

## Reflections from I-Wei Wang, Librarian in the Berkeley School of Law

My launching point was Hank's chapter 9, *Can Unions Defend AF?* [Yes, we can!]

- AAUP as a unique blend of professionalism and unionism
- Early crossings with AFT, parent org of UC-AFT, one of the last higher ed bastions of AFT
- Advocating for the public good – AF as public good? Relationship to libraries[ans] as a common good? (tragedy of the commons ...)???

No blow by blow of negotiations, but some points about the evolution of the librarians' AF campaign and how they touch on themes of both Hank's and Joan's books that are being raised, questioned, examined here.

AF as a negative freedom, and one most often invoked when it's absence/threatened – that's how it came to be an issue in our contract, proposing that what we assumed we had should be made explicit.

UC management's reaction: "AF - that sounds like a term of art" ... "That's something for the classroom" ... "What protection do you need? Perhaps we can protect that, but without calling it AF" ... "AF is for Senate faculty only, AAUP agrees" [um, no they don't] ... "AF can only extend to Senate because it is based on a professional body and community that upholds professional standards" ... "AF is not a good fit for librarians"

What this all boils down to is: **What the heck do librarians do that requires AF?**

- What's the right analogy here? Ask a fish to describe water? Or ask the ocean to explain why it needs water?
- The question repeated from many directions, even those supportive of librarians – what threats have librarians felt that implicate AF – which, to be frank, we struggled to articulate
  - We got a bit drawn into trying to answer this question ("when did you stop beating your wife") as if what we are interested in was an individual right and protection (the typical contractual vision, even in a collective bargaining contract)—Trying to give examples but perhaps the difficulty in articulating an adequate response is the assumption that the problem we were addressing was librarians being harassed rather than the need to defend a principle at the core of our professional identity, standards, ethics
  - Chilling effect rather than headline-grabbing incidents of librarians being "oppressed"
  - Conflation with freedom of expression and individual rights, neutrality/equal time
  - Along the way, a sort of urban legend developed that librarians were looking for something extra, beyond AF it applies to faculty—this probably arose from caution: AF is bounded by professional community/standards/ethics and therefore some librarian AF issues raise matters that Senate would not consider itself to be an arbiter. We have our own community/standards (e.g., ALA/ACRL)
- Most have a pretty instinctual response that yes, librarians have something to do with AF

Fast forward to the outcome – which was not a "contract win" in the sense of a contract provision like that enshrined in the Lecturer MOU (as they enter bargaining, it appears UC does not intend to touch that) but instead a University policy that applies to all librarians (including those not represented by the union) and all academic appointees in their activities that support the teaching a research mission of the

University: teaching, inquiry, research, and “**the public dissemination of knowledge**” unfettered by “outside” concerns

This helps us talk about what **does** this AF thing have to do with librarians?

- What we do as individual academics (in this model, we’re fish, academic freedom is the water)—
  - we teach (not just where the materials are and the tools for finding information, but how to access, evaluate, synthesize, use/re-use it, and how to create /present new knowledge) in classrooms but also outside (e.g. in reference)
  - we research, we inquire (PhDs and other advanced degrees – independent/personal research as well as more professional “librarianish” research)
  - we publish – a traditional version of “public dissemination”
- It’s also our professional and institutional role to create, maintain and defend (against a myriad of political, ideological, and commercial forces) the **circumstances in which the above freedoms** can exist (we’re ... the ocean?):
  - We select and curate materials so that knowledge can be transmitted
  - We organize and provide access points to that knowledge so that inquiry can happen
  - We enable discovery and modes of use that allow research to proceed
  - It’s the library—physical and virtual—where the public dissemination of knowledge happens, isn’t it?
- That’s so meta.
- An open question for me is, in the structure of the proposed policy, there is an “out” for violations of AF in activities by academics that support University’s mission but are not directly teaching/inquiry/research/dissemination
  - These are resolved not by Senate but by grievance procedure fairly controlled by Admin (they have to choose a librarian to sit on the panel for a librarian, but it’s their pick and it could be the library administration that the librarian is up against; they choose what body of professional standards/ethics applies)
  - What about classic librarian activities like selection (materials, subject matter, formats) and cataloging (identifying, arranging and providing discovery and access points for knowledge); and newer librarian concerns like digitization, open access—we see these as directly implicating T/I/R/D, but would Senate agree?

Some closing thoughts ...

- Has the ship sailed? Are we going to sink it? :/
- I’d propose that the AF campaign within the librarians’ contract struggle provides some hope for the Future of AF:
  - The instinctual/emotive response to #librarianAF links to Joan’s idea of a shared social value, the moral authority for AF—as a visible, appealing and [almost] universal symbol of the common good, libraries (and librarians?) are a good “poster child” for AF as a public good.
  - It certainly sparked dialog (faculty, students, staff, the public) about what librarians do and (since we modestly posit ourselves at the center of teaching, scholarly inquiry, research, and dissemination of knowledge) about what AF is and why society needs it

- Among librarians ourselves but also in the broader University community (e.g. here we all are), it's healthy to interrogate AF, and that dialog itself demonstrates the value of AF. [Talk about meta!]
- If the university is not a marketplace of ideas, perhaps it's a **garden of ideas**?
  - There is a hierarchy - Landscape architects, master gardeners, undergardeners, each has their role
  - Select seeds and stock; place them where they can flourish; amend the soil, shape terrains and canopies for heat and light; design pathways, build places to rest and contemplate; weed, mow, prune, plash; cultivate, hybridize, cross pollinate

**Selected readings** (other than Hank and Joan's books, of course):

"ACRL Statement on Academic Freedom." *Association of College & Research Libraries*, June 2015, [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/academicfreedom](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/academicfreedom). Accessed April 5, 2019.

Danner, Richard A., and Bintliff, Barbara. "Academic Freedom Issues for Academic Librarians." *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2006, pp. 13-35, [scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2275&context=faculty\\_scholarship](http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2275&context=faculty_scholarship).

Fister, Barbara. "Academic Freedom and Librarians: A Natural Fit." *Library Babel Fish*, Inside Higher Ed, Sept. 17, 2018, [www.insidehighered.com/blogs/library-babel-fish/academic-freedom-and-librarians-natural-fit](http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/library-babel-fish/academic-freedom-and-librarians-natural-fit). Accessed April 5, 2019.

Levine, Carole. "Are Librarians Entitled to Academic Freedom?" *Non-Profit Quarterly*, Aug. 30, 2018, [nonprofitquarterly.org/2018/08/30/are-librarians-entitled-to-academic-freedom/](http://nonprofitquarterly.org/2018/08/30/are-librarians-entitled-to-academic-freedom/). Accessed April 5, 2019.

Mann, Jesse D. "Intellectual Freedom, Academic Freedom, and the Academic Librarian." *AAUP Journal of Academic Freedom*, vol. 8, 2017, [www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Mann.pdf](http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Mann.pdf). Accessed April 5, 2019.

"Category: Academic Freedom." *UC-AFT Librarians Blog*, <https://ucaftlibrarians.org/category/academic-freedom/>. Accessed April 5, 2019.