

Editorial

The “Multihued Palette” of Academic Librarianship



“The nature of oratory is such that there has always been a tendency among politicians and clergymen to oversimplify complex issues. From a pulpit or a platform even the most conscientious of speakers finds it very difficult to tell the whole truth.¹

~ Aldous Huxley
Brave New World Revisited (1958)

To Huxley’s famous list of those prone to oversimplification given an appropriate platform, I fear we must add the occasional academic administrator wishing to solve a complex problem of human resource management and the journalist looking for a lead. These last two appeared as central characters in the most recent debate over faculty status for academic librarians, which played out last month around an article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* regarding the decision to eliminate faculty appointments for new librarians at the University of Virginia and a proposal to “revoke” faculty status from librarians at East Carolina University.²

In describing the rationale behind these efforts, Karin Wittenborg, University Librarian at Virginia, noted that “libraries are in a time of dramatic and continuing change,” and Maureen Sullivan, the American Library Association President also serving as an organizational-development consultant to East Carolina, reminded *Chronicle* readers that “there is a difference between the work and role of the teaching faculty... and the work and role of librarians.”³ Few would argue against either of these assertions, I

imagine, but it is unclear how either is related to the issue of faculty status for academic librarians, an issue that has been taken up many times in the pages of this journal.⁴

As Coker, vanDuinkerken, and Bales noted in our most recent entry into this discussion, the issue of the librarian’s role and status has been debated in the academy and in the profession for more than a century.⁵ As anyone reading their argument must conclude, the question of faculty status for librarians (whether with or without provisions for the awarding of tenure) is a complicated one. Arguments for faculty status have been made on the basis of concerns for intellectual freedom, of the librarian’s role in building collections and designing services that promote and support the teaching, learning, research, and service components of the academic mission, and of the direct contributions made to teaching and research by librarians. Arguments against faculty status have noted that the “terminal degree” recognized for faculty appointment as an academic librarian is at the Master’s level, rather than the doctoral, that many librarians do not receive in-depth training in teaching or research methods as part of their initial, professional education, and that the commitment by librarians of time for research and university service takes away from time that might otherwise be dedicated to the direct provision of library services. Many of these themes are repeated in the recent article in the *Chronicle*, but, in an argument more nuanced and well informed by the study of the history of our profession than the one found there, Coker, et al. remind

their readers that the librarian's is not the only academic role that has experienced "dramatic and continuing change" in recent years.

The changes shaking the foundations of the academic professions more broadly are described, for example, by Altbach, who notes the "complex historical development" of the academic professions, as well as the ways in which the roles, responsibilities, and composition of those professions have changed in the post-World War II period.⁶ Faculty of all stripes, he argues, face "harsh realities" in the 21st century rising from economic challenges, new demands for accountability, increased competition from for-profit providers, and "an unprecedented technological revolution" (all being issues that are very familiar to academic librarians, whatever their status).⁷ Looking at faculty issues more broadly, Schuster and Finkelstein conclude that "American higher education and the academic profession that serve it are on the edge of an unprecedented restructuring that is changing the face...of higher learning."⁸ If one accepts Wittenborg's argument that changes in the nature of library work are best addressed through a change in librarian status, does it follow that similarly dramatic changes in the nature of how teaching, learning, and research are conducted must have implications for faculty status more broadly? Perhaps it does, as another recent essay in the *Chronicle* opens by proclaiming "the death of tenure."⁹

Altbach, Schuster, and Finkelstein are only a few among many who have explored the increasing diversity of faculty appointments, as well as the conversion of historically tenure-system positions into "contingent" positions.¹⁰ Kezar provides a series of case studies demonstrating how diverse and complex the composition of the faculty has become and the ways in which organizational cultures and institutional policies must change in order to better reflect the roles, responsibilities, and contributions made by the members of what is often referred to as the "new

faculty majority."¹¹ Many of the arguments presented for or against faculty status for librarians, including Sullivan's reminder that the work of librarians and the work of teaching faculty is "different," appear to assume a unified model of faculty work that simply does not exist anymore (if it ever did). Schuster and Finkelstein, describing the "remarkable heterogeneity of faculty types and experiences," conclude that "[this] multihued palette of academic professionals and their work is the very essence of contemporary higher education."¹² In an academic world that affords us such a broad spectrum of colors with which to work, it is unfortunate that so many of our discussions of librarian status are painted in black and white.

Recognizing this multihued palette of academic librarianship need not automatically lead to an argument for removing faculty status from librarians any more than recognizing those same forces across the academy must result in a call to eliminate tenure-system appointments, as a whole. To suggest that it must is to propose too simple a solution to a complex and emergent problem. Consider, for example, the University Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which has long been considered one of the strongest bastions of faculty status for academic librarians. The library faculty at Illinois is composed of members holding only the M.L.S. degree (or equivalent), members holding both the M.L.S. degree and an advanced degree in a subject discipline or professional field, and members holding advanced degrees in a subject discipline or professional field without holding the M.L.S. degree. The staff at Illinois also includes academic professionals who are not members of the faculty, but who contribute directly to research and practice in the library. Over the past decade, the composition of this library's professional complement has become more complex as the nature of academic library work has changed; an evolution reflecting what

the Association of Research Libraries has called “new roles for new times.”¹³ As importantly, Illinois has embraced a broader range of academic professions as contributing to the core missions of the library and the University, which has led to a stronger and more diverse professional ecosystem at Illinois even as the commitment to the role of the librarian as faculty member has remained intact.¹⁴ Illinois, like Virginia, recognizes that libraries are in the midst of great change, but its response has been to engage the issues in all their complexity, rather than to suggest that they may be addressed by simply eliminating faculty status for librarians.

For almost 75 years, *College & Research Libraries* has demonstrated the scholarly approach to their work taken by academic librarians at a range of institutions of higher education, including those that recognize their librarians as members of the faculty and those that do not. With the entire corpus of C&RL research now

freely available through our Web site, I invite our colleagues to more fully consider the issue of faculty status through the many studies we have published. Interested readers may also consider upcoming articles available as pre-prints, including Fleming-May and Douglass’, “Framing Librarianship in the Academy,” which is scheduled for publication in May 2014.¹⁵ Finally, I encourage our authors planning their next research projects to consider the issue of faculty status for librarians within the broader context of the “harsh realities” facing all members of the faculty today.

These are important questions, but they are not simple ones. These are important issues, and their relevance is not limited to librarians. The *Chronicle* and its readers among our colleagues, our association leaders, and our campus leaders should recognize this. It is our job as librarians and as scholarly practitioners (with or without faculty status) to make sure that they do.

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Notes

1. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 71.
2. Sydni Dunn, “As Their Roles Change, Some Librarians Lose Faculty Status,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 18, 2013, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/article/As-Role-of-Librarians-Evolves/137937/>.
3. Ibid.
4. Among the more recent studies are: Pat Weavers-Myers, “Conflict Resolution: A Case Study About Librarians and Faculty Status,” *College & Research Libraries* 63, no. 1 (2002): 25-34; Jeanie M. Welch and Frada L. Mozenter, “Loosening the Ties that Bind: Academic Librarians and Tenure,” *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 2 (2006): 164-176; and Dorita F. Bolger and Erin T. Smith, “Faculty Status and Rank at Liberal Arts Colleges: An Investigation into the Correlation Among Faculty Status, Professional Rights and Responsibilities, and Overall Institutional Quality,” *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 3 (2006): 217-229. One of my predecessors, Donald Riggs, suggested in a 1999 editorial that a comprehensive bibliography on this topic would include “at least 250 entries” [Donald E. Riggs, “Faculty Status for Librarians: Force-Fitting into an Inappropriate Mold or Not?,” *College & Research Libraries* 60, no. 4 (1999): 305-306.].
5. Catherine Coker, Wyoma vanDuinkerken, and Stephen Bales, “Seeking Full Citizenship: A Defense of Tenure Faculty Status for Librarians,” *College & Research Libraries* 71, no. 5 (2010): 406-420.
6. Phillip G. Altbach, “Harsh Realities: The Professoriate in the Twenty-First Century,” in *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges* (3rd edition), eds. Phillip G. Altbach, Patricia J. Gumpport, and Robert O. Berdahl (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 227-253.

7. Ibid.
8. Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finkelstein, *The American Faculty: The Restructuring of Academic Work and Careers* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3.
9. Robin Wilson, "Tenure, RIP: What the Vanishing Status Means for the Future of Education," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 4, 2010, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/article/Tenure-RIP/66114>.
10. See, for example, Roger G. Baldwin and Jay L. Chronister, *Teaching Without Tenure: Policies and Practices for a New Era* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Judith M. Gappa and David W. Leslie, *The Invisible Faculty: Improving the Status of Part-Timers in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993). For the ongoing debate, see: American Association of University Professors, "Contingent Faculty Positions," accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.aaup.org/issues/contingency>.
11. Adrianna Kezar, ed., *Embracing Non-Tenure Track Faculty: Changing Campuses for the New Faculty Majority* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
12. Schuster and Finkelstein, *The American Faculty*, 5.
13. Association of Research Libraries, "New Roles for New Times," accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/planning-visioning/2512-new-roles-for-new-times>.
14. See also: Scott Walter, "The Library as Ecosystem," *Library Journal*, October 1, 2008, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6598103.html>.
15. Rachel A. Fleming-May and Kimberly Douglass, "Framing Librarianship in the Academy: An Analysis Using Bolman and Deal's Model of Organizations," *College & Research Libraries*, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2013/02/06/crl13-432.full.pdf+html>.

Errata



The article by Gay Helen Perkins and Amy J. W. Slowik entitled "The Value of Research in Academic Libraries," which originally appeared in the March 2013 issue has several errors in the transition from table to text in the Results section. The text in the Results section should read as follows:

"More than one-third (34%) had obtained one master's degree only,"
Page 147, line 29

"Thirty-four percent of the academic libraries had 500,000-1,000,000 volumes,"
Page 148, line 2

"A total of 86 percent of the academic libraries were not ARL-affiliated."
Page 148, line 7

TABLE 4
Has ALA-Accredited Master's Program "No. N=19 82.61%"
Page 148, Table 4

We regret the errors.