



Vol. 14, No. 1 March 1998

The Tie That Binds

by **Larry W. Griffin, Archives and Special Collections**
Indiana-Purdue University at Fort Wayne

Recently an IU colleague used the phrase "the tie that binds" in speaking of what IU Librarians have in common around the state. Her point was a good one. Although we are working in an environment of different missions, agendas, and strategic plans, all Indiana University librarians do have a common interest: status. Admittedly, the word carries connotations of non-egalitarianism, elitism, or just plain snobbery. I like the word, however, because it is short, concise, and clearly refers to certain rights, responsibilities, and privileges that IU librarians have attained. All writing instructors tell us to never use a big word when a little one is more effective! We can be called academic appointees, librarians, library faculty, faculty, second-tier faculty, or service providers, and those terms all carry connotations as well, but the written definition of our status is that which we must not overlook in debates about what we are called. All IU librarians around the state must carefully consider what may appear to be cosmetic, subtle, or "clarifying" changes made to documents relevant to the status of IU librarians. Sticks and stones may break your bones, and words can also hurt you. This is the tie that binds us.

Undoubtedly, there is a national movement, if not systematic and coordinated, toward modifying, adjusting, weakening, "rightsizing" faculty status. The pendulum is swinging toward *corporatethink*. Some convincing arguments are made by David F. Noble in his article, "Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education." ¹ Noble suggests that faculty are allowing a guilt trip to be laid upon them as they are told that they are "incompetent, hide-bound, recalcitrant, inefficient, ineffective, and expensive . . . faculty are portrayed . . . as obstructionist, as standing in the way of progress. . . ." Recently, a Purdue University Trustee was quoted as saying that faculty are "always stirring the pot and creating problems. Once a decision is made, they should get aboard. If employees engaged [*sic*] in such 'antics,' . . . they should be fired." ² Any questioning of direction, purpose, or values often results in one's being labeled as a hindrance to progress, a malcontent, or a poor team player. Corporations **do** expect *corporatethink* from their employees. Academe, however, has in the past shunned this idea. If the only option for academics is to ride the horse in the direction it is going (a fundamental question not yet answered to my satisfaction), then the members of the academic community need to get their saddles, stirrups, and bridles in the right places; otherwise, we shall find ourselves sliding off the rear, getting knocked off by a low-hanging branch we do not see, or more likely, riding over a cliff!

Noble makes a case well worth considering for what he calls the "*commoditization* of the educational function of the university." Academic faculty and librarians ". . . as labor are drawn into a production process designed for the efficient creation of instructional commodities, and hence become subject to all the pressures that have befallen production workers in other industries undergoing rapid technological transformation from above." Noble's article focuses on teaching faculty, but the ramifications for academic librarians with faculty status are clear. Of course, faculty and academic librarians may have no other option than to buy into the commercialization of education and making money. We should do so,

however, with our eyes open; moreover, we should make certain we reap some of the rewards, if that is the direction we are going! Noble makes a graphic argument for vigilance on the part of faculty by relating a Kurt Vonnegut fictional situation in which a character is "flattered by the automation engineers who tell him his genius will be immortalized. They buy him a beer. They capture his skills on tape. Then they fire him."

The fundamental "tie that binds" IU librarians is our academic status. Librarians at all campuses need to be aware of trends that could jeopardize their status. It is ironic that an organization that teaches people to be critical, to question, to judge, and to ask fundamental questions, at the same time punishes those who do so. Academic librarians at all campuses need to present a united stand for the rights, responsibilities, and privileges in the IU Academic Handbook; IU librarians need to protect their right to question, challenge, and inquire with impunity. We must remind those who search for a trendy motto for IU that we already have one: "Lux et Veritas."

Notes

1. David F. Noble, "Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education," *First Monday* 3, no.1 (January 1998): 31 pars. [journal on-line]; available from http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_1/noble/index.html; Internet; accessed 1 March 1998.

2. John Briggs, "Trustee Says 'Antics' of the IPFW Faculty Must Stop," *Frost Illustrated* (December 17-23, 1997): 4.

[back](#)

URL: <http://www.indiana.edu/~inula/notes/>

Comments: [Contact Us](#)

[Copyright](#) 1998, [InULA](#). All rights reserved.