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## So, You Find Yourself Supervising Faculty Librarians. What Now?

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### ***So, You Find Yourself Supervising Faculty librarians. What now?***

About half of academic librarians in the United States have faculty status, though the specifics of this status vary by institution (Bolen, 2008.) In my career as a librarian since 1992 I have held faculty status at four institutions: two public universities and two private liberal arts colleges. I am agnostic when it comes to the value of faculty status for academic librarians, the libraries we administer, and the institutions we serve. Depending on the institutional context, the specifics of such status, and the faculty and administrative cultures, faculty status can be a help or a hindrance in providing library services. I disagree with the idea that faculty status for librarians is a marker of respect and necessary for us to be regarded as equal and valued partners by other faculty members. All other things being equal, the value we contribute as librarians is independent of our employment status. Value is defined by what we do, not our status. However, all other things are not always equal. There are stratified institutions at which faculty members interact with each other in ways different from those in which they interact with staff or administrators. Even at these institutions, formal faculty status may not gain librarians entry into the faculty community. The status of librarians should meet the long-term needs and support the mission of the institution. The library and the librarians need sufficient autonomy and professional control to be able to effectively serve the needs of the institution. Faculty status may be an appropriate way of ensuring such autonomy and control.

### **On Becoming a Director**

A new director leading a group of faculty librarians should begin thinking about the issues involved before assuming the position of director. While the employment status of the librarians will not be the most important aspect of a directorship, it is important to understand the employment status of all individuals in the organization before accepting a position in order to incorporate this into a holistic understanding of the library.

As I do in the introduction, you should be able to articulate your own position with regard to faculty status for librarians. When searching for or considering positions, seek information about the status of the position and that of the librarians with whom you might be working. As the search proceeds, gather more specifics. The specifics of eligibility and criteria for tenure, the system of ranks and promotion, the librarians' roles within faculty governance, and within the governance of the library, will all vary. This is also true of the status of the director's position. Details matter, and these details will not always be clear in job ads, position descriptions, or accessible websites or documents. Pick the appropriate moment in the search process to ask for this information, and when you are in a position to hire faculty librarians, make sure that the details of faculty status are explicitly outlined in writing and shared at the appropriate stage. The more you know going in the better chance you, and the librarians you supervise, have of being successful and happy.

### **The Director's Roles**

The employment status of the library director also varies. In larger universities the director may be a dean of a school consisting of the library system and the librarians within it. In smaller institutions the director may be a department chair. In one small liberal arts college the director's role is elected from among the tenured librarians and rotates periodically. In my case, depending on the circumstances, I act as an administrator managing a complex organization, a faculty department chair facilitating the work of a group of faculty colleagues, and a dean reporting to the Provost. Understand how others see you, both within and beyond the library. Are you an administrator with faculty status or a faculty member who performs administrative duties? Also recognize that the answer to this question is context sensitive and that how you understand and perform your role has a great deal of influence upon how others see you.

The status of the library director also influences your relationship with faculty librarians. Be explicit with your colleagues about the nature of your role and endeavor to understand their

expectations of you. Hopefully, this will be explicitly stated in written documents like the faculty handbook or procedural manuals. If not, you can encourage this to be rectified. Even if not explicitly stated, take a moment to make sure everyone is clear about your role in a particular circumstance ( a tenure review, a hiring process, or a planning process.) In the circumstances at hand, are you one colleague among many, or a dean with a separate and different role, or something in between? Be consistent; you damage your credibility if you agree to act as one among equals and then veto a decision made by the majority.

### **Hiring, reviewing, managing faculty librarians**

The employment status of librarians as faculty members will have an impact on the hiring process, the applicants attracted to the position, and the attributes you seek in a successful candidate. Often the hiring process for faculty members is defined in the faculty bylaws or the faculty handbook. Understand these rules, how they have been practiced in previous library hires, and how much variation is tolerated in this library and in the wider campus faculty culture.

In any hiring process the goal is to attract the best candidate possible to fulfill the responsibilities of the position and further the mission of the institution. It is unethical, for instance, to hire a tenure track librarian if you do not think they can succeed in achieving tenure. It is also inefficient since tenure track positions are generally “up or out”: achieve tenure or leave, and the library may have to repeat the hiring process within six years, or even lose the position. Research and publication requirements for tenure vary enormously, but can be a stumbling block for some librarians. It is important to be explicit about these requirements early in the hiring process and to incorporate ways of evaluating applicants’ potential in this regard. Do applicants have prior research, publication, or professional presentation experience? What methodological preparation do they have? How engaged are they with a research literature (perhaps, but not necessarily, library science), and can they write or speak intelligently about their potential research interests? Similar questions can be asked about

teaching, perhaps the most common element of faculty status. Incorporating such questions into the hiring process can reveal, to both parties, the candidate's potential to thrive or not as both a librarian and a faculty member.

Since there is little or no prejudice against faculty librarians moving in mid-career (as there is in many other academic fields), you may seek or attract mid-career professionals. These candidates can raise specific questions. Is your faculty salary structure flexible enough to accommodate candidates who may seek higher salaries than a candidate with a freshly minted PhD? Does a record of publication and service at other institutions count for anything in your promotion and tenure system? If candidates come from institutions with faculty status, how does your institution handle requests to retain rank and tenure? Just as you will have to find an appropriate place within a community of faculty librarians, as director you have a responsibility to help more experienced newly hired faculty librarians find their place as well.

A director's role in helping to support librarians meet the criteria set for faculty does not end at hiring. Find out how the library has supported faculty librarians in the past. Is there a formal or informal mentoring program in place? Is there a system to evaluate progress towards tenure or promotion (if applicable)? If faculty librarians are expected to teach, to publish or present, to be active in professional organizations, or to participate in faculty governance, are there clear expectations about how to balance the time for such activities with their specific responsibilities as librarians? Are adequate funds available to support faculty librarian travel and publication expenses? Some answers will be library specific, but it is also important to understand whether faculty librarians have access to funding and opportunities open to all faculty members. Like all faculty, librarians can struggle to find adequate time to pursue all three legs of the faculty stool – teaching (or librarianship), research, and service. The best advice I ever received in this regard is to find the sweet spot where all three overlap so that your research and service inform your librarianship and *vice versa*.

If faculty status for librarians is important to the library's success in advancing the mission of the institution, then the expenses involved in enabling librarians to succeed as faculty members (both time and money) must be factored in to the cost of library services. However, there are two parties who gain from successful faculty librarians: the library and the wider institution, and the individual librarian in terms of continued career growth beyond the institution. Therefore, it is not necessary to budget for 100% of the money and time expended in these activities. Model faculty members spend funds from external grants, their institution's funds, and their own time and money on research, travel, and professional engagement. They spend long hours in the lab, the archive, and the field. They write on weekends and in the evening. They do this because this work is also what brings them pleasure and brings not only prestige and rewards to their institution, but to themselves as well. Faculty librarians should also expect to follow this model. This is a professional vocation, not just a job.

A new director leading a library and group of faculty librarians will find librarians at all stages of their careers – tenure track, relatively new librarians, as well as tenured librarians, including senior faculty members. Achieving markers of faculty status are not hoops to be jumped through, after which the faculty member falls gently back to earth and enjoys an unproductive life of leisure and guaranteed employment. The granting of tenure and promotion comes with an expectation of continued professional growth and productivity. A faculty librarian should be at least as, if not more, productive as a scholar, and more expert as a teacher and librarian, after tenure than before. It is too common for librarians to see faculty promotion and tenure requirements as external to their librarianship and to seek to meet those requirements in order to pursue their true passion, librarianship. If faculty status is an important element in successfully serving your institution, then these requirements are integral parts of being a faculty librarian. As a new director you can help your librarian colleagues understand their faculty status as part of their librarianship. More senior faculty librarians can also be key mentors in helping their colleagues grow into their role in the professoriate.

Promotion to full professor should come with the expectation of expertise and leadership on campus and beyond. Unless a new director has been able to negotiate tenure and a senior rank upon hiring, he or she may be outranked by these librarians. Approach the presence of such senior faculty leadership in the library as a blessing. You have inherited years, perhaps decades, of experience, deep expertise, and an opportunity for collaborative leadership. Sometimes, however, senior faculty librarians can be negative forces in the library. They may not have kept their skills up to date, be wedded to outdated practices, or seek to exert undue influence over their untenured colleagues. This can happen in any library, but faculty status and particularly tenure can leave a new director with the impression that senior tenured librarians are untouchable. Nothing could be further from the truth. As director you are charged with the administration of the library and the deployment of resources, including the human resources, to meet the community's information needs. If a tenured librarian is unable or unwilling to enact the mission and plan of the library, a new director would be remiss in allowing this to continue.

Hopefully the library's plan is developed in collaboration with the faculty librarians and any disagreements or professional development and re-training needs are resolved during the planning process. But if this situation continues, make sure the senior administrator to whom you report is fully aware of the situation and supports your intention to resolve it. Try to develop with the librarian in question a mutually acceptable plan for improvement. If the inability or unwillingness to perform continues, investigate your institutional faculty policies with regard to tenured faculty performance. Ultimately, if necessary, look to the procedures outlined in the AAUP 1958 *Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings* (American Association of University Professors, 1958.) Throughout make sure you have the full support of your administration and your Human Resources department, that you follow all institutional procedures, and that you truly are working in the best

interest of the library and the community you serve and have not become embroiled in a personal vendetta against an obstinate colleague.

The divide between faculty and staff that is so common in higher education may manifest itself in a library, which tends to have a greater proportion of non-faculty staff members than other departments in which faculty reside. This divide can be exacerbated in merged IT/library organizations and as libraries increasingly hire what James Neal referred to as “feral librarians” (Neal, 2006.) As a new director, you can ameliorate or aggravate this divide. If you have read this far you should be clear about why faculty status is important, or not, in your library and that faculty status comes with responsibilities as well as rights. Find ways to help everyone in the library understand this. Celebrate faculty publication and professional leadership successes and the hard, but often hidden, work that goes into making those possible. Consider requiring a report at all staff meetings from faculty librarians returning from sabbaticals, and conversely find ways to show how much you value the contributions of staff without faculty status. But don’t expect to entirely overcome this divide, as it is a perennial issue in higher education.

### **Beyond the Library**

Within institutional parameters, the faculty as a body determine their own criteria for success, promotion, and tenure. Individual faculty members have wide latitude in organizing their work to meet those criteria. Within the core faculty in academic departments this autonomy and self-governance works well, but the expectations of the library can be at odds with the expectations of the faculty. At the level of the individual faculty librarian this can come down to expectations for promotion and tenure that are at odds with the administrative expectations of library managers and the administrators to which the library reports. In such cases, what is a librarian to do? Achieve tenure and disappoint their supervisor, or meet the expectations of their supervisor and lose their job because they failed to achieve tenure? What is a director to do in such circumstances? First, understand that faculty expectations,

especially around promotion and tenure, change very slowly, tend to be conservative, and are jealously protected. If there is a faculty union and a contract involved, change can be even more difficult to achieve. Expectations can change but this will take time and is likely to be more successful if the impetus comes from within the faculty. Work with your faculty, especially your senior faculty librarians, to bring both sets of expectations into alignment. But do so after you have explored all other possibilities, which might include reconceptualizing administrative responsibilities to better fit with faculty expectations, and educating non librarian faculty involved in faculty reviews about librarianship.

Even more important is helping faculty librarians understand faculty culture and modeling “facultiness” for them. One of the by-products of doctoral programs is the acculturation of a new generation of scholars into the faculty. This acculturation is reinforced in post-doctorate fellowships and in first faculty positions. The MLS degree does not do this. So one of the reasons why some librarians with faculty status are not regarded as “real” faculty by their colleagues outside the library is that we think and act differently. If non-librarian faculty think about the dean or department chair at all it is as a senior colleague or someone whose job it is to arrange the resources for the faculty member to succeed in teaching and research. Often a faculty member’s first loyalty is to their discipline. The college or university is simply an institutional arrangement that enables (or thwarts) their passion for scholarship, teaching, and status within their discipline.

Librarians tend to have a more corporate or administrative relationship with their department head and institution. As a new director, consider hiring librarians who enjoy spending time with other faculty members, the intellectual life of the faculty, and the cut and thrust of faculty culture. Look for ways to expose librarians to this culture. Are they invited to and attending convocation and other ceremonies? Are librarians attending faculty presentations and lectures on campus? Are they intellectually engaged in their own sub-discipline of librarianship (reading the literature, participating in conferences, etc.), and is your library providing opportunities to discuss new developments in librarianship, not just with an eye

to immediate application in your service to users, but on a more theoretical level? Model faculty are intellectually engaged; faculty librarians should be too. Just as importantly, as a new director, are you modelling such behaviors?

Not infrequently the idea that librarians are not “real” faculty and should not have faculty status extends to the administration of the institution. This lack of administrative support can stem from beliefs about the nature of the faculty and the nature of librarianship, but it can also stem from a desire to have more flexibility with regard to employment. This might not mean that your Provost plans to fire librarians, but that budgetary policies make faculty lines more expensive than staff, or they hear that libraries are changing and librarians are re-skilling, and they are trying to retain long-term institutional flexibility. It is possible that you will find an administration that seeks to reclassify librarians from staff to faculty status. If you are clear on why you think that faculty status is, or is not, important for librarians at your institution, you are well positioned to either work with your administration to change the employment status of librarians, or to defend the current status. This question can arise when a new President, Provost, or Dean is appointed. So keep your political antennae active and always be aware of the shifting political landscape within which you work.

## **Conclusion**

Over my career as a faculty librarian, a supervisor of faculty librarians, and eventually a director, I have come to realize that there are three things that are most significant in dealing with an issue like faculty status for librarians. First, know thyself; understand your own position *vis-à-vis* faculty status, reflect on this occasionally, and test it against differing positions in the literature and among your colleagues. The better you understand your own position, the better able you will be to support the faculty librarians with whom you work and to challenge them to meet the high expectations that come with faculty status. Secondly, understand the structural setting of policies, procedures, and decision-making bodies that frame faculty status in your library and institution, and the ever-changing political

landscape that supports or challenges faculty status for librarians. But also understand that neither is set in stone. Finally, understand the environment in which you work. If faculty status is an important part of how you best serve your community, model the best faculty behavior for the librarians with whom you work and expect the highest standards of librarianship, teaching, scholarship, and service from them and yourself. No one ever said being a new director was going to be easy, but it will be rewarding.

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