

Librarian Scholarship and Tenure Analysis

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Librarians as tenured faculty is not a new development in higher education, but it is a complicated situation with varying requirements, expectations, and justifications. Herein, I look at and evaluate the policies of Colorado State University and Pennsylvania State University relating to tenured librarians, and explore the feasibility of meeting those requirements in the future.

Why Tenure?

Both institutions include explanatory material early in their relevant codes and policies, early on. Colorado State references the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and quotes several related documents regarding the important nature of library work, while Penn State's policies are wholly written in-house. Both, however, generally agree on the same points: that librarians support and make possible research at the institution; that librarians serve guardians of intellectual freedom; that librarians not only manage but contribute to academic research; and that librarians support and educate both students and faculty. The exact details vary between each institution (looking at several others, the University of Virginia lists different specifics, as do Emory and Clemson) without being dissimilar in the broad strokes. In short, these institutions recognize that librarians fill many of the same roles as other faculty and afford them the same general treatment.

One thing neither institution touched on in their policies and preambles was why tenure matters to libraries and librarians. Perhaps it was assumed to be a given, or a case of simply keeping-up-with-the-Joneses (after all, if other R1 institutions are giving librarians tenure, they might need to, as well.) The American Association of University Professors states that "the principal purpose of tenure is to safeguard academic freedom, which is necessary for all who

teach and conduct research in higher education" (AAUP, 2020), and cites cases (such as Dr. Marc Edwards researching and making public the dangerous water in Flint, MI) by means of example. Tenure exists, then, to protect researchers and teachers from avoiding difficult or controversial topics that might result in being removed from a position in more political careers.

While it seems librarians must not be vulnerable in the same way—what could be socially or politically controversial about information access and literacy?—even collection development decisions can fall under pressure from outside sources. Silva et al., in a 2017 piece, note that not only are librarians likewise vulnerable to pressure upon their research and teaching, but that tenured library positions are beneficial to patrons due to increased retention of talent, "[increased] motivation to give extra effort in the job," and integrate librarians more fully into the shaping of an academic institution's future via positions on faculty-only committees and decision-making processes.

Comparison of Policies and Criteria

Both Colorado State University and Pennsylvania (Penn) State University are R1 universities according to the Carnegie Classification (2019), and both offer tenure-track paths for librarians (as well as staff-only or continuing non-tenured positions), with their policies, procedures, and evaluation criteria for the tenure process available online. Colorado State details three specific criteria for evaluation, while Penn State lists four; each criterion, however, is broad and can be broken down into multiple elements. Additionally, some basic requirements are detailed in order to even begin seeking tenure at the institutions.

The former looks, in broad terms, for evidence of "practice of librarianship," "research and creative activities," and "service", while the latter evaluates based on the scholarships of

librarianship, teaching and learning, research and creative accomplishments, as well as service. These general categories, then, are the same between both universities, with the exception of Penn State also recognizing “teaching and learning” as a top-level criterion instead of a more vague part of “service” as is handled at Colorado State. The table below details specific requirements at each institute, as well as highlighting notable differences. Where requirements are directly cited, page or section numbers are given.

Table 1: Tenure-Track Requirements

	<i>Colorado State University</i>	<i>Pennsylvania State University</i>	<i>Comparative Analysis</i>
<i>Degree</i>	Terminal (MLS or equivalent)	— — — Assumed to match.	Neither university requires a PhD, accepting a MLS in place for librarians.
<i>Development</i>	Continuing development required via workshops, lectures, conferences, and additional events (p.6).	— — — Rolled into “service” category.	In either institution, continuing development and education is a good idea, tenure-track or otherwise.
<i>Librarianship</i>	Provide intellectual and physical access, furthering teaching and improving instruction at the university.	Function as a librarian, in one’s “core areas of librarianship” (section 2-1, para. 4), including organization and preserving information and promoting new forms of communication.	Penn State specifically notes that librarianship is “the most important criterion” for promotion decisions, while Colorado State instead suggests 75-80% of time be spent here.
<i>Scholarship</i>	Peer-reviewed publications including a “major contribution in the field” in the form of a scholarly monograph or four articles in peer-reviewed journals (p.12-13).	“Established reputation in the scholarship of research and creative accomplishments.” No specific number or type listed. (section 2-3, para. 5)	One cannot be sure of which institute is more rigorous, here, but Colorado State’s requirement of at least four articles establishes a baseline.
<i>Service</i>	Must participate and hold some role in a regional, national, or specialized professional organization	Can include participation in committees or university taskforces, assistance to student	Colorado State’s requirement is stricter, while Penn State allows for

	<i>Colorado State University</i>	<i>Pennsylvania State University</i>	<i>Comparative Analysis</i>
<i>Teaching</i>	(p.13-14). Some librarians are expected to teach, and this may allow a lesser organizational role. ----- Not directly noted, but mentioned as part of service.	organizations, or leadership or service in professional associations. Developing, advocating, teaching, or offering substantial support to <i>credit-bearing</i> classes.	more means of fulfilling this requirement. Penn State notes teaching of a for-credit class as an additional criterion which may replace another requirement.

1. CSU policies are available at https://lib.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CSU_Libraries_Code_Current_02-06-2019.pdf

2. PSU policies are available at <https://libraries.psu.edu/policies/ul-acg07>

Colorado State, across the board, makes more detailed policies and evaluation criteria for tenure available for viewing (though one suspects that Penn State has additional policies, standards, or "common practices" that are less publicly available.) Whereas Penn State lists vagaries such as "must show an established reputation" for publishing, Colorado State not only lists amounts and general locations, but offers a breakdown of expected time librarian faculty will devote to various portions of their job. The institution expects 75-80% of work to be "librarianship" shared with non-tenure staff, and only 10-15% of their time doing research, as opposed to non-library faculty who are expected to devote a greater percentage of their time to research (Miranda, 2010; DCEE, 2016). This reflects a common theme amongst librarians-as-tenured-faculty where their research expectations are lower than professors in other departments, still heavily focusing on day-to-day functioning of the library and affiliated institutions.

Meeting the Requirements

Using Colorado State University as an example, pursuing tenure requires multiple articles published, in addition to years of experience (met simply by working for a time in a non-tenured position), continuing development, and active leadership in the field of library science. Were I to go that route, I would need to begin by familiarizing myself more with the means of actually publishing a scholarly work; "the uneven preparation the MLS degree affords a librarian to succeed in academia" (Silva, 2017) means that, unlike a PhD-holding member of the staff, I have not done publishing prior to approaching the tenure-track. Despite my lack of familiarity with the process, however, I understand and am interested in both researching information science topics and sharing them; the hurdle in method is surmountable. Tentatively, I might meet the requirements via the following:

Development: Continuing education is a requirement for tenure-track positions at both institutions—and many others—because it addresses mental ruts that can form when someone does a job in the same way over a long period of time. I am currently back in higher education for my third time, and both enjoy and appreciate scholarly conferences. In my experience, universities not only encourage librarians to participate and attend such events, but allow them to do so during work hours if they are in good standing (and not too far behind on tasks). My background in information technology and web development accustomed me to processes that change on a regular basis, and staying abreast, if not atop, of new developments is reasonable and doable.

Librarianship: Tenure requirements based on "the practice of librarianship" are the most straightforward to meet: do the job I was hired to, do it well, and remain involved in mentoring and coordinated relationships regarding my work across the university campus. My

interests lie in special collections and reference, primarily, which generally will involve working with other departments (special collections) and the general body of patrons, as well as professors. Straightforward is not the same as easy, but it is one that requires less planning and more active participation.

Service: To-date, I have limited interaction with professional library organizations. I have interacted with members and attended events of the Coastal Georgia Library Collaborative, as well as both attending and engaging in discussion at the ACRL Together Whenever conference, but more is needed. Obviously, local organizations vary depending on where I eventually find work, but their value in promoting institutional collaboration and pooling of resources is valuable, and worth pursuing. Larger organizations, such as the ACRL or ALCTS (Association for Library Collections and Technical Services) have broader reach, but are correspondingly more difficult to reach leadership positions in, depending on how tenure requirements define that requirement (organizational role leadership versus committee membership or the like, for instance.)

Scholarly Writing: In SLIS797, I examined available literature on the subject of digital conversions of magnetic media (VHS, primarily) for long-term preservation, and found it lacking. Much material is available discussing the importance of the subject, but very little on hard specifics or methods. Currently-cited leaders (such as NYU, Stanford, and the LCC) employ techniques over two-decades old and using no-longer-supported technology (Barnett, 2019). Digital formats, sustainability and preservation, along with format restrictions and software access concerns are areas I am passionate about, and have begun looking into better ways of handling. Papers on this subject are not only viable, but potentially useful for other librarians

and archivists working with older electronic materials, and thus should be meaningful contributions to the field.

Because of the crossover nature of this material, both archival and library journals are fitting places for publication, including *American Archivist*, the *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, *The Moving Image*, *College and Research Libraries*, the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, and *Information Technology and Libraries*. The peer-review process may require cross-institutional collaboration and test-cases, but provides numerous means of pursuing this and related topics.

Teaching: As noted in Jardine, Shropshire, and Koury's article, information literacy courses taught for credit are becoming more popular, from 22% in 1973 to 37% as of the writing (2018). I have never taught formally, but I tutored for a number of years, and find the activity rewarding—and the topic critically important. Depending on the institution, I may be eligible to teach in an adjunct fashion, or participate in shared courses taught by reference librarians and work up to teaching directly.

Conclusion

It is not an easy task to look at what the future holds, and my experience working at academic institutions is limited. There is, however, appeal in pursuing a tenured faculty position in a university library; while I am primarily attracted to the work that brought me to the MLIS program at USC, the related scholarship and teaching are, in fact, exciting in their own right. Given that I expect to change positions (and likely universities) several times during my career as a librarian, I have the luxury of some time before making any decision; both institutions here require a minimum number of years' experience, making it *currently* a moot point and allowing me time to familiarize myself with academic employment.

On a less personal note, it seems clear to me that not only is there support for tenured librarians, but they serve a valuable purpose. A relatively low number of non-librarian, library and information science degree-holders work in higher education, and just as with any other field, we need research and development to better serve our patron and our profession. Allowing—encouraging—practicing librarians to also devote time to research and education means not separating scholarship from practice, and enabling a flow of information and technique both directions. While the suggestion of time spent (especially as “post-tenure” librarians are expected to devote *less* time to research, according to the University of Colorado, 2019) does somewhat minimize that ability, it is far and above the zero-percent time spent researching and serving the field expected of non-tenured librarians.

As to how institutions value tenured librarians, a study from 2017 showed that non-tenured librarians and staff ranked tenure as a significantly high priority and advantageous for patrons (Silva et al, 2017), while another noted the mentoring potential of ranked tenure systems for developing early- and mid-career librarians into better faculty (Couture et al, 2020), though the later does note that mentor support for post-tenured librarians (like that of other post-tenure professorial positions) is low. A common concern—outlined in McQuarrie et. al—regarding tenure positions, librarian or otherwise, is that inconsistent, vague, or unavailable details regarding tenure requirements does incentivize those seeking it to publish in “predatory journals” that lack rigorous review and quality research value (2020). Despite these concerns, however, the value tenure adds to information science scholarship should not be dismissed, and whether it ultimately is for me or not, I appreciate that the system exists.

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