

## An Overview of Academic Librarians Status in US Libraries

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### Abstract

The issue of faculty status for academic librarians has been the hotly and much debated topic in recent decades. 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 any thing in their power to keep it. Central to the issue is how faculty status is defined. The purpose of this paper is to examine the key points raised during this debate. The paper shows that with faculty status, academic librarians receive the same rights and privileges as other faculty members in the academic institutions.

**Keywords:** Academic Librarians; Status; Faculty; ACRL; United States of America.

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### Introduction

Status and role are two sides of the same coin. A's behaviour as determined by the norms towards others is A's role. Other's behaviour, opinions and attitudes towards A as a consequence of the role which A plays, is A's status. One's duty is one's role; the privileges one gets for playing one's role determine one's status. Status is considered of paramount importance in life. "It is a place in the sun, position in the scheme of things, niche, in the town or community: How a man ranks in the society of which he is a part and the necessity of establishing this status, figure in every activity of man" [1]. Actually status refers to one's position in relation to something else. Thus, in life, every individual has a plurality of statuses in conformity with the number of situations or relative position he occupies. A father's status as head of the family is high, though his occupational status

may be very low- if he is a street cleaner, for example. It means everyone has then a personal or social status, and at the same times an economic or occupational status. The two are, of course inter-connected. One may directly affect the other. The street-cleaner referred to above with his low occupational status but high personal status by virtue of being the head of the family, is not likely to have a very high social status in the community.

The academic librarian plays an important role in the overall mission of any university. This role is both overt in the day-to-day involvement between librarian and students and faculty in the institution as well as subtle in the librarian's continual awareness of changes in available resources and technologies to aid the campus community. Though the academic librarian, clearly, is a vital member of the university community, his or her organizational classification in the hierarchy of the institution can be murky, and this murkiness may have effects, both understated and profound, on the librarian's attitude, motivation, and outlook regarding his or her chosen profession.

Reference to the quest for faculty status in US can be found as early as 1878, when

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Sawtelle declared that “librarianship ought not to be annexed to a professorship, but be itself a professorship” [2] (as cited by McAnally in 1975). In his statement on the historical development of faculty status in academic libraries, McAnally warns that librarians must join the faculty or remain forever in peripheral and inferior roles. The information explosion of the post world war II period, coupled with the move towards the German model in American Universities, saw academic librarians move from a conservation function to a utilitarian function as research became a central role of the university [3]. As their roles became more complex, requiring better training and specialization, academic librarians became increasingly dissatisfied with their relatively low status and looked to the faculty model as a means for attaining the recognition they felt they deserved [4].

#### *Emergence of ACRL*

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. In 1958, the Universities Library Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) established the Committee on Academic Status, which was the first body of the American Library Association (ALA) to officially and formally endorse faculty status as a policy and right. In 1969, this committee was converted to a general committee of the entire ACRL. In 1971, the ACRL approved its “Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians” which was reaffirmed by the ACRL and ALA in 2001. The standards include professional responsibility, library governance, college and university governance, compensation, tenure, promotion, leaves, research and development funds, and academic freedom. In 1972, a “Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians” [5] was issued by the ACRL, the Association of American Colleges (AAC), and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and it was reaffirmed in

June of 2001. The ALA defines faculty status as “an official recognition by an institution of higher education that librarians are part of the instructional and research staff by conferment of rank and titles identical to those of faculty and commensurate benefits, rights, and responsibilities” (as cited by Werrell and Sullivan). In 1973, the ACRL issued the “Model Statement of Criteria and Procedures for Appointment, Promotion in Academic Rank and Tenure for College and University Librarians” which was later revised in 1987. The Model Statement was superseded by “Guidelines for Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure of Academic Librarians”, which was approved by the ACRL board in June of 2005. Thus, 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. Institutions of higher education and their governing bodies are urged to adopt the following standards [6], which basically delineate various facets in which librarian faculty status is deemed equivalent to the faculty at large on a given campus.

- (a) Librarians perform professional responsibilities.
- (b) Librarians have an academic form of governance for the library faculty.
- (c) Librarians have equal representation in all college or university governance.
- (d) Librarians receive compensation comparable to that of other faculty.
- (e) Librarians are covered by tenure policies.
- (f) Librarians are promoted in rank based on a peer review system.
- (g) Librarians are eligible for sabbatical and other leaves in addition to research funds.
- (h) Librarians have the same academic freedom protections as other faculty.

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 other 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.

*Librarians Status Typology*

There are four (three types in which librarians are faculty and one in which they are staff) types of academic librarians as under:-

- (a) Faculty: Professorial ranks
- (b) Faculty: Other ranks with tenure

ranks” (parallel ranks, e.g., Assistant Librarian, and librarian ranks, e.g., Librarian I) with tenure and other ranks without tenure. Tenure is a salient aspect of faculty status, and it plays an important role in creating a typology of status.

Type1 and Type 2 are generally readily identified, because librarians who are tenure-track faculty are clearly identified in university documentation. Type 3 and 4, on the other hand, can be harder to distinguish, because some institutions have given librarians a status that parallels or has some features of faculty status.

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, 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

**Table: Distribution of Status Types[7]**

Type	Frequency	Percent
1. Professorial	33	27.7
2. Other ranks with tenure	28	23.5
3. Other ranks without tenure	13	10.9
4. Non-faculty (staff)	45	37.8
Total	119	100.0

- (c) Faculty: Other ranks without tenure
- (d) Non-Faculty: Professional or academic staff

The typology was first developed based on data about land grant universities only. The rationale for the typology begins with the idea that professional rank represents the universal teaching faculty model and is one necessary category. Academic or professional staff status is also a necessary category, since it represents a model in which librarians are not faculty. Between those two end points are “other

meaning than simple binary categorizations by examining individual characteristics and how those characteristics relate to each other [8]. The following types of data were gathered proactively from the libraries’ websites:

- (a) Employee group (faculty or staff)
- (b) Title of library administrator (dean, director, etc.)
- (c) Rank system (professorial ranks, parallel ranks, librarian ranks, other)
- (d) Tenure eligibility

#### (e) Representation on faculty senate

From the findings[9], 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%. The rationale for this typology is that professorial rank is an obvious category, because it is the universal faculty teaching model, 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. 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.

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 are listed [10]as under:-

##### *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, forty 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 fifty percent of staff librarians are represented.

##### *Rank System-Tenure Eligibility*

There is a very 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 hundred percent overlap between these characteristics. Even librarians without tenure serve on the senate more than sixty percent of the time.

In the process of creating the typologies, Bolin found that drawing the line between faculty and staff is 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 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". 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.

### *Views against Faculty Status*

There are so many opposing views to faculty status for academic librarians can be found in the literature. Some disagree with the basic tenet that librarians are primarily teachers. Shapiro [11] state that the work librarians do is “fundamentally different” from teaching faculty. Peele views teaching as only a small part of what a librarian does and that it does not compare to classroom teaching. He also states that teachers are an “originating force” and that librarians are a “responding force” [12] (as cited by Johnson). Leonhardt [13] states that librarians must remember that they have a service mission of providing access to information. He believes that academic librarians “promote learning in a different context and have to know more than a little about a lot”. The benefits of faculty status to the librarians are also disputed. According to Shapiro respect and status cannot be granted, but must be earned and that faculty status does not automatically make librarians equal partners with the teaching faculty. Nor does it guarantee fair compensation or academic freedom. Librarians should not be starry-eyed about the capability of tenure to protect freedom of speech.

Critics of faculty status are also quick to dispute claims of benefits to the institution, especially in the area of research. Anderson believes that library schools do not prepare students sufficiently to do research. Shapiro claims that empirical research is not essential to the basic mission of librarians. Others feel that the research that is published is of poor quality.

As for faculty governance, Shapiro [14] says faculty status is not required to ensure a system of collegial governance and that “faculty status provides no guarantee that librarians will be considered central to the educational process”. According to the Cronin [15] their role is to support and not to define the academic mission of the university. In general, English [16] has found that most university administrators believe granting faculty status to librarians does nothing to

benefit the university and that faculty appointments are unsuitable for librarians.

### *Ambiguities of Faculty Status for Librarians*

The ambiguities of faculty status for librarians can oftentimes lead to conflict among administrators and other faculty. Weaver-Myers [17] provides a case-in-point in her study of the challenge faced by University of Oklahoma librarians. 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. An untenured clinical faculty status 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. Although this type of arrangement can suffice in a difficult situation, it does serve to create further ambiguities and many 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 we know, 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 of academic libraries in 1999 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. 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 [18] 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".

*Realities of Faculty Status for Librarians*  
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 cited by Welch and Mozenter) [19], "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".

### *Summing up*

According to Oberg [20] and others "Faculty status accords librarians full partnership in the creative, cooperative, synergistic, and collegial relationship between students, teaching faculty, and campus administrators that today's volatile academic environment requires". The faculty status option has also support of three professional associations like the ACRL, AAUP and AAC. Ultimately, 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. Before accepting a faculty librarian position of any kind at any institution, one should understand the activities and responsibilities expected to him/her as a scholar librarian.

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