

Tenure and Turnover in Academic Libraries

Elizabeth C. Henry, Dana M. Caudle,
and Paula Sullenger

This study examined the relationship between tenure and turnover rates for librarians in academic libraries. Survey forms were sent to 124 college and university library directors. The authors found no significant correlation between the two. However, there does seem to be a relationship between scholarly publishing requirements and turnover rates.



his study investigates the relationship between tenure requirements and turnover rates within academic libraries. The authors are new librarians in an academic institution where librarians are required to stand for tenure and promotion reviews like other faculty members. Much anecdotal evidence, both pro and con, exists concerning whether or not tenure requirements have a causative relationship with turnover rates. A search of the literature revealed no existing studies on the relationship between tenure requirements and turnover rates. The authors decided to conduct such a study in order to evaluate the relationship objectively, if any, of tenure requirements to turnover rates. It is also hoped that further research into the effects of faculty status and tenure-track requirements on professional librarians in college and university libraries will be stimulated.

SURVEY OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Surveys of librarians and their status have been in the library literature for decades. Since the establishment of the ACRL's "Standard for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians,"

published in 1971, there have been an increasing number of surveys investigating the status of librarians, their titles, rate of pay, and various other aspects of their professional lives.¹ In the mid-1980s several literature reviews discussed the topic of faculty status and tenure. Janet Krompart and Clara DiFelice highlighted the most often asked questions found in major surveys conducted from 1971 to 1984.² They discussed the findings of those surveys and the implications for the profession. Emily Werrell and Laura Sullivan looked at literature on librarians and faculty status from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s.³ They examined librarians' feelings toward the idea of faculty status and the problems faced by librarians in the areas of publications/scholarship, governance within the library, collective bargaining, and the issue of librarians as teachers. Kee DeBoer and Wendy Cullotta reviewed the literature on the status of librarians, much of it survey research, in articles published between 1980 and 1987.⁴ They covered the topics mentioned in the previous two articles by comparing the results different authors found on the same topics. There were wide disparities found on subjects

Elizabeth C. Henry and Paula Sullenger are *Serials Catalogers* and Dana M. Caudle is a *Monographic Cataloger* at Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama 36849.

such as the number of librarians with faculty status, sabbaticals, and funding for research. In 1992 Krompart published a comprehensive annotated bibliography of research done on faculty status.⁵

While the amount of published research on tenure is impressive, there is little on library turnover, and even less that links the two together. James Neal's studies on employee turnover rates in libraries have evaluated such factors as geography, salary, and spouse requirements and their effects on turnover rates.^{6,7,8} Dee Ann Allison and Eva Sartori questioned previous and current librarians on their decision to leave the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and analyzed their responses.⁹ Among their findings, they revealed that "less than 25% of those who left considered tenure very important in making a decision to leave or stay."¹⁰ Karen F. Smith and others found that "having tenure does not appear to be an overriding consideration restricting the mobility and advancement of tenured librarians. Librarians, whether married or not married, are generally tied to their jobs for a variety of personal reasons."¹¹

METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

The authors listed all academic libraries found in *The American Library Directory*—excluding law and medical libraries—with five or more professional librarians. Every sixth library from this list was selected, which resulted in a random sample of college and university libraries in the United States. The only other similar survey, that of W. Bede Mitchell and L. Stanislava Swieszkowski, surveyed directors of Center for Research Libraries member libraries.¹² A wider, more representative sample of libraries was desired, because much research tends to focus only on major research libraries (see appendix A).

One hundred twenty-four libraries received the survey forms. Of this number, ninety-four were returned, mostly within the first two weeks of the mailing. A number of write-in comments were received on the form. The overall re-

sponse rate was 76 percent, compared to the 94.5 percent response rate of Mitchell and Swieszkowski.¹³ One survey had to be discarded because of incomplete information and one survey arrived too late to be included in the data set. Statistical analysis was performed on the remaining responses which represented 75 percent of the total sample.

The data were entered into PC SAS and all statistical tests were conducted at a 0.05 or 95 percent confidence level. Two general measures of crude turnover rates were calculated for each library. The accession rate is defined as the percentage of librarians hired during a given period. It is calculated by taking the number of librarians hired and dividing by the average number of librarians. The separation rate is defined as the percentage of librarians leaving during a given period. It is calculated by taking the number of librarians who leave the institution and dividing by the average number of librarians. Those who left for reasons of retirement or death were excluded.

Tenure track requirements for professional librarians in college and university libraries do not have a significant effect on their turnover rates.

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed for each of the turnover rates, with the granting of tenure as the dependent variable. The null hypothesis for the tests stated that libraries with tenure track appointment for professional librarians will have the same turnover rates as libraries without a tenure track. The *t*-test proved this hypothesis is true for both accession rates and separation rates. Turnover rates are statistically the same whether or not a library has tenure. Therefore, tenure track requirements for professional librarians in college and university libraries do not have a significant effect on their turnover rates.

An analysis of the error bars confirmed the results of the *t*-test. The error bars show a mean accession rate of 51.1 +/- 6.7

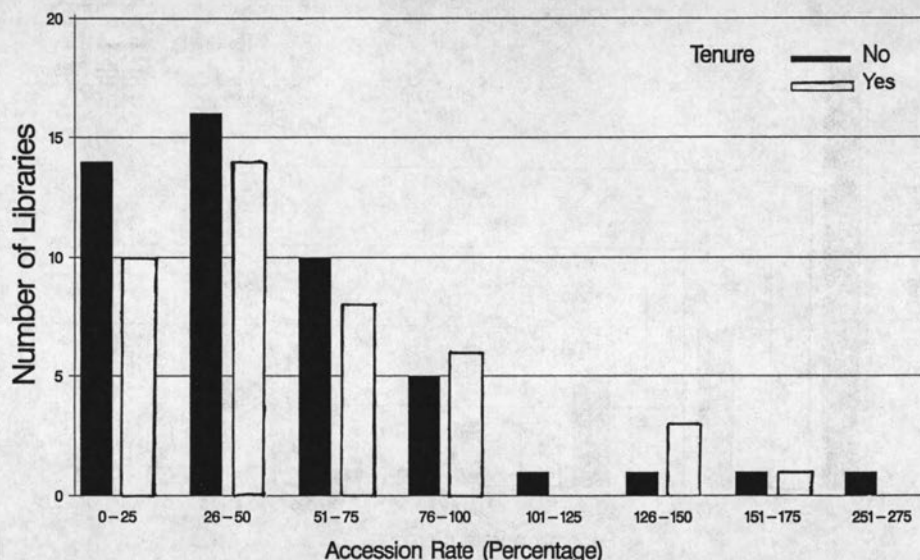


FIGURE 1
Accession Rates

percent for libraries that do not have tenure and a mean rate of 54.4 +/- 6.3 percent for libraries that do have tenure. Although there is a difference of 3.3 percent in the mean accession rates, it proves not to be statistically significant. The error bars also show a mean separation rate of 38.9 +/- 6.9 percent for libraries that do not have tenure and a mean rate of 33.7 +/- 5.0 percent for libraries with tenure for professional librarians. Again, this 5.2 percent difference in mean separation rates proves not to be statistically significant.

The range of values for the accession rates (figure 1) and separation rates (figure 2) in libraries with tenure is approximately twice that for libraries without tenure. The maximum value is 275 percent versus 175 percent for the accession rates, and 300 percent versus 129 percent for the separation rates.

Tenure denial rates and tenure approval rates were also calculated for each library that granted tenure. Forty-two out of the ninety-two, or 46 percent of the responses, came from libraries with tenure track appointments. In general, for academic institutions having

tenure track requirements, 93 percent of all librarians who stood for tenure received it, compared with 81.5 percent in Mitchell and Swieszkowski's survey.¹⁴

Next, a Pearson correlation was performed between the tenure denial/approval rates and the turnover rates. Here the null hypothesis stated that no correlation exists between the tenure denial rate and the accession/separation rates, and that no correlation exists between the tenure approval rate and the turnover rates. This hypothesis was proved false for all combinations. There are very small correlations indicating a relationship between the following combinations of rates (ranked by strength of the relationship from the strongest to weakest):

- There is an inverse correlation (meaning that one rate will decrease when the other increases) between the separation rate and the tenure approval rate.
- There is also an inverse correlation between the accession rate and the tenure approval rate.
- There is a positive correlation (meaning that the rates are directly related) between the separation rate and the tenure denial rate.

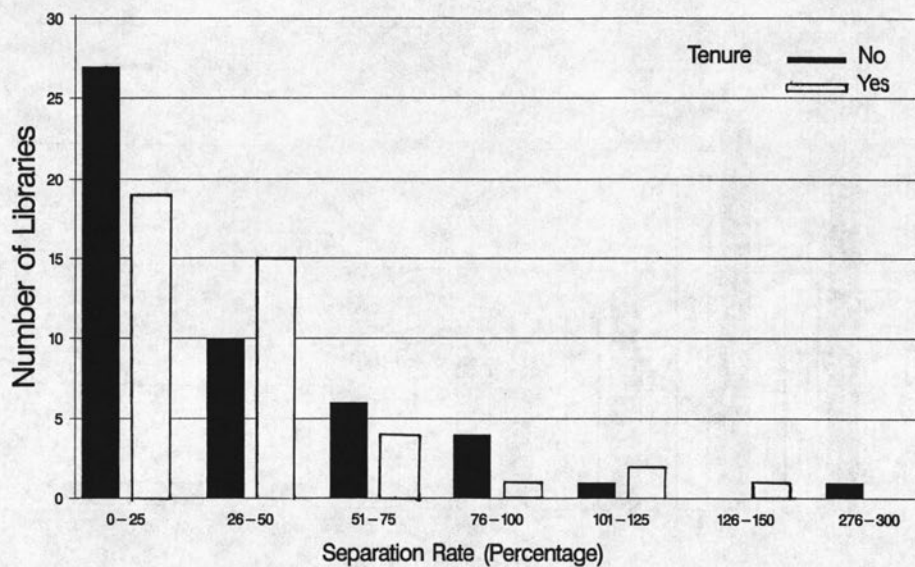


FIGURE 2
Separation Rates

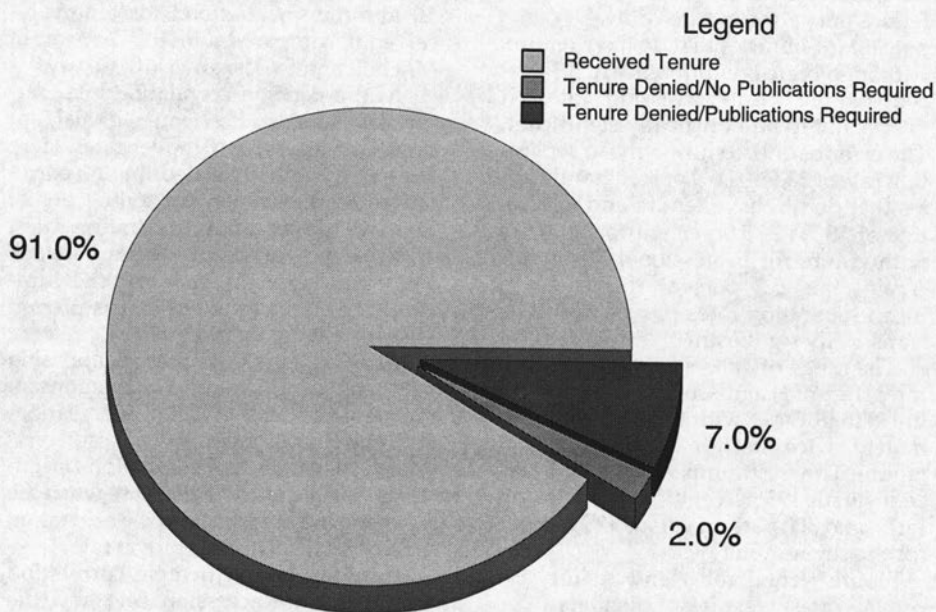


FIGURE 3
Effect of Scholarly Publishing Requirements

- There is a positive correlation between the accession rate and the tenure denial rate.

The weakness of these four correlations may indicate that tenure does not significantly affect the decision to remain in a position.

Finally, tenure approval and denial rates were compared between institutions that required scholarly publishing for tenure and those that did not. The authors did not investigate whether or not the definition of scholarly publishing at each of these academic institutions meant anything in print anywhere or publishing strictly in refereed journals, nor did they investigate whether authorities internal or external to a library applied internal or external standards to determine an acceptable level of publishing. Of the 9 percent of academic librarians denied tenure, 7 percent were at institutions requiring scholarly publishing, and only 2 percent were at institutions that said they had no publishing requirements. This result suggests that scholarly publishing requirements may have some effect on turnover rates and should be more closely investigated. The pie chart (figure 3) illustrates the effect of scholarly publishing on tenure approval.

Requirements for service commitments were examined for their effect on turnover rates. In the interest of keeping this survey brief and exploratory, "service" was not defined. This could include service on a committee or two within the library system itself, service on committees of the academic institution, or service on professional committees at the state, regional, or national levels. This could serve as a topic for further investigation. There was no correlation between tenure and release time, either, as Mitchell and Swieszkowski found.¹⁵

CONCLUSIONS

First, it should be pointed out that colleges and universities generally believe that a certain level of turnover is beneficial to the institution by bringing in fresh ideas and experiences and adding to the diversity of the faculty. Beyond that certain percentage, turnover be-

comes undesirable and negative for the institution. The negative aspects of turnover are the demoralizing effects of constant change, the continual training of new staff, and the lack of continuity. Turnover rates in this survey ranged from 0 percent to 300 percent (achieved by the library filling the same position more than once during the five-year period). It is important for each academic library to know what the turnover rates are for their institution and for their library, and how these rates reflect institutional and library goals.

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the possibility of a correlation between tenure track requirements and turnover rates for academic librarians. The primary conclusion of this study is that having librarians meet tenure track requirements does not significantly increase or decrease the turnover rates for professional staff. In fact, those libraries that had high turnover rates were more likely not to have tenure requirements. It is clear that tenure does not have a significant impact on turnover rates across the profession. When examining tenure rates of professional staff, academic libraries need to consider factors other than tenure requirements. The anticorrelation between the tenure approval rate and the crude turnover rates suggests that the presence of tenure track appointments might contribute to stability and lower turnover in an individual library, rather than cause higher turnover. The authors hope this study will be of use to those libraries contemplating either adopting or discontinuing the tenure track system. It should also help librarians who already work in a tenure environment to have reasonable expectations about the repercussions of tenure. Librarians considering working in a college or university library with

tenure can make more informed decisions about whether they want to work within a tenure system.

The study did not examine turnover rates in terms of library size. Future studies need to examine the impact of tenure on turnover in small libraries versus that in large libraries. Subsequent studies also need to examine the number of tenured librarians who leave as compared with the number of untenured librarians who leave. A study of the number of years that librarians stay in a tenure track position may also prove useful since some libraries use a third year review process to weed out librarians who are not progressing toward tenure.

Several other areas suggest themselves for further research. A survey of the methods that college and university libraries employ to support their professional staff development and to facilitate meeting tenure track requirements

could be of benefit to other libraries. Research into turnover rates for librarians in technical service areas compared to turnover rates for librarians in public services should be pursued. Many technical service departments have quantitative quotas in place, either unofficially or in official guidelines, which may put additional pressures on technical service librarians to perform at both a high quantitative and a high qualitative level. Finally, further exploration is needed concerning the effect that scholarly publishing requirements have on turnover rates. This area seems to be the one most identified with tenure requirements and the one area that provoked the most response, sometimes quite emotional. Some librarians have very strong feelings about research and publication requirements. More objective information on the subject would be desirable.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY FORM

1. Regardless of rank or title, how many permanent professional librarian positions did your institution have at the end of the 1991/92 academic year? _____
2. Did the number of these positions change during the period from the beginning of the 1985/86 academic year through the end of the 1991/92 academic year? _____
If so, what was the change? (increase or decrease and number) _____
3. How many individuals were hired during the above period, excluding temporary appointments? _____
4. How many individuals left during the above period, excluding temporary appointments? _____
5. How many of these individuals leaving did so because of retirement or death? _____

For questions 6, 7 and 9, please answer *yes* or *no*.

6. Do professional librarians have to stand for tenure? _____
If not, please disregard the rest of the questions and return the survey.
7. Aside from job performance, which of these are requirements for tenure?
 - a. Scholarly publishing? _____
Are librarians granted release time to work on research? _____
 - b. Professional or institutional committee and association work, or other service to the profession? _____
 - c. Other? (Please specify) _____
8. How many individuals applied for tenure during this period? _____
 - a. How many obtained tenure, excluding those granted de facto tenure? _____
 - b. How many were denied tenure? _____
9. If your institution conducts exit interviews, has any librarian stated publishing or committee requirements as a reason for leaving? _____

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