

Deborah Lee

# Mentoring the untenured librarian

## The research committee

Many academic librarians starting down the tenure track are put off by the research requirement that is often part of such a position. Some studies have indicated that a lack of socialization and adequate preparation serve as primary impediments for the newly hired tenure-track librarian.<sup>1</sup> Institutional support can offset this lack of familiarity with the academic culture and the research expectations of a tenure-track position.

To assist both tenured and untenured library faculty, the Mississippi State University (MSU) Libraries sponsors an active research support program through a research committee. This article will provide an overview of one year's worth of activities and programs, and discuss strategies for further extending the support provided by a research committee.

The use of research committees in academic libraries is not new. Tamera Lee reported on the development of the research committee approach at Auburn University in 1995.<sup>2</sup> It was after a visit to the Auburn Libraries that a number of faculty at the MSU Libraries began to discuss the possibility of developing our own research committee. Beginning as an ad hoc committee, the research committee became a standing committee of the library in 1999. Members are appointed by the dean and include both tenured and nontenured librarians.<sup>3</sup> The charge of the research committee includes:

- developing programs to enhance the research skills of the library faculty;
- sponsoring informal discussions of research ideas, strategies, methodologies, and opportunities;

- apprising faculty members of upcoming conferences and deadlines for paper submissions;

- providing individual mentoring as needed, including editorial advice;

- recognizing faculty publications in appropriate ways; and

- recommending to the dean improvements to support research.

The promotion and tenure committee is charged with the formal review of an applicant's research for promotion and tenure purposes. The research committee does not take part in the formal review process; rather, it exists to offer support through the development of formal programs and workshops and through individual mentoring to all library faculty. Obviously, the greatest emphasis is on developing activities to empower the untenured library faculty in terms of research.

### Workshops and programs

While the research committee has had formal research funds to distribute in the past, this has not been the case for the last couple of years. Our challenge for the 2004–05 fiscal year was to develop programming at a minimal cost that would assist our colleagues in their research endeavors. To do this, we turned to resources located both inside the library and from other parts of campus.

In past years, the research committee sponsored a daylong workshop focusing on

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library research issues. Feedback from many library faculty indicated a preference for more programs spaced throughout the year that required less of a time commitment. To that end, the research committee developed a number of programs that ranged from one to two hours.

The first workshop of the fall 2004 semester was focused on the editorial review process. A number of library faculty members had either extensive publishing experience or served on a number of editorial review boards. This informal session allowed experienced members to discuss the basics of preparing a manuscript for submission and working with editors and reviewers. Panel members also discussed how they landed their first library-related publication. Library faculty members were encouraged to submit questions prior to the workshop and were encouraged to ask questions during the session.

The second workshop focused on a research resources overview. In discussing research issues with a number of library faculty, it became clear that not everyone was familiar with the searching nuances of the library databases and electronic journals available at MSU. This hands-on session introduced librarians to the library databases and related resources available in other databases and illustrated ways to tailor profiles and journal alerts for a specific research area.

The third workshop was even more informal and focused on evaluating research articles. The workshop acknowledged that prolific scholars read broadly in their subject area and critically evaluate the research they read. Three articles were distributed prior to the session, along with a list of suggested evaluative criteria. The chosen articles reflected different areas of research and research methods in library and information science.<sup>4</sup> Participants evaluated each article in terms of the stated research problems and hypotheses, the variables used, the assumptions brought to the article, and the conclusions drawn from the research.

The fourth and final workshop of the fall 2004 semester was dedicated to an in-depth report by Deborah Lee and June Garner on the type of papers presented at the Library

Research Seminar III, which they had attended in October 2004. Using evaluative criteria similar to that used in the earlier research session, Lee and Garner discussed how the authors chose their research topics and the types of methodologies employed.

The increasing expectation of research for candidates coming up for tenure generated a good deal of concern among both tenured and untenured library faculty during the academic year. To help address this concern, a daylong research retreat was held prior to the start of classes for the spring 2005 term. Cosponsored by the research committee, the retreat gave all library faculty members an opportunity to discuss research concerns, especially as they related to the promotion and tenure process. The research retreat was followed up by an additional session with the untenured faculty entitled "Research and the untenured faculty member." This workshop gave untenured faculty an opportunity to discuss research issues without their supervisors present.

The lively discussion brought forward a number of additional projects the research committee pledged to develop, and served as the inspiration for two additional workshops. One was a workshop entitled "Writing the winning curriculum vita." A curriculum vita (CV) is an often-used tool in academia. The session focused on incorporating elements unique to academic librarians in a CV, and offered suggestions for wording and organization.

The second spring workshop was developed at the request of library faculty and explored aspects of survey research. Drawing upon the extensive expertise held in this area by faculty from other parts of campus, a sociologist and a member of the campus Institutional Review Board for Research with Human Subjects committee spoke. The speakers addressed common issues related to survey research and answered questions regarding the use of mail, e-mail, and telephone surveys.

### **Additional committee projects**

The research committee is charged with a number of activities beyond workshops and seminars. One is to develop activities

that recognize the achievements of library faculty authors. To do this, we began a Web page in 2000 that highlights the publications produced by the library faculty.<sup>5</sup>

This Web page recognizes library faculty authors and gives other library faculty an overview of the type of research being conducted by their colleagues. We spotlight the page each year on the library's Web site, include information in the library's newsletter "Library Links," and distribute a research report to the University Library Committee (an advisory committee composed of faculty from across campus). In addition, each supervisor acknowledges when a member of his or her department has an article accepted with a congratulatory message by e-mail (sent internally to all librarians). The research committee also develops an exhibit each year, housed in the main floor of the library, which focuses on library faculty research. Copies of books, chapters, and articles are displayed, with each author acknowledged. These small gestures provide additional positive enforcement for the authors.

The research committee is charged with providing information about upcoming research opportunities, including calls for papers, related workshops or conferences, and useful research articles. Most major e-mail lists are monitored and relevant calls are distributed via e-mail to the library faculty. The committee also offers an editorial service, with senior published authors reviewing manuscripts for novice writers.

In an effort to assist library faculty in continuing professional development, the members of the research committee developed a list of courses offered on campus that focus on research methods. The university supports continued professional development by covering the cost of tuition for up to two courses per semester. Instructions for signing up for the tuition remission program were also developed. To assist library faculty members in locating related research resources in the library, a research guide (comparable to the treatment provided to other topics) was also made available.<sup>6</sup>

## **Future developments**

One of the challenges of a library research committee is to provide support activities that are timely and relevant. As new library faculty are hired, there is a need to revisit workshop topics. One project we are exploring is the development of a research packet for all newly hired librarians. Our Office of Research already provides something similar in its research orientation held at the beginning of each year. Our packet would focus on resources and services of interest to newly hired, untenured library faculty.

In addition to presenting a substantive body of research for promotion and tenure, library faculty (along with other faculty across campus) are being asked to document the impact of their work. A future workshop will address the use of citation analysis. This workshop will discuss the use of databases such as ISI citation indexes and EBSCO's Academic Search Premier, as well as strategies for using Google and Google Scholar in a citation analysis.

An informal survey of faculty at the end of the spring semester indicated that mostly untenured faculty routinely attend the programs offered by the research committee. While this is one of the core constituents of the committee, additional investigation is needed to develop programming to support the tenured library faculty. The committee is also investigating options for taping workshops for faculty members unable to attend or more recent hires. The survey revealed a desire by novice or untenured library faculty for more informal opportunities to discuss research ideas. The research committee is exploring the option of sponsoring "research lunch Friday," with a reserved table in the university cafeteria, or maybe even more informal research discussion groups.

## **Conclusion**

The research committee is one means of providing institutional support to untenured library faculty and serves as a useful component on its own or when combined with other

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• **Polish American Journal.** Published in suburban Buffalo, the *Polish American Journal* has an English-language Web site. The “On-line Library” button links to biographical information on World War II hero Lt. Colonel Matthew Urban and holiday customs, such as the Wigilia dinner at Christmas and Lent and Easter customs. Access: <http://www.polam-journal.com/>.

• **Polish News.** The *Polish American Journal*’s competitor from Chicago, *Polish News*, calls itself America’s leading bilingual illustrated monthly. Access: <http://www.polishnews.com/>.

• **Warsaw Voice.** Poland’s first English-language weekly has been published in Altoona, Pennsylvania, in tabloid format since 1988. Its weekly circulation is 10,500. For visitors to Poland or anyone on campus who wants to surmount the language barrier, this site deserves a visit. Log-in ID and password is required for full-text access. Access: <http://www.warsawvoice.pl/>.

## Notes

1. Thomas Duscak [sic], “The Polish presence in North America,” *Choice* 32, no. 3 (November 1994): 399–419. *ZZ*

### Submit your Internet Resources topic to C&RL News

*C&RL News* is seeking topic proposals for Internet Resources articles for the September 2006 through July/August 2007 issues. If you are interested in writing an Internet Resources article, submit a topic idea and brief information about your knowledge of the proposed topic to Stephanie Orphan, *C&RL News* editor, at [sorphan@ala.org](mailto:sorphan@ala.org).

Topics for the 2006–07 issues will be chosen in spring 2006. Compilers whose topics are selected will receive specific manuscript preparation information. Articles are published in print and online. For a list of past Internet Resources article, visit: [www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/internetresources.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/internetresources.htm)

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programs (such as mentorship programs). Even in tight budgetary times, the research committee can often find local resources, either within the library or across campus, that can enhance the institutional support provided to library faculty. These activities can assist new academic librarians as they adjust to the expectations of a tenure-track position and enhance their probability of a successful tenure application.

## Notes

1. See, for example, the study by B. Mitchell and Bruce Morton, “On becoming faculty: Acculturation problems and remedies,” *College & Research Libraries* 53 (1992): 379–92.

2. Tamera P. Lee, “The library research committee: It has the money and the time,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 21 (March 1995): 111–15.

3. Members of the 2004–05 committee included: Michael Ballard, Jessica Buehring,

Maria Collins, June Garner, Deborah Lee (chair), and Bob Wolverton. The workshops and programs described in this article are due to the hard work of the committee members.

4. The articles chosen for discussion were: Thomas G. Kirk Jr., “The role of management theory in day-to-day management practices of a college library director,” *Library Administration & Management* 18 (Winter 2004): 35–38; Jim Gravois, “Poster sessions, promotion, and publishing: Is there a connection?” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25 (January 1999): 38–43; and Ross Atkinson, “Contingency and contradiction: The place(s) of the library at the dawn of the new millennium” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 25 (January 1, 2001): 38–43.

5. This Web page is available at: [library.msstate.edu/publications/faculty/index.asp](http://library.msstate.edu/publications/faculty/index.asp).

6. This guide can be found online at: [library.msstate.edu/csrl/LS.asp](http://library.msstate.edu/csrl/LS.asp). *ZZ*