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PUBLISH, PERISH -- OR PARTICIPATE?

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In the heyday of the struggle for faculty status for librarians, here and elsewhere, most librarians (including those at IU) were pushing for the whole ball of wax--professorial titles, participation on the faculty council and on campus committees, ten-month appointments, sabbaticals, salary equivalency, all the responsibilities and all the perks. The easiest piece for us to get turned out to be faculty parking privileges (such as they are)--we got that, and we got academic appointments, in the first push in 1950. TIAA-CREF (with a longer waiting period for librarians, however) soon followed.

In the ensuing years, only job performance was required. There was little or no encouragement, and no support, for most librarians to attend ALA or other professional meetings. Librarians who taught had a very hard time getting the information they needed, not being on the faculty mailing list, and we had no voice at all in campus affairs. (Two students were in time added to the Bloomington Faculty Council, but no librarians.) Moreover, the library was being blind-sided by every new program or activity that came along. Campus committees are a great place to hear who's asking for money for a new program--and we need to know, because sooner or later they'll probably get it! Informal contacts with faculty, other than those a librarian directly served, were extremely limited. Today we are much better informed, professionally active, involved in campus activities, and able to contribute and to offer input (and collect it) in many contexts. Our library service is much the stronger for it.

This change came with the implementation of librarian ranks in 1972-73, after another big push that achieved most of what we were seeking. (The mailing list, of all things, continued to be a struggle for some years to come.) Participation in faculty affairs, equality in regard to TIAA-CREF, sabbaticals, and other changes followed. The professorial titles we never got at all, but the trade-off for it was significant and has often seemed to be a superior deal: control of our own promotion and tenure system. In fact, librarians at some institutions have deliberately sought a parallel process rather than try to adapt to an awkward model administered by teaching faculty who are unfamiliar with the complexities of our work and of our needs as a cooperative, team-oriented unit.

In the third decade of our careers as full partners of the teaching faculty, how is it working out? Pretty well, I think. Librarians are teaching many classes; they are playing key leadership roles in faculty governance and campus activities; they are publishing at least as extensively as their colleagues in many departments (ten librarians published books, in one memorable year!); many librarians, perhaps a majority, are actively involved in regional and/or national organizations, have ties with their counterparts at similar institutions, and are fully aware of the national scene, often playing leadership roles. We can congratulate ourselves, I think, for positioning ourselves to be full players just in time for the tremendous changes taking place as the electronic revolution brings all research libraries into closer working relationships.

Requirements for tenure and promotion have gradually tightened over the years, just as they have for the teaching faculty. A more critical look at activities has led to heightened expectations for tenure candidates, and some who were assigned associate or full rank in the initial go-around or shortly after would find their achievements at that date sadly short of the mark if they were judged today. Judging job performance, the key component of our process, has sometimes been difficult because it relies so heavily on the statements of extremely individual supervisors. It was not easy before we had faculty status, either, for the same reason. (By the way, judging teaching has been highly problematical also!)

Sometimes new librarians feel somewhat panicky at the thought of having to publish. They are assured by the Promotion and Tenure Committee, and by their mentors, that this is only one of the possibilities and there are other things they can do instead. Some of those very librarians do go on to publish, later when they are more experienced and find that they do have something to say. Others publish little or not at all, but make major contributions on their campus and in professional organizations that are charting the course of their work or their discipline. For still others, their careers will include a mix of publications and activities.

Recently I heard a library director lament that her staff did not participate in ALA or other activities beyond the local, and have very little sense of what is going on in academic libraries--they are required to publish, and so they do that instead. (What they publish, I know not.) She feels they are very out of touch. At the opposite extreme, an article by John Newman in the latest C&RL News, "Academic Librarians as Scholars: publishing is your moral obligation," argues that we should quit going to meetings and "wasting time" at conferences, and spend our time on scholarly

research. ¹ Which ought we to be doing, and what ought we to be required to do?

Publish or perish? I don't know whether that would have happened if we'd gotten professorial titles. On the whole, I'm glad we never risked it. Publishing is valuable. I've done a little, and nothing has taught me more about my work. Materials I've gathered while preparing for publication, some of it never appearing in any actual publication, have been valuable tools on the job. Our publications can also be useful to others--what a kick to learn that one piece was being taught at a number of library schools!--and I'd encourage everyone to consider it. But many of our finest librarians have made their key contributions in other arenas, and have learned and have given as much or more thereby. We need that. If they all had to divert their energies to trying to publish, when all their natural thrust was in another direction, our libraries would be much the poorer for it. Our system should, and does, encourage all the individual achievements that benefit and enrich our libraries and our profession.

A choice and/or a mix of publishing, participation in professional organizations and university activities, and other forms of professional development that suit the individual librarian's career, seems to me to be the best option of all. For me at least, participation and publishing seemed to go together, as contacts were made and that led to invitations to write. But varying library assignments lead to varying opportunities. Others will follow other paths. Promotion and tenure requirements can be the initial stimulus that leads to career-long involvement in productive and satisfying professional activities.

Yes, I think we got it right. (On the other hand, ten-month appointments and salary equivalencies might be good too! Maybe next time . . .)

Notes

1. John Newman, "Academic Librarians as Scholars: Publishing Is Your Moral Obligation," *College & Research Libraries News* 59, no. 1 (January 1998): 19-20.



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