

## **Crafting a Profession: Personal Reflections on Faculty Status**

**by Charlotte Hess**  
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I came across a letter written a few years ago by our former colleague and my early mentor, Barbara Halporn. In it she wrote:

*One of the greatest strengths of the faculty status system at Indiana is its ability to create a climate for professional growth, to support the aspirations of its librarians, and to encourage them to participate in the development of our field.*

What impressed me upon this reading was the twofold nature of this perspective on faculty status: the symbiotic relationship between the inward and outward aspects of professional life. Working with Barbara over 20 years ago left me with an acute awareness of the importance of self-fulfillment through creative application of investigation and discovery in our day-to-day work. At the same time I came away with a sense of the necessity of giving back and adding value to our profession.

Throughout this past year, because of the work of the Program and Social Committee, I have thought frequently about the nature and benefits of faculty status -- and, of course, have participated in many discussions about it with colleagues. But I kept having this nagging feeling that I wanted to add something else to the discussion. It's this: faculty status is cause for celebration *if only* because it allows us the time and the resources to draw upon our full creative forces in our work. Of course, all work should be "a natural, ongoing, creative process."<sup>(1)</sup> Faculty status nurtures our creativity and encourages artisanship in our work.

During my years as a professional librarian, some of my most fulfilling work has developed out of a sense of inquiry and the uninhibited pursuit of answers to questions. A commission to do a bibliography on the Ohio River raised questions about aspects of early life along the river usually omitted from school textbooks. They ultimately led to an exhibition at the Lilly Library on the cultural history of the river (where I grew up). The questions "who is my user community" and "how do I best serve this community?" led me to Uganda to help collaborating researchers set up a library. The question "Is the Internet a commons" (shared resource) led to the study of information technology, economics, and sociology.

Looking at my InULA colleagues, it is quite clear that all of us engage in our own unique ways of professional creativity. The list of InULA Research Grant Recipients, for instance, reads like a litany of inspired, creative output: "The Novel in Woodcut" (Perry Willet); "The Role of Books and Libraries in Utopian Communities" (Marty Joachim); "The Study of Libraries as Social Agencies..." (Elizabeth Hanson); "A Bibliography on the LA Riots" (Grace Jackson-Brown); and

many more. Or we can think of the creative processes that led colleagues to Norway (May Jafari), Australia (Mary Strow), and Cameroon (Andrea Singer). Other colleagues' professional craftsmanship led them to new areas of research: Social Informatics (Mark Day); Men's Studies (Nancy Wootton Colborn); Illinois Folk Music (Jo Burgess); Railroad Advertising (Stephen McShane).

Creatively pursuing our questions aligns our work with our spirit. The process can bring us satisfaction and fulfillment. At the same time, this ongoing creativity is also necessary if we want to make significant inroads in advancing the field of librarianship. I don't believe there has ever been a time when creative discovery, analysis, and communication have been more important in the worlds of scholarly information and the library profession. In a recent article, information science professor Phil Agre writes:

*New technologies create a wider range of institutional possibilities, but precisely for that reason they also force us to articulate more deeply the nature and purpose of our work.* <sup>(2)</sup>

Indeed, we are at a crucial stage of evolution of our existing information institutions (universities, libraries, etc.). The complexity of the decisions we must make is enormous. Steady, careful, and creative research and analysis are required if we hope to create successful and sustainable libraries. However we decide to communicate our knowledge and insight to the community, we must do it well, with energy. And, hopefully, we will enjoy it.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See the stimulating book *Zen and the Art of Making a Living in the Post-Modern World* by Laurence G. Boldt (NY: Arkana, 1993) p. 5+. [back](#)

<sup>2</sup>Agre, Phil. "Meet Me at the Crux." *Educom Review* 33,3 (Sep/Oct 1998): 30. [back](#)