

Perspective on Tenure for I.U. Librarians Part II: Perspectives from Retired Librarians

by Andrea M. Morrison, with Ann Bristow and Other Retired I.U. Librarians

As a follow up to the article I wrote in the last *InULA Notes*, "[Perspective on Tenure for I.U. Librarians Part I](#)," I asked retired I.U. librarians to share their perspectives on tenure for librarians and what it meant to them during their careers via a request sent to the retired librarians e-mail list in March 2012. Below are some of the responses I received.

Nancy Cridland, IUB, explained that when librarians first asked for faculty rank and titles at I.U., we were offered the variation of academic status for librarians in lieu of professorial rank. Although at the time, some librarians wanted to hold out for rank equal to teaching faculty, librarians eventually realized there was great campus support and appreciation of our academic status and position that grew over the years. (Nancy Cridland, personal communication, April 16, 2012).

Mary Stanley, IUPUI, reported:

I think for me it wasn't so much the security of tenure but the progress towards it motivated me to write and to be involved at a higher level of participation in organizations. However, I actually wrote two books after receiving tenure so I am not really sure. The one thing that I do believe is that having tenure put us more at an equal status with the teaching faculty (Mary Stanley, personal communication, March 29, 2012).

Steven J. Schmidt, IUPUI, wrote:

For me, tenure was first and foremost a great ego stroke. It came at a time when I was starting to feel the weight of too many things to do and not enough time to do it all. On a more practical level, tenure also gave me more weight and authority in the eyes of the faculty. At the time I was tasked with the job of enforcing copyright in regards to course reserves. This meant I was frequently refusing to accept materials that faculty were submitting for their reserves. The fact that I was tenured made it a little easier for me to work with them as an equal, but as one friend commented, "If I was running for a seat on the faculty senate, I would get 100% name recognition and 0 votes."

Steven also commented that mentoring a librarian through tenure was rewarding, although sometimes he heard complaints from teaching faculty that the standards for librarians were less rigorous than the standards for teaching faculty. He actively dissuaded this perception whenever possible, and explained his position by stating:

During the three decades that I was with IU, I had the opportunity to see and review a large number of tenure documents, both teaching faculty and librarians. While the yardsticks are admittedly different, I felt that the standards they were held to were the same. Tenure is both an honor and recognition of service and dedication to both the campus and the profession. I continue to be a strong supporter of it (Steven J. Schmidt, personal communication, April 20, 2012).

Finally, Ann Bristow of IUB provided her thoughts on tenure. Nancy Cridland also reviewed them and commented: “Ann has put the case so well that I can add nothing to it!” and I concur. Here are Ann’s comments in full as submitted, and her colleagues thank her for her feedback!

Perspectives from Ann Bristow, April 15, 2012

I first worked in the Libraries from 1965 to 1967, in the then named Documents Department. Helen Lightfoot was the long-time head of that department and a finer librarian and better boss could not be found. I choose that word deliberately. I thought of Miss Lightfoot as my “boss.” The structure of the workplace was very hierarchical. My job was well-defined and carefully bound. It did not extend into the larger university community.

When I returned to the Libraries in 1974, after some years living abroad, I found what felt like a completely different workplace. While much was familiar--Tom Glastras had worked with me and taught me in the Documents Dept--Tom was now head of the Reference Department which I joined as an Assistant Librarian “on the tenure track.” In my second year, I was appointed to the Promotion and Tenure Committee. After that service, I wrote to ACRL describing my interest in the Academic Status Committee. I served there and was named Chairperson later. The understanding of the national scene which that service offered me intensified my conviction that the “status” and opportunities offered to librarians at Indiana University were a model for others.

The opportunity I found and valued was the ability to serve the university as a full partner in the academic enterprise. By “full partner” I do not mean I found librarians were viewed as equal to whichever of the faculties or disciplines one might view as most prestigious. A Professor of History might find her equal in a Professor of Chemistry. She might or might not find that likeness in a Professor of Education or a Professor of Music or a Professor of Business. The differences in training, purpose and role among the many disciplines that make up the University are very great and are seen as very great by *all* its members. (Not to touch on salary and all the issues surrounding salary.) Librarians found their place within that complex society and gained the respect of their colleagues within and outside the Libraries. The examples are many and include election and appointment to leadership positions across the university.

Colleagues who argued in the late 1960s for our full inclusion and who found partners on the Faculty Council have my greatest respect and gratitude. Many fine colleagues, in computing, counseling, and other professions, were not offered the same role and responsibilities. I believe it was the widely agreed upon centrality of the libraries’ mission to the academic enterprise that justified the role offered to librarians. One way I found that centrality reflected was in the way we were organized and in the way we conducted our discussions of many issues. Each discipline within the University was represented, each language taught and studied was represented. We became used to understanding the sometimes complementary and sometimes competitive relationships between disciplines and departments. We heard reflected in colleagues’ attitudes and arguments the teaching faculties’ attitudes and arguments. This organization and way of looking at our work and our role was unique and explained in good part our acceptance as full partners worthy of being given the opportunity to earn tenure.

This reflection of the university as a whole, recognizing and valuing all of its approaches to learning and research, extended to our understanding of librarians' research also. We did not ask that the research and writing and creative activity be tied directly and narrowly to the performance responsibilities of an individual librarian. I found this surprising initially, on my first service on a promotion and tenure committee. I later came to view it as one of our strengths which encouraged a wide range of contributions and valued excellence above all.

I am conscious that these remarks are expressed mostly in the past tense. That reflects my absence from the scene for over eight years as well as some appreciation of the accelerating rate of change. I have every hope that new librarians joining each of the campuses of our University will find their opportunities to work in those libraries and within their campuses as rewarding and fulfilling as I did.

Ann Bristow, Librarian Emeritus, IUB, Seattle, Washington (Ann Bristow, personal communication, April 16, 2012).