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Library Mentoring and Management for Scholarship

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Attaining tenure and promotion is by no means the only goal in research and writing. As White (2001, 7) comments, research and writing can be directly related to and enhance the professional development of librarians in their fields of expertise, and can augment both their personal reputation and the reputation of their library and institution. Courant (2006), paraphrasing his own writing about the value of a liberal education, states that "liberal education and *basic research* position us to solve the *next new problem* [emphasis added] without knowing in advance what the problem will be." (para 5). Sounds like an ideal pursuit for librarians, a field seemingly always on the verge of the next problem. Yet, practically speaking, achieving tenure and promotion is *the* next new problem, or more seriously, the most significant personal obstacle or goal related to scholarship, for someone who wants to continue to work in academic libraries in institutions that offer tenure to librarians.

Given the increasing pressure to publish for librarians who have faculty status, in concert with the ramping up of expectations of what is published on many campuses, what steps can be taken to facilitate scholarship for librarians? Although some experienced librarians feel that the tenure-track librarians should be able to make their own way, it is difficult enough to find and hire personnel that some support seems like a worthwhile investment in the future of the institution and the individual. The standards may have changed, in most cases to more stringent levels over time. While there are steps that can be taken by individual mentors on behalf of mentees, there are also corporate or institutional aspects that should be addressed. Bland, Weber-Main, Lund, and Finstad (2005) offer a number of good strategies in their book *The Research-Productive Department*, which details the results of surveys that they made over a number of campuses in their system. It confirmed some of what I have observed or heard; I have taken it as a foundation and elaborated, below. Though some themes may seem commonsensical, it is important to state them explicitly.

Hiring practices are important. Hire people with motivation, drive, excellent work habits, and the necessary skills, or at least the potential to develop them (Bland, et al., 16-39). Experienced librarians being interviewed for an academic library setting that awards tenure based in part on scholarship should have some previous publications and/or presentations or other projects of sufficient scope, depth, and quality to represent scholarly effort, preferably in their area of responsibility or a related area. Not all library and information science programs require either a research methods class or completion of a thesis, but new librarians should have some idea of what they would like to research, and what the research process entails. An applicant who states, when asked about her writing interests, that she wants to write children's books (and has never published anything) is naive or perhaps not interviewing in the right place, unless she is being interviewed for a position as a librarian for a children's literature collection, and perhaps not then. Personal writing can inform or reinforce

professional writing, but will rarely take the place of it. Some institutions accept artistic or musical production or scholarly production in another field in lieu of scholarship in librarianship, but their numbers are fewer as the corporate/business model overtakes more campuses. A librarian who intends to pursue an alternative path to tenure of contributions in the arts or other disciplines besides librarianship, should discuss those intentions with supervisors at the outset, and plan to make an especially strong case at the decision point(s). Contributions in the fields of art, music, or other forms of writing must not only be strong in themselves but be described and supported even more fully than more standard writing or research. Librarians who have successfully put these things forward as scholarly work have detailed the studies, practice, and level of contribution in which they engaged. Acceptance of work in juried shows, especially at the regional or national level, successful participation in recitals, concerts or competitions, and publication of prose, poetry or fiction in recognized journals are examples of items in successful dossiers. Work that has gone through the equivalent of peer review is more likely to be viewed positively. It does depend on the position that the librarian is in and the culture of the library and of the campus whether such things will be successful in and of themselves. One librarian who submitted artwork as one of his main contributions was in a media department, and the director of that library was perhaps unusually supportive of the arts. In a different case, someone from a public library who crossed over into an academic library, but continued to write a frequent newspaper column, has had the scholarship and importance of that publication record questioned by some (solely) academic librarians. If, in real estate, the tag is "location, location, location," in academic circles, it is "impact, impact, impact," and that impact must be described and demonstrated. In most cases, suggest to tenure-track librarians who are hoping to take this route that submission of performances or art be part of scholarship, not the whole.

Helping faculty members recognize their own strengths and weaknesses is important.

Newer faculty in particular may not be aware of these, as they may have compensated for them in the academic realm without identifying them. This may be pivotal in initiating successful collaborations, as people with similar weaknesses or similar strengths may find each other congenial but not be ideal as research partners. It may influence the types of data they try to gather or the way they gather it. For example, during a seminar on learning styles and how to make appropriate instruction for a variety of students, I learned via an inventory (an early version of Neil Fleming's VARK inventory. See www.vark-learn.com for the most recent iteration) that I have a strong preference for visual and kinesthetic learning, but more importantly, that I have very little aptitude for auditory learning, and that this is in contrast with many students, who are more likely to be auditory learners. This has proven to be more professionally useful than anything else I learned that day. It changed the way I teach. I try to incorporate both auditory and visual elements, and more hands-on practice, into demonstrations and discussions. In terms of research, recognizing this means that I would not be likely to conduct phone interviews; or if I were going to facilitate focus groups, I would not rely on my own memory of what I heard without the support of copious notes, a transcript of a recording, a colleague there who was good at auditory processing, or all of these. Knowing what you do well is a key to doing productive research more easily.

Colleagues are important. Over and over again, the opportunity to communicate with and work side by side with active, engaged, and interesting colleagues who are also willing to work collaboratively makes a documented difference to the progress of individual faculty members, whether the senior faculty members are within the discipline or not (Bland, et al. , 84-104). This is discussed more below, in the section on modeling, but experienced colleagues who will talk freely about their own projects and processes, carefully but sensitively critique the content and processes of others, and propose new projects, are vital to the growth and productivity of tenure-track faculty members. The opportunity to talk to each other about research and scholarship leads almost inevitably to more publications overall and for tenure-track faculty in particular. When I spoke with several colleagues of an article I was drafting about annual review of post-tenure faculty, which had become an issue on campus because of state legislation, another librarian who was particularly interested in management issues wrote a section that applied and could be incorporated, becoming a co-author, and fleshing out an aspect that I had not provided on that article. In another example that I am familiar with, a reference librarian who is particularly interested in indexing of state and local materials has

collaborated with a tenure-track cataloging librarian on more than one publication related to cataloging, archiving, and indexing local and regional materials. By contrast, colleagues who are disengaged, disenchanted or marking time until retirement can have a significant dampening effect on the progress of tenure-track faculty.

“The true cultural capital on any campus is proper recognition of good work” (Olson, 2006). Make certain that research and publication are rewarded, whether through salary, professional rank, praise, new assignments, or some combination of them (Bland, et al. , 157-167) Research and writing has its own intrinsic rewards, but extrinsic honors are important. Conversely, lack of perceived benefits from productivity can retard it, or drive faculty to institutions where such work is given recompense. Retention of productive researcher/librarians sometimes requires extra funding, but is likely cheaper than hiring again, given all costs, and recognizing that the institutional reputation is enhanced by retaining, as well as recruiting, talented people.

Make both the written and unwritten rules and standards explicit to all. Tysick and Babb (2006, 95) concur that "ambiguous publishing criteria" are a continuing source of anxiety in many institutions. A given department, faculty, or institution may have expectations that are not codified but nonetheless impact retention, tenure and promotion; allow no one to be taken by surprise. If the library has, over time, accepted a range of submissions for scholarship, but the college or campus is now using publication in peer-reviewed journals as a yardstick, whether it is in the written standards or not, convey that to new faculty. Otherwise, examination of past dossiers may be misleading to tenure candidates. If it is purely a matter of quality and impact, regardless of format or platform, express to new faculty how those might be measured or more easily quantified and documented or otherwise communicated in review documents.

Experienced persons should openly model the process (Bland, et al. , 59). They should be willing to be seen writing, revising, succeeding and sometimes failing to be published. An instructive early experience for me was when an article that I had co-authored with a heavily-published more experienced librarian was rejected; she said "Oh, well. Send it to _____, (the next journal on our list). it is good work. Someone will publish it." She had no time or emotion to waste; she had a pragmatic rule for moving forward. *Having a list* of potential publications, so that if a manuscript is turned down there are immediate options, is both a psychological and professional refuge, saving stress and time in the submission process.

Tysick and Babb note in their 2006 article that the subject faculty are thoroughly immersed in the research and writing process in their field as graduate students, an experience commonly lacking in library science programs. They go on to state that only slightly over half of librarians are required to take a research methods course and less than 10 percent are required to produce a thesis, according to a separate study by Tysick. Graduate students in other fields may be invited to work with professors on papers or presentations, work in labs or field experiments, or at least go through a fairly rigorous research, writing and editing process with theses and dissertations, often including seminars, presentations and practice in data collection and analysis (2006, 94). More experienced librarians in a given setting can provide to new librarians at least some of the types of support given to graduate students by regular faculty.

Networking is important. Development of a strong professional network is crucial to productivity in research and publication. Assisting new faculty in developing contacts in their departments, on campus, in the state, in the region, and nationally, by telephone, postage and e-mail support, and by travel, allows communication to flourish (Bland, et al. , 97). Flourishing communication engenders excitement and potential productivity. The practice of giving people time to discuss current work in progress, of whatever kind, or to announce acceptance of publications in departmental meetings is also fruitful, as it reinforces the notion that all may be engaged in scholarship, and it may spark ideas for other librarians. (104).

New faculty should keep a research diary or to adopt some other method of recording ideas, progress and questions and help keep track of projects, deadlines, etc. This is also good general practice, as it provides details and jogs memory for annual reports and eventual creation of the tenure and promotion dossier. Toth suggests that such an item be used to frame and record short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals. She also suggests that it, along with contracts, agreements, and other materials, be kept at home for privacy and safety (1997, 60). Whether one uses an electronic file or paper, a day planner or a blank notebook, the style of diary is less important than keeping some sort of record of goals, ideas, and objectives, while not letting planning take the place of production.

Faculty should read something every day. Nothing improves an individual's writing more than exposure to others' good writing, as long as reading does not preclude writing. Charles Patterson, a faculty member in the library school at Louisiana State University, used to say, "Read something every day. It will keep you in touch with why you and the patrons are here." Also, reading articles in journals illustrates what types of articles and styles of writing are accepted in particular publications; it can suggest potential outlets. I was a regular reader of *College Teaching*, trying to find tips that would serve for library instruction, when I realized that a) they might publish something library-related and that b) it would be seen by faculty members in the other disciplines.

Faculty should write something every day. According to Parini (2005) and Krashen (2005), among others, it is easier to find twenty or thirty minutes to write, frequently, than to find big blocks of time infrequently, and writing consistently keeps the writer in practice and connected to what they last wrote. Blocks of time can be important to concentration but they are also harder to arrange and keep uninterrupted.

Keep everyone abreast of the time table, AKA "it is later than you think!" George (n.d., accessed 2006), although speaking to graduate students and new professors in English, expresses the correct sentiment: "Your publication timeline is the most important issue in your professional life." While new faculty commonly think of the time until tenure and promotion as seven years, it is really more like five or five and a half years, and there are lag times after submission and there can be delays in publishing. Almost all librarians have sufficient responsibilities (instruction, reference, cataloging, collection management, committees, governance, and so on) to soak up most of an eight-hour day, and often more. As for writing and doing research at home, I have heard it said that the best thing that tenure-track librarians can do to further their writing is to *give away their televisions*. That is regarded as an extreme statement in this media-driven culture, but it remains that television, DVDs, and other programming can become an easy distraction, an invitation to procrastination, and a major impediment to productivity. There is no time to waste. More articles produced and sent out lead to more articles published, almost inevitably. Prolific authors are more likely to be published authors.

Encourage investigation of journals or other outlets. Blind submissions to journals or conferences one has not investigated are almost doomed from the start. Making assumptions about journals (especially "They will never publish anything about *this!*") is another dead end.

Study and follow the submission guidelines. Editors of library science journals almost always have full-time jobs in addition to editing. It is perfectly acceptable to write a brief note of inquiry to an editor to see if a submission would or would not be within the scope of a particular journal, if you are uncertain, rather than sending a submission directly. A submission that is off-subject or formatted in the wrong way may be rejected out of hand. Given our professional tasks, librarians should be particularly aware of the importance of correct and full citations in reference lists. Save the editor's time, and your own.

Mentors may help sort out what the important journals are in a particular field(s), by personal knowledge and by use of tools such as the *Journal Citation Reports*, and help tenure-track faculty be aware of the different rates and turnaround times for submission, review, and acceptance for various journals; those given are usually averages, not the longest possible. The education-related Cabell's

directories sometimes list relevant titles. Directories of library science periodicals, which used to be published regularly, seem to have fallen by the electronic wayside, but most journals' websites will give you some idea of the time frames involved in publication.

For conference presentations, although the selection process will be more rigorous, a presentation that will be peer-reviewed before acceptance and for which the proceedings are published is a better support of tenure than one that is not, and can take about the same amount of time and preparation. However, writing the proceedings paper, if it is not identical to the original presentation, may take extra time. The author(s) must keep in mind the content and opportunity, but also the impact or importance of the work, and be sure to document it.

Everyday experiences can present research and writing opportunities. Not every experience lends itself to a writing opportunity, but many do. Recurring issues that are causing stress in one library are likely occurring elsewhere, too, and if a solution can be found, others will want to know. Obvious possibilities are database comparisons, citation analyses, and assessment of services. The practical how-we-did-this-well article can be very useful to readers.

Provide/request release time. This is not always easily supplied or easy to ask for. Some librarians are on nine- or ten-month contracts and have some time for research and publication, but most are using minutes or hours squeezed from other duties. Supervisors should encourage/mandate new faculty to take advantage of whatever time is available, although this must be done judiciously to avoid the appearance of over-protection. Release time may provide a set window of hours per time period, as in one half-day per week for X time, or it may be a set understanding that if nothing else is urgent, especially in the "both urgent and important" sense that Covey (1994, 37) describes, then time may be (or *must* be) allocated to research and writing.

A corollary to this is helping new librarians manage their service commitments so that they are not overburdened too quickly in their formative professional years. It is especially easy for new faculty who are often learning to manage a whole array of tasks and who want to be agreeable and make their presence felt to commit to more than can be managed in a given area, and it is easy for anyone to underestimate the time and work required for a given committee or task force. Seasoned colleagues, supervisors or mentors should be proactive in offering advice, particularly if they can forecast or witness signs of a colleague getting overzealous or overcommitted. Noticing someone bursting into tears should not be the first signal that something is amiss.

Provide office space appropriate to the task and the individual. Research and writing requires concentration, but what invokes the ability to concentrate may vary with learning style. Although productivity often improves with quiet, private space rather than in cubicles or more public floor space, for some, productivity improves when they are less isolated, just as some of our students work best in the noisier areas of the library. Situational trials may be needed to determine a "personal best" work area for an individual. I developed as a writer when our library was being renovated; we moved to the fourth floor and had faculty carrels instead of cubicles; a small solitary (but not completely isolated) office with a door that closed and a window to the outside. This turned out to be one of the best places for writing that I have ever had. After the renovation I recreated the feeling of that space with pastoral scenes on the wall, a cover for the window on my door when I am writing, and earphones to counter sound when necessary.

Establish writing/research groups. These, if handled properly, can function as mentoring groups, providing constructive comments and helping to encourage writing. More practiced members may offer advice on how to collect data, how to collaborate with other authors, or provide pointers on how to decide where to send an article that is finished, or to help determine *when* an article is finished, which is particularly difficult for some authors. Someone fairly senior/powerful but not threatening should chair the group, and be willing to control the progress of the meetings. All members of the group must be willing to allow the others to read their work and comment honestly without hurt

feelings or payback. Attendees must agree to treat each other and each others' work with respect; taking or allowing someone to take cheap shots or to pillage someone else's ideas is not only grossly unprofessional but will wither a writing group faster than bad coffee. Again, Tysick and Babb go into detail about the establishment and success of a writing group, the Academic Writing Group at the Library at the University at Buffalo, using *The Work of Writing* by Elizabeth Rankin as a textbook. Their group even took time to set up and provide for a two-day writing retreat for ten participants (p. 99).

Establish a mentoring program. Some people will respond well to the individual attention that a mentor can provide. Often, it is easier to show a piece of writing or thrash out a research project with one trusted individual rather than to a group. Mentors should be good communicators, approachable, productive themselves, and trustworthy. If mentoring programs are in place, they may be formal or informal, but an effort should be made to match mentors to all new hires who *wish* to have one; some institutions require all new faculty to have a mentor or mentors. I am ambivalent about requiring someone to have a mentor, as it is not always easy to develop a mentoring relationship, from either side, and it is not in keeping with every individual's style or preference. However, it can be equally argued that allowing new hires to refuse mentoring may put an institution in a challenging position if that person later has difficulty making professional progress.

Mentors should be careful of the rights of their mentees. As a generalization, the three most consistent complaints about mentors (from mentees) in the literature involve a perceived lack of commitment by the mentor (or a difference in expectations of what the mentor planned and the mentee hoped for), difficulties in communication between the partners, and the perception that the mentor had taken credit for some work or project of the mentee (see Eby, et al. , 2004, or Simon and Eby, 2003). Many institutions include acting as a mentor in the service part of an annual review, and the individual's performance may be reviewed at that time. Mentors need to be scrupulous about credit, commitment and communication.

Support travel or other avenues of learning. Travel support is not always an obvious way to support scholarship. However, travel to conferences helps freshen thinking, generate contacts, and inspire ideas (Bland, et al. , 104). Also, presentations given at conferences may be developed into publications. My own first article grew out of a poster session from ALA annual conference. I was invited to develop it into an article by the editor of the journal, who was attending the conference. Rachel Singer Gordon speaks of having had a similar experience in her useful book (2004, 85). Since junior faculty members may be less likely to have available sources of self-funding, funding for travel should be built into the library's budget, and, while something is better than nothing, it should not be dependent on uncertain revenue streams (such as in one institution that funded travel with fines for overdue materials). Limited funding of all interested faculty is better than full funding of a few, for fairness and to spread the opportunity for growth. One never knows who will return with ideas. However, it is recommended that libraries give priority in funding to the people who have less chance of supporting travel themselves, those who are not yet tenured, and to fund the ones who are representing their institution with presentations even more urgently, and give top priority to those in whom these coincide.

If funding for travel is not available at all, another avenue is the developing field of continuing education online, via synchronous and asynchronous classes and seminars. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has many offerings in this vein, and while they are not cheap, they are cheaper than conference registration and travel. There may be choices at the institution or other local venues that are more financially feasible; these offer the additional advantage of allowing the librarians to become more familiar and better acquainted with people on campus, in the city, and in the state.

Provide graduate assistants, if possible. Graduate assistants with proper training may be of great help in collection of data, administration of surveys, and other tasks that support publication. In addition, this can give junior librarians the opportunity to gain experience in supervision and in turn

give the graduate students experience in helping to prepare a publication. Our campus does not have a library school, but we have had good success in a cooperative effort with the Graduate School, recruiting and using graduate students from the respective colleges they serve as assistants for the library subject specialists (Jones, Parsch and Varghese, 2005; Jones, Parsch and Varghese, 2004). The graduate students learn a lot about libraries and about finding research materials; some of them have taught classes or drop-in sessions for databases in their respective subject areas. They are often available to their peers in situations that librarians are not, and the librarians frequently learn about the disciplines from which the students are drawn. Some graduate assistants who have been very involved with the research of their subject librarians have ended up with publishing credit as second authors on journal articles or presentations at conferences. This provides both excellent scholarly experience and résumé highlights for them.

Find or provide support for understanding statistical analysis, grant writing, and other technical or specialized skills not necessarily common knowledge to all library faculty. Many campuses have support staff for these things available to all faculty; they need not be part of the library staff, although it is wonderful to have such expertise in-house. There may be a research center that is willing to undertake some forms of statistical analysis, and there may be support for grant writing from a development office, either in the library or on the campus. For example, on my own campus, the Survey Research Center offers (according to their website): "... short-term consultation on research or survey design through the full design and implementation of surveys. Partial survey work includes, but is not limited to: questionnaire development, data collection, computer-assisted telephone surveys, mail surveys, face-to-face interviews, focus group facilitation, web surveys, e-mail surveys, coding of open-ended data, data entry, data analysis, report writing and presentation, supply data from data warehouse..." and so on. The center offers its service to the campus and to others for a fee that is related to the complexity and duration of the work. They also provide advice for negotiation of the Institutional Research Board rules. This is not unique. For example, Oregon State University has a similar center; UCLA has multiple support centers for campus researchers.

Professional development may be the avenue of choice, if campus help is not otherwise available. Classes on grant writing may be offered at state, regional or national conferences, by state or regional libraries and library networks and cooperatives, or there may be local expertise to draw from at the public library. There are frequently continuing education classes offered by campuses or county services in grant writing, statistical analysis, and fund raising skills. Sometimes these circumstances will let librarians learn the skills that they need.

Conclusion

Tenure-track faculty members need support and guidance to do research and write for publication in what continues as an increasingly demanding field. Many libraries are strapped for funding and low on staff, and performance standards are high, but campus expectations for scholarship from library faculty include publication and in many cases tenure and promotion committees continue to hold librarians to similar constraints as subject faculty. Careful hiring, orientation to the campus, and provision of appropriate office space is basic, but continuing to commit resources, time and effort, in mentoring, writing groups, collaboration, and other contributions to the continued education and socialization of the tenure-track librarian, should make it more likely that they will learn how to balance the needs of performance, scholarship and service in ways that will be fruitful to them and supportive of the missions and needs of their institutions. To some extent, we can participate in the creation of better colleagues by this kind of intentional sustained nurturing of their efforts. Not all institutions can supply all of the mentioned types of support to all tenure-track faculty members, but to be aware of them and to supply them when and where possible is a start.

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