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***Library Philosophy and Practice* 2011**

ISSN 1522-0222

Librarian Faculty Status: What Does It Mean in Academia?

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Introduction

The issue of faculty status for academic librarians has been a hotly debated topic ever since its inception. There are those who believe that librarians have no business operating under the rubric of faculty, while there are others who just as fervently assert that librarians have rightly won the status and must do anything in their power to keep it. Central to the issue is how faculty status is defined. In actuality, "faculty status" manifests itself in a wide variety of ways across different arrangements and institutions. This paper will focus not on whether faculty status should be implemented for librarians, but rather on the various manifestations of faculty status found across academic institutions and its many ramifications. Other types of academic statuses will be discussed in relation to faculty status as well.

The ACRL Standards for Faculty Status

In order to talk about what it means to be a faculty librarian, it is helpful to have a benchmark that enables us to compare and contrast the extent to which a particular person is indeed faculty. The most useful and widely accepted measuring tool is the Association of College and Research Libraries' *Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians.* First laid down in the early 1970's, these guidelines have been revised over the years, with the latest revision approved at the American Library Association Annual Conference, June 2007 and prepared by the ACRL Committee on the Status of Academic Librarians (ACRL, 2007). Institutions of higher education and their governing bodies are urged to adopt the following standards, which basically delineate various facets in which librarian faculty status is deemed equivalent to the faculty at large on a given campus.

1. Librarians perform professional responsibilities.

2. Librarians have an academic form of governance for the library faculty.

3. Librarians have equal representation in all college or university governance.

4. Librarians receive compensation comparable to that of other faculty.

5. Librarians are covered by tenure policies.

6. Librarians are promoted in rank based on a peer review system.

7. Librarians are eligible for sabbatical and other leaves in addition to research funds.

8. Librarians have the same academic freedom protections as other faculty. (ACRL, 2007)

The standards entailed above represent the best case scenario, the optimal situation for library faculty or at least the situation that would most nearly equate them with other campus faculty. In truth, all eight standards are rarely seen implemented fully at any given institution. Rather than being a yes/no dichotomy, it is clear that "faculty status" for librarians may be implemented in a variety of ways, with some facets apparent and others absent. The degree to which each facet is implemented also varies and further complicates the issue of how well the ACRL standards are being met. It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at every academic library across the nation or even all members of a single subgroup. Instead, the continuum of faculty status will be examined and particular snapshots will be taken from this continuum and discussed when appropriate.

The Continuum of Academic/Faculty Librarian Status

There is much confusion and apprehension among new librarians entering the field when it comes to faculty status. The realization that faculty status is not a static state and may be very different across institutions should offer these librarians more hope in finding a particular library that offers the responsibilities and opportunities commensurate with their own skill set and attributes. Furthermore, a new librarian may opt out of faculty status altogether, taking a position as a staff member or one involving a non-faculty, yet academic status. These non-faculty statuses will be discussed briefly later in order to shed light on other options for professional librarians.

There are various schemes for evaluating what type of status a given academic librarian might have, but one that is particularly useful has been laid out by Bolin (2008), who examined typologies of librarian status across American land grant universities, these being state universities that share the three pronged mission: teaching, research, and service. The approach is an attempt to provide deeper meaning than simple binary categorizations by examining individual characteristics and how those characteristics relate to each other (Bolin, 2008, p. 220). The following types of data were gathered proactively from the libraries' websites:

1. Employee group (faculty or staff)

2. Title of library administrator (dean, director, etc.)

3. Rank system (professorial ranks, parallel ranks, librarian ranks, other)

4. Tenure eligibility

5. Representation on faculty senate

From her findings, Bolin was able to determine that the status typology frequencies were: professorial 42%, other ranks with tenure 28%, other ranks without tenure 10%, and non-faculty 20% (2008, p. 223). "The rationale for this typology is that professorial rank is an obvious category, because it is the universal faculty teaching model" (Bolin, 2008, p. 223), while academic or professional staff status is the other option for those librarians who are not faculty. Overall, the combination of "Employee Group=Faculty" and "Tenure=No" is rare (Bolin, 2008, p. 223). The "Other ranks" categories encompass such positions as Assistant Librarian or Librarian I, positions that may or may not carry tenure. These librarian ranking systems offer some degree of equivalence to teaching faculty by paralleling professorial ranking schemes. Bolin brings up an interesting point concerning the

"professional librarian" type of status that is instituted in lieu of faculty status. While it does recognize the education and expertise of the library profession, it may negate one of the main rationales for faculty status for librarians – that being strength in numbers. This larger faculty group that librarians are often a part of helps them reach their goals of recognition, appropriate salaries, etc. (Bolin, 2008, p. 224)

Through the use of frequency and cross-tabulation, correlations are described that show how the combinations of characteristics fit together. The combinations that are most relevant to our discussion are listed below:

Employee Group - Rank System: Only faculty members are called professor, while two-thirds of Parallel and Librarian rank group members are faculty.

Employee Group – Tenure Eligibility: A large majority of faculty librarians have tenure. Among librarians who are staff, 40 percent have a form of continuing appointment.

Employee Group – Faculty Senate Representation: Only a small number of librarians who are faculty are not represented in the faculty senate. Even 50 percent of staff librarians are represented.

Rank System – Tenure Eligibility: There is a very high occurrence of tenure accompanying professorial rank. Librarian ranks are evenly split, while parallel ranks have tenure in the majority of cases.

Rank System – Faculty Senate Representation: In all rank systems where all or most librarians are faculty, they are overwhelmingly represented in the faculty senate.

Tenure Eligibility – Faculty Senate Representation: There is a 100 percent overlap between these characteristics. Even librarians without tenure serve on the senate more than 60 percent of the time (Bolin, 2008, p. 227).

In the process of creating the typologies, Bolin found that drawing the line between faculty and staff was not always easy. There are those who have parallel ranks, but their documents refer to them as faculty. Bolin goes on to point out that, "There are cases, however, in which librarians have many characteristics of faculty, including a form of tenure (continuing appointment); are represented in the senate; have responsibilities for teaching, research, and service; but are, in fact, staff. The University of California System is an excellent example of this. In other cases, such as the University of Georgia, librarians have almost none of the characteristics of faculty, but they are faculty, and refer to themselves this way." (Bolin, 2008, p. 227) Regardless, a strong model of faculty status is found in these universities as a whole and even librarians who are not faculty have a status that recognizes their expertise and which is often indistinguishable from faculty status.

Teaching, Research, Service?

One of the fundamental qualities of librarian faculty status is that it is usually based on the teaching faculty model. Yet, there are those who believe that librarians should not be held to the tenure and promotion guidelines that are seen in this model, namely: teaching, research, and service. In 1995, McGowan and Dow published an article outlining the transformation to a clinical model of faculty status for academic librarians. This model is drawn from the medical field and centers around the idea that all teaching, service, and research activities focus on the patient. The authors state that, "If reference service is compared to patient care, then the clinical faculty model comparisons become readily apparent" (McGowan and Dow, 1995, p. 348). This provision of patient care provides the link between the clinical faculty member and the academic librarian.

However, the article fails to provide a satisfactory definition and overview of clinical

faculty status. According to The University of New Hampshire, "Clinical faculty have specialized training and experience in a professional field. It is expected that clinical faculty have expertise in three areas: direct services to clients, supervision and teaching in a clinical or practice setting, and service." (Univ. of NH, 2008) The criteria include possession of a terminal degree appropriate to the field and successful teaching or other relevant experience. Clinical faculty are responsible for providing direct service to clients, while their primary function is to help students acquire clinical skills needed in a professional environment. They do not occupy tenure-track faculty positions and are not eligible for sabbatical leave. The evaluation of the candidate is limited to accomplishments in direct services to clients, supervision and teaching in a clinical or practice setting (Univ. of NH, 2008). With this expanded definition, we can see the logic in a clinical model – such a model could grant librarians a faculty status that is more in keeping with the realities of the field, yet recognizes their unique abilities and the instructional component of their jobs.

Challenges of Ambiguity

The ambiguities of faculty status for librarians can oftentimes lead to conflict among administrators and other faculty. Weaver-Myers provides a case-in-point in her study of the challenge faced by University of Oklahoma librarians in the 1990s. It came about that a dual status was proposed after one particular library faculty member was granted tenure and, another, upon not receiving tenure was offered professional status. This suggested that librarians could successfully perform their duties without faculty status (Weaver-Myers, 2002, p. 27). An untenured clinical faculty status, as outlined above, was also suggested by university administration. Ultimately, it was decided that librarians would choose their preferred status, with an even 50/50 split deciding for and against a tenure-track position and subsequent new hires were all appointed to non tenure-track positions, as required by the provost. (Weaver-Myers, 2002, p. 28)

Although this type of arrangement can suffice in a difficult situation, it does serve to create further ambiguities and may potentially polarize faculty librarians within a single library or institution. Inconsistency regarding faculty status among academic libraries is one thing, but inconsistency within a single library is another thing entirely with its own ramifications. This situation affords new librarians more alternatives in the profession, but at the cost of identity ambiguity. As mentioned earlier, faculty status is a very important issue for new academic librarians entering the field because it can have long-term consequences for their careers.

ACRL conducted a survey in 1999 of academic libraries which included a series of questions designed to determine the extent to which institutions offer faculty status to academic librarians, which was subsequently summarized by Shannon Cary, *director of Research and Special Initiatives* (2001). The survey questions asked which of the nine conditions listed in the ACRL Guidelines for Academic Status were provided by each institution. The results indicated whether an individual institution was providing complete faculty status, a limited version of faculty status, or no faculty status at all. Not surprisingly, the condition that almost all institutions grant their librarians is academic freedom however, the majority of respondents felt that this academic freedom was only partially granted. It appeared that faculty librarians were gaining equality with teaching faculty in the areas of leaves of absence and research funding. The area in which librarians most often responded that they are not on equal footing with their teaching counterparts was salary scale, benefits, and appointment period. As Cary points out, "Tenure and peer review were also areas where a significant number of librarians indicated they are not on equal footing with other academic faculty, with 35.5 percent indicating they were not covered by the same tenure policies as other faculty and 35.2 percent indicating they were not promoted through the ranks on the basis of professional proficiency and effectiveness via a peer review system with standards consistent with other faculty" (2001, p. 510)

Librarian Faculty Status and the Institution

Through comparison of the conditions of faculty status given to librarians at the different types of institutions, certain patterns were brought to light. Librarians at institutions granting bachelor of arts degrees reported the most inequality in the area of salary. Additionally, librarians at institutions granting bachelor of arts degrees were less likely than librarians at other types of institutions to be covered by the same tenure process as other faculty. Only 48 percent of these institutions had full or partial tenure processes for librarians, whereas 67 percent of the other types of institutions partially or fully provided tenure opportunities (Cary, 2001, p. 510). The distinction is made by Cary that, "overall, institutions granting associates of arts degrees were the most likely to partially or fully provide the conditions that define faculty status to librarians, and institutions granting bachelor of arts degrees were the least likely to provide these conditions to their librarians" (2001, p. 510). This being said, there are usually differences in the ways that such conditions as rank and tenure are interpreted at associate level institutions. These conditions may be based more on longevity than on requirements typically found at universities, such as scholarly publication and professional service on a state or national level.

How does the personnel status of librarians affect overall institutional quality? This is what Bolger and Smith sought to answer in their survey of 125 liberal arts colleges (2006). Their findings indicated that, "the higher the tier (i.e., the better the overall quality of the liberal arts college as determined by U.S. News and World Report), the less likely librarians will have faculty status or rank, the less likely they will be required to undergo a formal review process, the less likely they will have access to research funds, and the less likely they will be eligible to serve on faculty committees" (Bolger & Smith, 2006, p. 227).

Ramifications of Status

The ACRL standards have specified that librarians with faculty status should have the same privileges and responsibilities as other faculty on campus. As Hoggan (2003, p. 432) has pointed out, this is different from *academic status*, where librarians are recognized as instructional and research staff, but are not given the same rank, benefits, and responsibilities as faculty. What sort of privileges and concomitant responsibilities might faculty librarians find in a position as such? A major advantage for some librarians is improved stature and recognition within the university as opposed to a staff position. If librarians do research and serve on faculty senates, they may have better relationships with other faculty on campus, which in turn can translate into more effective collaboration. The research aspect may allow librarians to better adapt to change and solve problems in a more systematic and effective way (Hoggan, p. 434). Faculty librarian status can translate into increased salaries, but this has not been found consistently across various institutions. However, faculty librarians (especially tenure-track) may be eligible to take leaves of absence, engage in more professional development, and have more opportunities to publish.

The disadvantages of faculty status must also be taken into account when deciding what status may be appropriate on an institutional or individual basis. Resentment among other faculty members seems to be most pronounced at universities, where the terminal degree of the master's level librarian is not seen as appropriate by the Ph.D. holding faculty. Beth Shapiro (1993) wrote that respect must be gained via the effective services offered by librarians, rather than a nomenclature offering token status (Hoggan, 2003, p. 436). The pressure to publish that often accompanies tenure-track positions can be an enormous source of stress and can actually limit the ways in which librarians are able to contribute directly to the university community. Other opportunities, such as public speaking, serving on state or national library association committees, and giving relevant workshops can

all be ways in which a librarian may contribute to the field, whether they are faculty or hold some other form of academic status (Hoggan, 2003, p. 436).

The Realities of Faculty Librarian Status

Arguments for and against librarian faculty status aside, it is apparent that the ideal held up by the ACRL is seldom found in its entirety. It forms more of a "wish list" for academic librarians who seek equality with the rest of the faculty on campus. Although the model of teaching faculty is strong and forms the basis for what we measure ourselves against, it may not always be the most appropriate measuring stick. Certainly, if the majority of ACRL's standards for faculty status are not being met, yet we are named "faculty", we must question this faculty status. It is likely a nominal status, one that fails to bolster the individual and collective psyche of the profession. Nominal faculty statuses may be the worst of both possible worlds in that library faculty know they are not being treated equitably, yet at the same time, they are not in a position to achieve equality. In some instances, the reverse may be true and librarians should indeed be considered full-fledged faculty, based on the scope of their current position. The determination should be made based on what a particular librarian actually *does* vs. how they want to *appear*. According to Richard Slattery (as quoted by Welch and Mozenter, 2006), "At issue is whether academic librarians 'qualify' as college and university faculty, and to what extent performance criteria should take into account differences in 'duties and schedules' between librarians and teaching faculty."

Plan for Success

In order to ensure that you are clear about what is expected of you as an academic librarian, whether in a faculty, staff, or academic role, it is important to get a copy of the library's guiding documents or promotion/tenure guidelines. In a tenure-track position, maintaining a strategic plan and building in benchmarks along the way is a key to achieving success. Collecting documentation will be important as you build your case, your portfolio, based around the standard measuring blocks of teaching, research, and service. These are usually clearly weighted based on a formula such as 40 percent teaching, 40 percent research, and 20 percent service. This formula refers to importance, not time spent – in other words, the above university would view teaching and the production of scholarly work as equally important in a tenure decision, while service is half as important (Hill, 2005, p. 9).

Teaching is often referred to as "profession of practice" and encompasses more than actual instruction sessions with students and other users (Lee, 2007, p. 627). It may be difficult for those in certain areas, such as technical services for instance, to define their worth based on standard criteria, yet it is possible for these minority cultures to use this umbrella heading to apply their particular contributions (Hill, 2007). Research requirements, if any, should be clearly enumerated so that the new librarian can begin early in the tenure process. The last aspect, Service, is the one that tends to come easier to librarians since we work in a service profession. Nevertheless, the service activities one engages in should support long-term career goals (Lee, 2007, p. 628).

We have seen that there are many variations of faculty and academic status for librarians across different institutions and even within the same institution. You may be considered faculty and accorded all the benefits of teaching faculty. You may be eligible for promotion, but not tenure, or vice versa. Your ranking system may be identical to teaching faculty, or you may have parallel ranks, such as Librarian I or Senior Librarian. The most critical aspect of navigating through the particulars of a career is to fully understand the system at a particular institution and how to succeed within that system. As mentioned above, it is imperative to know and abide by the campus and library policies. Before accepting a faculty

librarian position of any kind at any institution, you should understand the activities and responsibilities expected of you as a scholar librarian (Gregory & Chambers, 2005, p. 60). By taking the necessary steps involved in a certain position with a particular status, you are ensuring your own success and the success of the library and its parent institution.

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