

Interim President Kristi Mindrup
Interim Provost Mark Mossman
Board of Trustees Chairperson Carin Stutz
Board of Trustees Vice Chair Polly Radosh
Western Illinois University
1 University Circle
Macomb, IL 61455 USA

September 30, 2024

Dear Interim President Mindrup,

As librarians and faculty, we have been following the unfolding tragedy at WIU over the past several months in which the university's faculty librarians are being laid off, following upon years of staff and faculty reductions. As we suspect administration already knows on some level, this "total obliteration" of the library faculty will have an inevitable impact on the campus community, the capacity of the university to serve its students, and ultimately retention itself. Dr. Leo Lo, president of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), has already pointed to the detrimental impact a nearly complete lack of faculty librarian expertise will have on first generation students, but there is more to the story. Librarians are experts in information literacy, and interdisciplinary service-oriented scholars who are vital to the process of critical engagement between students and curricular and co-curricular institutional priorities. Without librarians, the library is pedagogically empty. Without libraries, inquiry is bound up in the parameters of syllabi. As Ta-Nehisi Coates put it in his book *Between the World and Me*:

The pursuit of knowing was freedom to me, the right to declare your own curiosities and follow them through all manner of books. I was made for the library, not the classroom. The classroom was a jail of other people's interests. The library was open, unending, free.

Your proposal will create roadblocks to access- making the library a closed-stack warehouse, accessed by a skeleton crew of civil service workers, who will certainly be overtaxed and underpaid for the work you will be asking them to do. Librarians engage in constant professional development, and invest their time and capacities in curating and improving both resources and their own expertise. Information science is a discipline that supports a particular set of research and professional expertise geared toward connecting people with information. In our present reality, languishing support for the foundations of higher education will directly contribute to the atrophy of the capacity of students to learn. Learning loss due to the pandemic, which has been well documented in populations of students now entering colleges and universities, can only be exacerbated by the choice WIU is making regarding its faculty librarians. Librarians are a critical connection between students and institutional resources such as databases, tangible materials, and programming, yes, but perhaps of equal importance, librarians take seriously the

responsibility to fulfill the promise the institution, your institution, has made to current and incoming students.

Your mission statement says:

Western Illinois University empowers students, faculty, and staff to lead dynamic and diverse communities. We provide student-centered undergraduate and graduate programs characterized by innovative teaching, research, and service, grounded in interdisciplinary, regional and global perspectives.

One wonders how students will be “empowered” by a skeleton crew inevitably struggling to run a library designed to be staffed by considerably more workers, and lacking access to both resources and time necessary to do their work. One further must ask who will be leading communities of any sort, when future leaders will be subjected to diminished institutional capacities, longer wait times, and an almost complete lack of access to librarians. Though your current approach may arguably be innovative in the same way that burning down one's house to avoid paying the power bill is “innovative”, it hardly solves any problem other than one of short-term arithmetic. It is no exaggeration to say that a library without librarians is no library at all. You are cutting out the heart of your university. This choice will not serve students, it will not serve faculty, it will not produce leaders of dynamic and diverse communities. It will simply fail to fulfill the promise you have made to students about serving them, and continue to undermine the relevance and longevity of WIU. We ask you to reconsider your decision and reinstate your faculty librarians, for your students, faculty and the future of WIU. We, the faculty librarians of SIUE stand in solidarity with the faculty librarians of WIU, and the community surrounding WIU libraries in our capacity as private citizens, librarians, and those concerned about the future of public higher education in Illinois.

In solidarity,

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