PRISCILLA GEAHIGAN, HARRIET NELSON,
STEWART SAUNDERS, AND LAWRENCE WOODS

Acceptability of Non–Library/Information Science Publications in the Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians

If library/information science is a true academic discipline, then academic librarians must reevaluate the acceptability of publications in other fields if they are to be considered academic faculty members in the field of library/ information science. This was perceived to be the issue by the Purdue University Library faculty when they altered the tenure and promotions document to require that consideration for promotion and tenure be based on publications in library/information science. The issue has been raised by the growing number of librarians with non-library/information science Ph.D.s who prefer to publish in the area of their Ph.D. A survey of ARL libraries indicates, however, that only a relative handful of academic libraries presently supports requirements similar to those adopted by the Purdue library faculty.

D URING A RECENT SURVEY of a university library faculty, a respondent stated, "The librarian is a true Renaissance Man." Herb White encountered a distinguished scholar-librarian who described libraries as being "self evidently good."[1] Is it realistic to continue to view our profession as a bibliographic Camelot in the light of the realities of the times? We have striven for acceptance by our academic colleagues by seeking faculty status for librarians. We have worked for several decades to define our area of activity as professional. How has our success enhanced

Priscilla Geahigan is reference librarian, Krannert Management and Economics Library, Harriet Nelson is senior reference librarian, General Library, Stewart Saunders is reference and liaison librarian, General Library, and Lawrence Woods is head of the Research and Development Unit, University Libraries, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

or detracted from the old concept of the librarian as a self-directed, cross-disciplinary scholar?

THE ISSUE DEFINED

The library faculty of Purdue University adopted in 1978 a clarification of its promotion and tenure policy stating that publications in library/information science would be given more weight in promotion and tenure decisions than those in other scholarly fields. This issue arose when, in interviewing a candidate for a position on the library faculty, she stated that she would only publish in English literature, which was the area of her Ph.D. At that time the Purdue Libraries had no explicit policy covering this issue since it had never been raised before in hiring or promotion and tenure considerations. It was apparent, however, that the issue at stake was one of definition. What is the subject expertise of library/information science?

The issue having been raised, the director of libraries appointed a committee to study and make recommendations on a policy. The committee searched the literature and surveyed the opinion of the library faculty. The literature search revealed that there was no single article addressing this issue directly. At the next faculty meeting the committee reported and presented a resolution favoring stronger support to library and information science publications than to those in other fields. Enough discussion was generated that the report was tabled to permit further consideration by the faculty. It was clear that the library faculty was divided on the topic.

Those faculty members who supported the resolution based their argument on the proposition that library and information science is a discipline in its own right. Consequently the librarian and information scientist ought to do research and publish in this field if he/she is to advance the state of the discipline and comply to general norms for the faculty of an academic discipline. This argument was supported by references to other academic disciplines where publication outside the area of one's academic appointment would be inappropriate. For example, a chemist would never gain tenure or promotion if he were to devote his research to Arthurian legend.

Faculty members who opposed the resolution based their objections on two similar but distinct arguments. In a philosophical vein, it was argued that the trend in modern research is toward an increase in interdisciplinary studies and that librarianship by its very nature is an interdisciplinary subject. Therefore, to impose restrictions on the scope of research done by librarians and information scientists would not only curtail academic freedom but would also be counter to the current direction in other disciplines. Echoing a similar sentiment at a more practical level, several library faculty members expressed the opinion that the everyday professional activities of librarians bring them into contact with the entire realm of knowledge and that, unlike other disciplines, a broad working knowledge of many subject fields is essential for successful job performance. The same criteria of the relation of subject knowledge to job performance could be applied by the subject specialist to his/her own peculiar role as

the liaison between the library and the teaching faculty of a specific discipline. Given that subject knowledge is essential for many professional library positions, research in these subject areas, it was argued, should not be inappropriate to the tasks of librarianship. The opposition supported its argument with the example of a leading literary scholar who had published several critical bibliographies, implying that librarians should be rewarded for publishing literary history.

Although the director of libraries made the point that he would find it difficult to justify to the university-wide promotion and tenure committee promotion and tenure for someone who was publishing in something other than library and information science, this practical problem was never considered to be the real issue by either party in the debate. No pressure was being exerted by the university administration to make the librarians follow a particular course in research and publication. Rather, the arguments centered on the more philosophical issue of library and information science as a unique discipline versus library and information science as a loose confederation of many other areas of knowledge.

In the course of the debate it became apparent that a compromise opinion had formed among the library faculty. They agreed that library and information science was the library faculty's proper field of investigation, but at the same time they wished to see the subject defined in the broadest possible terms. Many suggestions were made to amend the original resolution in order to reach a compromise between the two opposed philosophical views. Such suggestions usually amounted to examples of acceptable research, but it was soon realized that without a core definition of library and information science the examples could be strung out ad infinitum, and the library faculty was unwilling to commit itself to a core definition.

In a spirit of compromise, a resolution was adopted that gave preponderate value to publications in the field of library and information science, but left the interpretation of what properly belonged to this field to the tenure and promotions committee. In practical terms this meant that someone might publish in a subject other than library science so long as he/she was careful to show its rele-

vance to the concerns and issues of librarianship.

The adopted resolution read:

Since the field of library/information science/audio-visual constitutes a discipline, most publications should be related to the discipline in some way. The discipline should be interpreted broadly.

Faculty members should strengthen their case by having as many good refereed publications in the discipline as possible.

All publications in the discipline may be included in consideration for promotion and tenure.

Publications in scholarly fields not directly related to library/information science/audio-visual are acceptable but may not be given primary consideration.

No specific requirements should be established for the number and types of publications which are acceptable.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The issue of whether publications in library and information science should be given more weight than publications in other subject fields is complex, and one that has not been fully clarified in the resolution adopted by Purdue's library faculty. Some indication that such an issue might be important in the field can be gained by considering the growing emphasis placed upon subject degrees as part of the qualifications of academic librarians. Miller's 1976 study of Ph.D.s in librarianship[2] found that of the 207 Ph.D.s holding professional positions in seventy-two large university libraries, 175 (84.5 percent) are subject Ph.D.s. His study likewise shows that the number of students who entered schools of library science with Ph.D.s in hand approximately doubled between 1972 and 1974, and that there is a preference in the current job market for librarians with subject expertise at the Ph.D. level. Given the current emphasis upon the possession of subject matter expertise in librarianship, it may well be that a greater proportion of academic librarians are publishing, and desire to publish, in their subject specialty. This is indicated in a recent study of publication patterns by librarians in ten university libraries. Of the journal articles published in a five-year period by this group, 41 percent were published in nonlibrary journals.[3]

How do other academic libraries deal with this issue? In a recently conducted search of the literature, many studies were found that dealt with the topic of faculty status and publications for librarians in general, but only a few addressed this topic specifically. The findings of Kellam and Barker's 1968 study indicated that 97 percent of the seventy-two respondents, mostly ARL library directors, did agree that librarians should be encouraged to do research and that about 60 percent of this group answered that the research need not be related to library operations or problems.[4] Also, 92 percent of the respondents in this study did favor librarians' participation in nonlibrary professional association work.[5] However, the study also noted that administrators supported such activity to a lesser degree than participation in professional library association work.[6] More relevant to the focus of this article is the recent survey of sixty-eight ARL libraries by Rayman and Goudy. Of the ten libraries in this survey that required publication for promotion and tenure, only two required that the publications be in library or information science.[7]

THE ISSUE SURVEYED

In order to obtain a more accurate assessment of the importance of discipline focus as an issue for promotion and tenure, the authors conducted a survey of ARL member libraries. A short questionnaire was printed on a stamped, addressed postcard and sent with a letter of explanation to all 108 ARL library directors. These questions together with the results from eighty-two responding university libraries are listed in table 1.

Two important conclusions emerged from the raw data of the questionnaire. (1) Most academic libraries give equal weight to publications in subject fields and library/information science. As shown in table 1, question 4, fifty-four ARL academic libraries (65.9 percent) allowed equal weight for both types of publications. If the seventeen libraries that did not answer the question are removed from the sample, then this percentage rises to 83 percent. Nine libraries indicated that subject-field publications had either less weight or no weight when compared to publications in the field of library/information science. Looking, however, at the subset of thirteen libraries requiring publication for promotion and tenure, only two of these gave less weight to subject-field pub-

TABLE 1

RESULTS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE RECEIVED
FROM EIGHTY-TWO ARL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

	Frequency	Relative Frequency
1. Size of professional staff:		
Less than 50	27	32.9%
50 to 100	39	47.6%
101 to 150	10	12.2%
Larger than 150	6	7.3%
Total	82	100.0%
2. Do your librarians have faculty status?		
Yes	46	56.1%
No	35	42.7%
No answer	1	1.2%
Total	82	100.0%
3. Is publication essential for promotion and/or tenure?		
Yes	13	15.9%
No	67	81.7%
No answer	2	2.4%
Total	82	100.0%
4. What weight do subject publications carry compared to library/information science publications?		
More	2	2.4%
Same	54	65.9%
Less	4	4.9%
None	5	6.1%
No answer	17	20.7%
Total	82	100.0%
5. Has the question of the weight of subject publications ever been an issue at your institution?		
Yes	9	11.0%
No	69	84.1%
No answer	4	4.9%
Total	82	100.0%

lications. This agrees with the results obtained by Rayman and Goudy. (2) The question of the relative merit of library/information science versus subject publications has never been an issue in most ARL academic libraries. Sixty-nine libraries (84.1 percent) said that it had never been an issue; nine libraries (10.9 percent) indicated that it had been an issue (see table 1, question 5). The reader should note that the nine libraries in question 4 were not the same nine libraries in question 5.

The size of the library staff correlates very highly with the answer to these two questions (questions 4 and 5, table 1). All nine libraries that said that publications in subject fields carried less or no value when compared to library/information science publications had professional staffs below 100 while none of the libraries with staffs larger than 100 gave less value to subject-field publications (see table 2). Likewise, all nine libraries that indicated that the subject matter of publications

TABLE 2

STAFF SIZE BY WEIGHTING POLICY*

Staff Size	Relative Value of Subject-Field Publications to Library/Information Science Publications		
	Same Value	Less or No Value	Row Total
100 or less	41	9	50
Larger than 100	13	0	13
Column total	54	9	63

*Missing cases represent libraries which did not answer question 4 or indicated a greater value for subject-field publications.

had been an issue for their library policy had professional staffs of less than 100 (see table 3). The probable explanation of this phenomenon is to be found in the long tradition of employing subject specialists in the larger academic libraries. Subject specialists would be prone to publish in the area of their specialty and would have done so for many years, long before faculty status ever became an issue in libraries. Thus publication in subject areas

TABLE 3

STAFF SIZE BY ISSUE OF THE SUBJECT MATTER OF
PUBLICATIONS*

| Staff Size | Libraries in Which a Policy Issue Regarding the Suitability of Subject-Field Publications Has Been Raised | | |
	Yes	No	Row Total
100 or less	9	53	62
Larger than 100	0	16	16
Column total	9	69	78

*Missing cases represent libraries which did not answer question 5.

would have come to be accepted as a traditional and legitimate scholarly activity for these librarians. On the other hand only recently, in an era when faculty status has become a point at issue and when more and more library school graduates also hold subject Ph.D.s, have the smaller academic libraries begun to hire subject specialists. The larger libraries settled the issue in an earlier context; only now, under new circumstances, are smaller academic libraries grappling with the problem.

CONCLUSION

The requirement that academic librarians confine their research and publications to the issues of library/information science if they wish to receive serious consideration for promotion and tenure is obviously not a national trend at this time. This is perhaps due to the existing state of library/information science. Library/information science is the science of the organization of knowledge for purposes of storage and retrieval, and this very fact is the source of the confusion. In the past the principles by which knowledge was organized derived from the bodies of knowledge being organized and not from any general principles of organization. Witness the Library of Congress classification schedules; they were created by subject specialists. Any general principles of organization on which a core definition of library/information science should rest are, as of now, only partially formulated, seldom taught at any level of sophistication, and in the final analysis may lie in the synthesis of various branches of probability theory and semantics. Two opposing developments within the profession may, however, change this state of affairs.

On the one hand an increasing number of subject specialists with Ph.D.s are entering librarianship. They are trained to do research in their particular subjects and thus have a vested interest in utilizing that prior training to publish in these subject areas. Librarians with only an MLS generally lack these research skills and find it difficult to compete on an equal footing. On the other hand the very logic of defining library/information science as a profession and an academic discipline requires that librarians circumscribe and lay claim to a specialized body of knowledge that must be advanced by research. Otherwise library/information science may come to be regarded as nothing more than an eclectic jumble of the arts and sciences and, like nursing, be subordinated to another group of professionals who claim to understand and advance a truly unique and scientific body of knowledge.

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