

October 10, 2024

To the Administrators of Western Illinois University:

Members of the Library Faculty of Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) express deep concern and strong opposition to the recent decision to eliminate all nine faculty librarian positions at Western Illinois University (WIU). Removing professional librarians from an academic library disregards the essential role they play in supporting student learning, faculty research, and the overall educational mission of the institution. This decision will have far-reaching impacts on the quality and accessibility of resources and services that are fundamental to a thriving academic environment.

Professional librarians are essential to the teaching, research, and service missions of universities, providing expertise that extends far beyond basic library management. The Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree equips them with a deep understanding of research methodologies, information organization, digital literacy, educational pedagogy, and emerging technologies, making them uniquely qualified to build and maintain collections, develop online research guides, teach information literacy, and foster a space for intellectual engagement. Librarians are not merely gatekeepers of information; they are educators, collaborators, and information specialists who help students and faculty navigate the complex landscape of scholarship

The elimination of professional librarian positions reduces WIU's ability to provide the quality of support typically expected from a university. Librarians are key to developing and maintaining the library's collections, creating a dynamic and equitable learning environment, and fostering a culture of critical inquiry. They provide instruction that enhances students' information literacy, collaborate with faculty to design research assignments, and contribute to the preservation of institutional history through specialized archives and collections. This work cannot be replicated by individuals who lack the necessary training, credentials, or professional status. Faculty status further ensures that librarians contribute to the university through continuous scholarship, professional development, and meaningful engagement in institutional governance.

The decision to replace professional librarians with non-MLIS-holding employees risks isolating WIU from broader academic networks and threatens its standing among peer institutions. As noted by the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)¹, academic librarians play an essential role in shaping resource management, digital literacy initiatives, and the evolving information ecosystem that supports the university's research mission. Without faculty librarians, WIU will struggle to maintain its academic integrity and fulfill its mission to produce well-informed, capable graduates.

We recognize the financial challenges facing many institutions, but budget constraints should not be addressed by undermining the core academic functions of the university. We urge the WIU administration to consider the long-term impacts of this action and ask them to reinstate the faculty librarian positions. The loss of professional librarians would be a significant step backward,

compromising the educational quality WIU aims to provide. **Libraries are more than repositories of books—they are dynamic centers of learning, teaching, and research that require the leadership and expertise of professional librarians to fulfill their purpose.**

Sincerely,

NEIU Libraries Faculty

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- Lisa Wallis, MSPH, MSLIS
- Mary Thill, MA, MLIS
- Robin Harris, MLIS
- Ashley Howdeshell, MLS, CA
- Chrissy Cogswell, MSLIS
- Amanda Levine, MLIS
- Edward Remus, MSLIS, MA
- Jacqueline Zook, MM, MLIS

¹ <https://www.carli.illinois.edu/membership/Importance-of-Librarians>