom**

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and the publication of those results.
2. Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject.
3. College and university teachers are citizens, members of the learned profession, and officers of an educational institution.

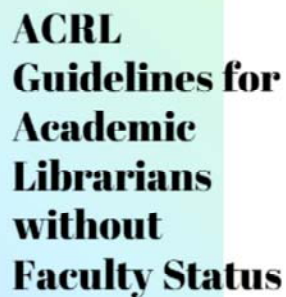
The AAUP is the American Association of University Professors and in their 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure the following three points are outlined under Academic Freedom. In 1970 they made the clarification that teachers also includes investigators who are attached to an academic institution but do not have teaching duties. The AAUP encouraged disciplinary associations to adapt the policy to fit the populations they serve.

The logo consists of a black-outlined speech bubble shape on a light blue background. Inside the bubble, the text "ACRL Statement of Academic Freedom" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, stacked in four lines.

**ACRL
Statement
of
Academic
Freedom**

- Originally endorsed by the ACRL in 1972 and adopted by the AAUP in 1973.
- Reaffirmed by the ACRL in 2001 and 2007.
- Revisions made in collaboration with AAUP in 2012.
- Reaffirmed in 2018.

This is why we have the ACRL's Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians. The document acknowledges the multifaceted roles academic librarians play within their institutions, including the teaching of for-credit courses, informal instruction and advising to students and other faculty. However this document clearly states faculty status for librarians which is why...

A graphic consisting of a white speech bubble with a black border, containing the title text. The background of the slide features a vertical gradient from light green at the top to light blue at the bottom.

**ACRL
Guidelines for
Academic
Librarians
without
Faculty Status**

"ACRL supports faculty rank, status, and tenure for librarians but recognizes that not all academic institutions provide faculty status to their librarians."

In 2011 the ACRL Guidelines for Academic Librarians Without Faculty Status was drafted. The document outlines nine guidelines for academic staff librarians. They are: professional responsibilities, governance, contracts, compensation, promotion and salary increases, leaves and research funds, academic freedom, dismissal or nonreappointment, and grievance. Under Academic Freedom it states that "Librarians are entitled to the protection of academic freedom as set forth in the AAUP 1940 Statement".

I will remind us at this time that the AAUP does not specifically name librarians.



**Neutrality
Within
Librarianship**

- D.J. Foskett's "The Creed of a Librarian – no politics, no religion, no morals", 1962
- ALA Midwinter 2018, panel on neutrality in libraries

In The Creed of a Librarian, Foskett states, this is a direct quote, the gendering is his own, "during reference service, the librarian ought to virtually vanish as an individual person, except in so far as his personality sheds light on the working of the library. He must be the reader's alter ego, immersed in his politics, his religion, his morals. He must have the ability to participate in the reader's enthusiasm and to devote himself wholly".

As recently as ALA Midwinter in January 2018 the President's Program was titled, "Are libraries neutral? Have they ever been? Should they be?" Two presenters on both the affirmative and negative side, with a panel of responses to those presentations. While I was not physically at the session, Twitter allowed for me to follow the commentary of the event. As you can imagine, or perhaps know, it was polarized between neutrality doesn't exist and of course we should be neutral. And to clarify my own bias, libraries are not neutral, nor should they be.



Photo by [Emily Morter](#) on [Unsplash](#)

There were several questions that guided me through this paper:

- What is the employment status of liberal arts librarians?
- Does employment status change the understanding of academic freedom?
- Does length of employment change the understanding of academic freedom?
- If reference interactions are considered teaching spaces, do librarians feel free to express their views?

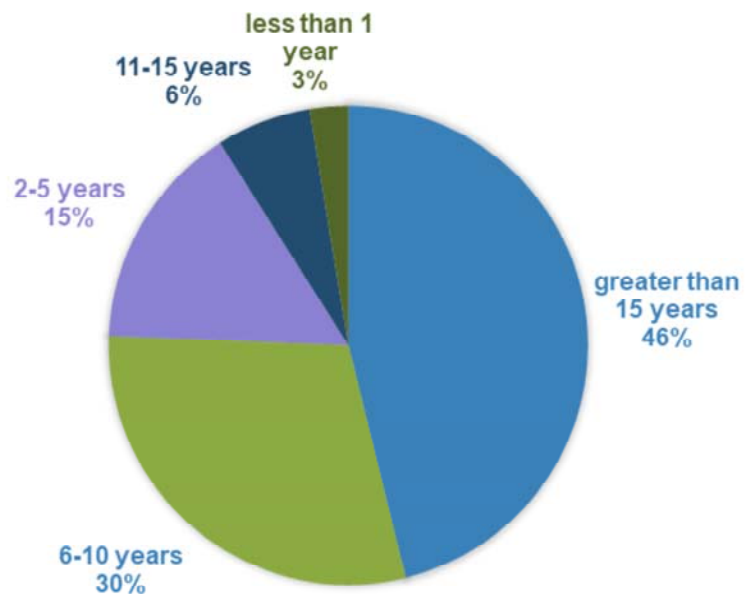
For this case study I used Kandiuk and Sonne de Torrens' 2015 research on Canadian academic librarians for the shape of the questionnaire. While I collected data on social media, this paper will focus face-to-face engagement, so I added questions to include understanding of teaching spaces and self-reported definitions of academic freedom. Kandiuk and Sonne de Torrens expanded this research and it was published earlier this year in CRL.

I received 78 responses in the 4 weeks the questionnaire was open. The questionnaire was distributed through listservs and Twitter. There are over 200 liberal arts institutions in the US. While this data is not significantly significant in can inform practice and recommendations. I analyzed the data using critical domain analysis.



**Employment
Classification and
Length of
Employment**

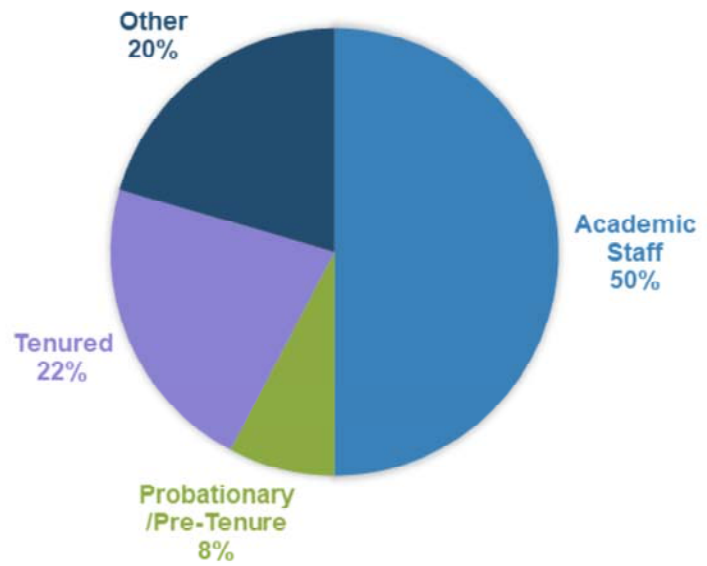
**How long
have you
been a
professional
librarian?**



Within the 78 responses the breakdown fell almost 50/50 with half being employed over 10 years and half less than 10 years. The largest populations are greater than 15 years and 6 to 10 years. We are looking at mostly mid to late career librarians.

The largest proportions of academic staff librarians fell within 0-5 years and greater than 15 years of employment.

Which of the following best describes your status?



As hypothesized, half of the respondents are classified as academic staff. The 20% of “other” include the write-in responses of: director, professional staff, and administrative staff.

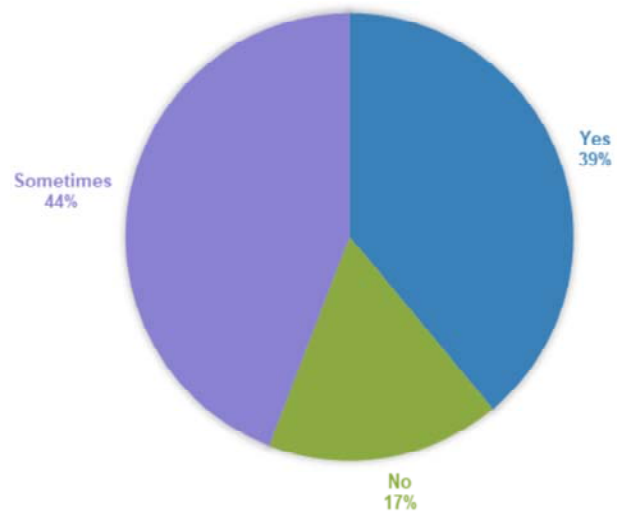


Face-to-Face Engagement

When asked if the reference desk and classrooms were teaching and/or learning spaces, the answer was overwhelmingly yes. Only 2 people responded “sometimes” to the reference desk as a teaching space. I asked this question to tie back to the AAUP’s definition of academic freedom which states that “teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject”.

However, are we discussing “our subject” at the reference desk?

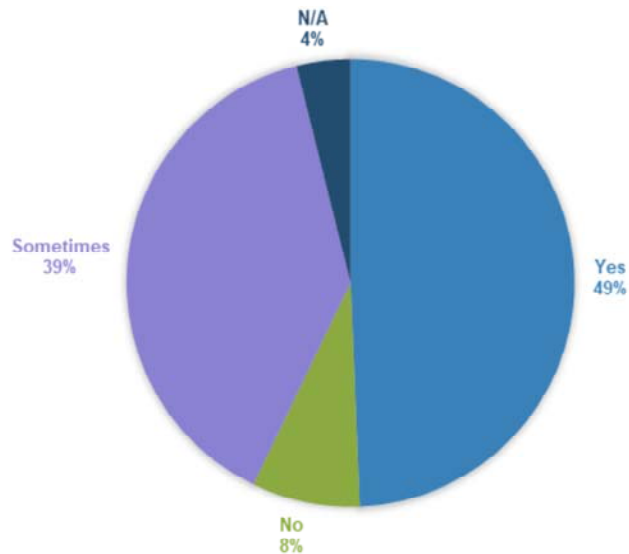
Do you feel free to express your views during reference interactions?



Even though the respondents feel that the reference desk is a teaching space, less than 40% feel free to express their views during reference interactions.

Of this 39% only 17% are academic staff.

If you provide one-shot instruction, do you feel ownership of the space?



I then asked the responding librarians if they feel ownership of the instruction space during one-shot instruction, the results were close to evenly split between yes and sometimes or no. When they expanded on their answers it depended on the librarian's relationship with the faculty member and the location of the classroom – meaning if they traveled to the faculty member's classroom or used a space in the library.

Alternatively when asked the same question about feeling ownership of the lesson 79% of the respondents said yes. The folks who responded with no or sometimes reported again relationships with faculty – in the given examples faculty remained in the room, would interrupt a lesson or outline specific databases to be covered to complete an assignment.

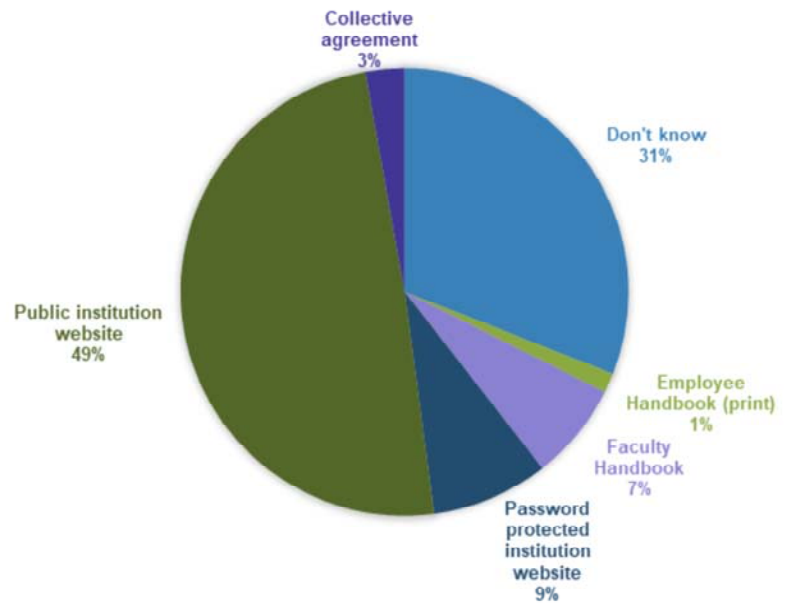


Defining Academic Freedom

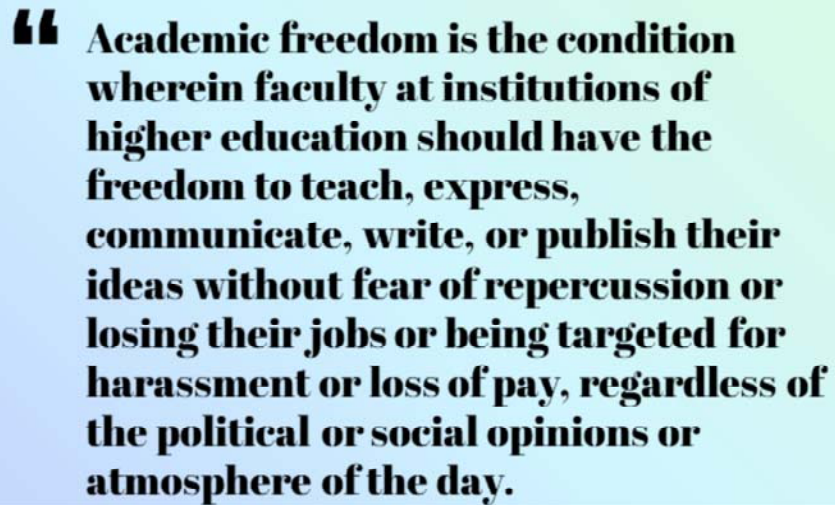
When asked to give their own definitions of academic freedom the responses fell into three categories.

Those summarizing AAUP (in fact, several people told me to read the AAUP in their response), those summarizing the first amendment, and those defining academic freedom by their job function.

Where is the statement made available?

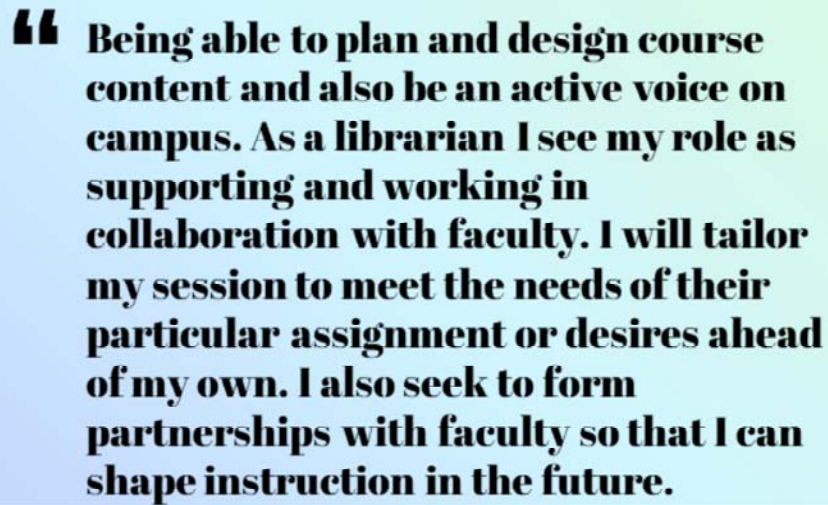


Additionally, I was interested in where their institution's statement on academic freedom was located. About half of the respondents have a publicly found statement. However 31% of these librarians do not know where their statement lives – this question was derived from my experience when I went to find my institution's statement. I did not find it until I asked a faculty member what they reference.



“ Academic freedom is the condition wherein faculty at institutions of higher education should have the freedom to teach, express, communicate, write, or publish their ideas without fear of repercussion or losing their jobs or being targeted for harassment or loss of pay, regardless of the political or social opinions or atmosphere of the day.

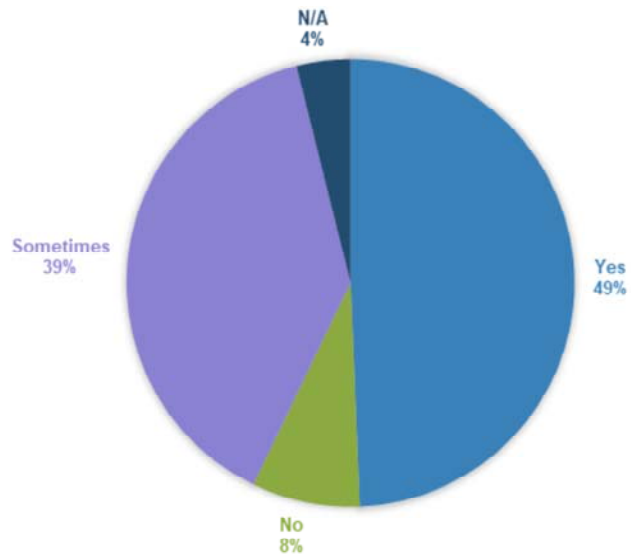
First an example of a definition closely tied to the first amendment.



“ Being able to plan and design course content and also be an active voice on campus. As a librarian I see my role as supporting and working in collaboration with faculty. I will tailor my session to meet the needs of their particular assignment or desires ahead of my own. I also seek to form partnerships with faculty so that I can shape instruction in the future.

And an example of a definition closely tied with job function.

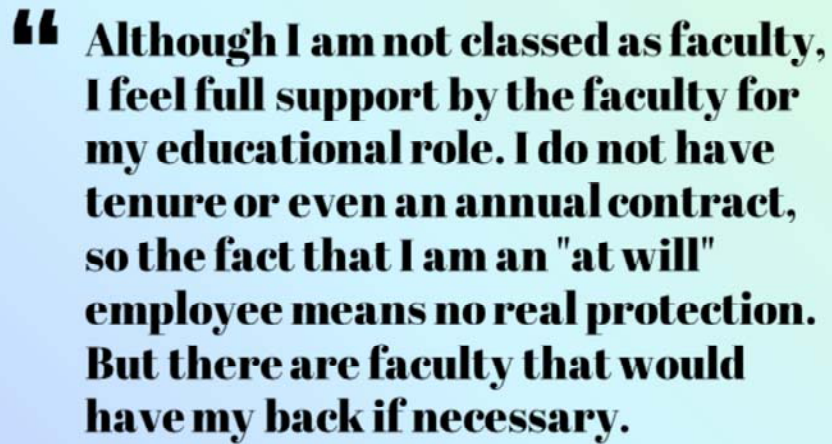
Do you feel protected in your work as a librarian?



The final question was to ask if the librarians felt protected in their work. Again we see a 50/50 split between yes and sometimes or no. When folks followed up on their answers of sometimes or no, they were still unsure if their policy covered them, even though they knew the definition of academic freedom and where to find their institution's policy.

I then filtered for academic staff and two-thirds of the respondents said sometimes or no when asked if they felt protected compared to a quarter of faculty who responded sometimes or no.

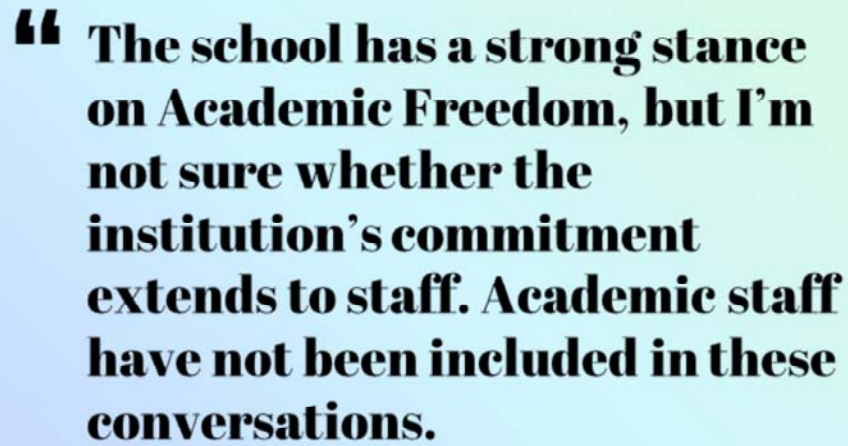
The following examples are all from academic staff librarians.



“ Although I am not classed as faculty, I feel full support by the faculty for my educational role. I do not have tenure or even an annual contract, so the fact that I am an "at will" employee means no real protection. But there are faculty that would have my back if necessary.

An example of a “Yes” rationale:

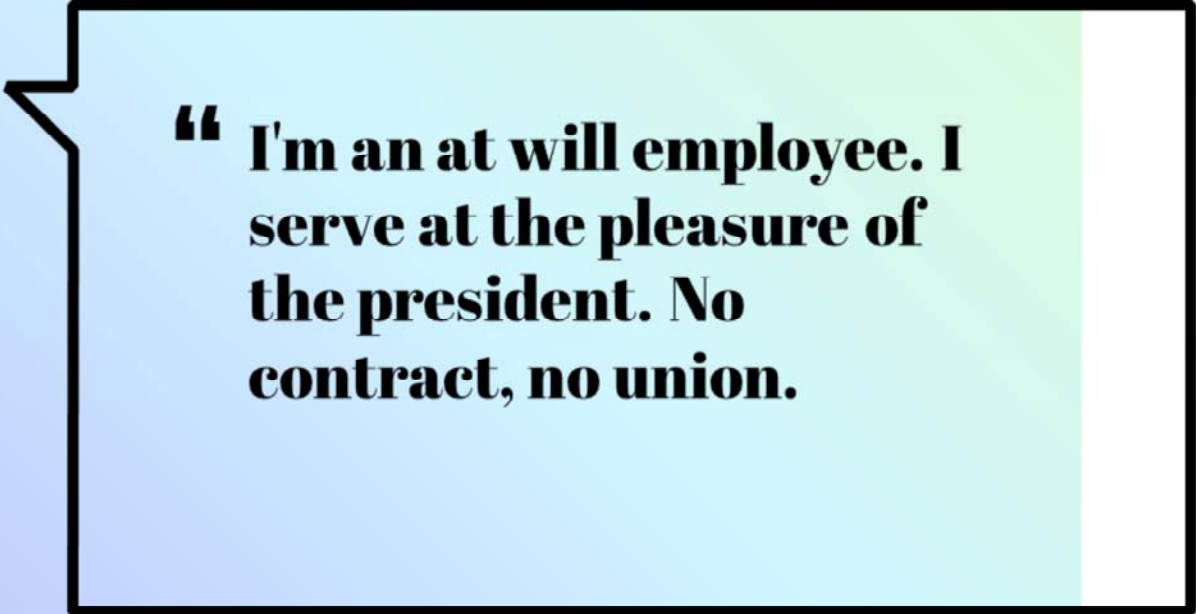
Many others stated the support of their director, provost, or supervisor when explaining why they feel protected without faculty status.



“ The school has a strong stance on Academic Freedom, but I’m not sure whether the institution’s commitment extends to staff. Academic staff have not been included in these conversations.

An example of a “Sometimes” rationale:

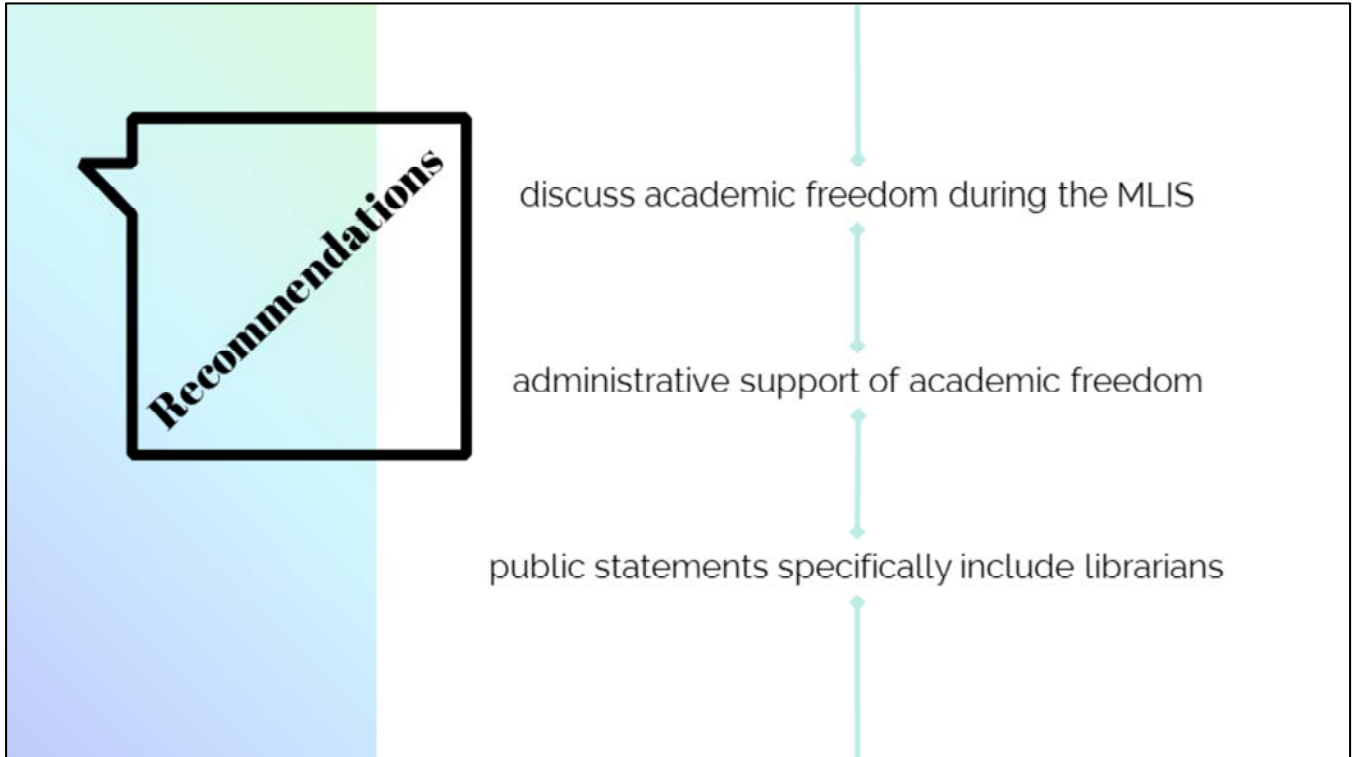
A recognition that while others have full freedoms, this might not apply to their classification.



“ I'm an at will employee. I serve at the pleasure of the president. No contract, no union.

An example of a “No” rationale:

Simple, and to the point.



During my MLIS program, I graduated in 2012 from Long Island University, there was no conversation about academic freedom in any of my classes. It wasn't until I was employed as a librarian and heard junior faculty were afraid to speak out that I considered my work to be at risk.

The institution's senior administrative staff should publicly support academic freedom and be inclusive of those who it covers.

Institutions should have publically available statements on academic freedom. They should not be only on password protected websites. Current and future employees should be able to quickly find this information to evaluate and understand their place of work.

Thanks!

Any questions?

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Presentation template by [SlidesCarnival](#)

Thank you and I welcome any questions.



Works Cited

AAUP. "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments". <https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf>

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