

Vol.13 No. 1 Spring, 1982 ISSN 0196-0679

InULA

Quarterly

The Librarian as a Professional



InULA Quarterly

Vol.13 No.1

New technology, budget constraints, a tight job market, faculty status—these all create pressures and demands on the librarian. While willingness to accept challenges and to rise to new demands are the earmarks of the professional, many librarians are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up. Where do the problems lie? Here, several librarians respond to questions in an attempt to define the concerns facing us.

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Correction: The last issue of InULA Quarterly should have been Vol.12, No.4.

InULA Quarterly is a publication of the Indiana University Librarians' Association. Letters and items of interest should be addressed to Amy E. Novick, Archives of Traditional Music, Maxwell 221, IU-Bloomington. Publications Committee: Jo Brooks, John Curry, Mark Day, Dorothy Niekamp, Amy Novick, editor.

Where is the balance between professional development (attending conferences, publishing, meeting promotion and tenure requirements) and career development (concentrating on a particular job, perfecting skills used in daily work)?

I see no inherent conflicts between the needs for career development and for professional development, particularly in the academic library setting. Teaching faculty have long insisted that while solid research does not insure good teaching, teaching which is not based on research (or experience outside the classroom) rapidly becomes obsolete and sterile. It can be similarly argued that being a good reference librarian or cataloger requires not only an awareness of what is happening professionally in these areas, but also a participation in the process of shaping dynamic change. The difficulty for librarians as for anyone else in academia comes in establishing a balance between the two requirements at a time of increasing pressure and diminishing resources, and that balance is a difficult and sensitive one. The process must guard against excesses in either direction. Faculty who spend all of their time in outside consultation and short-change their lecture preparation are not acceptable, but neither is the alternative of assigning huge classes and overload teaching responsibilities which interfere with scholarship requirements. When this pressure builds to intolerable levels in academic units, classes can be cancelled or enrollment is curtailed. This is more difficult for an academic library, but the determination of what is a reasonable balance level must be discussed, debated, and ultimately made. When that level falls short of what the unit or outside users have determined as "need," then either resources must be increased or adjusted, or "needs" redefined.

The problem is particularly sensitive for librarians, because in many cases the job pressures which can interfere with career development are not professional pressures at all. It

is perhaps unfortunate but nevertheless certainly true that libraries run on clerical routine. When there are staff shortages (and where aren't there?) these clerical routines take precedence over professional duties, and the reduction or elimination of work study positions which we seem to face will intensify this pressure. In the absence of clerks professionals become clerks, and it doesn't just happen in libraries.

Coping with these difficulties, and carving out enough time for career growth *and* professional activities will not be easy, but it must be done. Realistic objectives which can be met with available resources, people resources in particular, must be developed. It is obvious that we cannot do all things, but there is a marked reluctance to discuss the things we plan *not* to do. Discussing these questions with library administrators will be difficult enough, discussing them with user groups may be even more difficult. Library users are not particularly prepared to set limits on their expectations, or to worry about how you are supposed to do what they want done. Moreover, those expectations largely run in the direction of the clerical emphases mentioned earlier.

Given the reality of limited resources, there is need for an ongoing process of communication and evaluation to determine what activities should be and can be supported. I think that the balance between professional activities and career growth will not be nearly as difficult to strike as the balance between these forms of professional expression and the engulfing tide of routine.

The determination of "need" has many ingredients, including the needs of the individual professional, the needs of the bureaucratic or-

ganization in which he or she must function, and the needs of the community being served. This continued and open discussion must take into consideration a conglomeration of rights and responsibilities which don't necessarily

clash, but also don't necessarily coincide. We may even have to begin with a definition of "need" itself, differentiating it from preference, preconception, or assumption.

Herbert S. White, Dean of the School of Library and Information Science

How can we reconcile the emphasis on attendance at professional meetings for promotion and tenure with the decreasing travel subsidies available?

As a member of the Bloomington Library Faculty Council Continuing Education Committee for two years, I am aware that for most library faculty the expense of professional travel is a problem. The level of university support for the cost of travel has decreased at the same time that all costs for attending meetings have increased. The expenses, usually totalling \$400 to \$600, involved in attending a national meeting in a large city are staggering. Many of us are staying at home, and all of us are thinking of ways to cut expenses.

In our relatively short history in the academic ranks, we have placed a high value on participation in professional organizations and in national meetings and conferences. Participation in ALA committees and programs and in the work of other prestigious organizations has been regarded by the library promotion and tenure committees as strong, solid evidence of continued professional growth. We have been directly rewarded for our participation by the promotion and tenure process.

Many of our faculty are members of committees of national organizations. Our involvement enriches our professional lives but the

financial costs of involvement are increasing. A number of librarians have found themselves to be the only non-administrator on ALA committees and consequently felt themselves to be the only member paying out-of-pocket to do the committee's work.

We also want to attend more than one meeting per year. One particularly active faculty member, filing the federal income tax this spring, was troubled to see that she had spent—without reimbursement—a month's salary on professional travel for 1981. She thinks she spent too much.

How can we cope? 1) We can concentrate on local and regional meetings and programs rather than go for the national, big-town, big-hotel ones. Such a movement would improve these organizations and their programs. The Nashville, Indiana, conference on technology is a recent example of an important local program. 2) We can urge our national associations to meet in Mid-America and avoid the east and west coast cities. 3) We can be eclectic and attend national meetings when they are in our area. For example, ASIS is meeting in Columbus, Ohio, in October 1982. 4) We can

suggest that national conventions be scheduled every other year and that regional meetings occur in between. The programs could be rehearsed regionally and go national the next year, thus improving the quality of the national meetings. 5) We can encourage the national groups to package programs to be used region-

ally. An excellent example of this was the AACR2 institute last year.

I think that we can refresh our professional lives without extensive travel every year and that this professional growth can be evidenced to future promotion and tenure committees.

Frances Wilhoit, Head of Journalism Library

Do you feel that the library's expectations concerning your professional development are justified in terms of the support provided?

I feel that the expectations are unrealistic in terms of money and time pressure. Beginning librarians' salaries can be as low as \$13,000. The cost of one trip to an annual conference (ALA or other professionally related) can easily exceed one half of one month's salary, particularly if the distance is great, and if one stays for more than a few days. At a time when our salary increases have fallen way behind the rate of inflation, it is unreasonable to be expected to spend such a large proportion of our income on travel and other necessary conference expenses. We are getting conflicting messages: one from our supervisors and promotion committees, who say it is important for us to attend at least one national level meeting per year, and the other message from the budget office which says travel is not important enough for us to provide adequate financial support. So we are caught in the middle, and feel the pressure of being expected to prove professional growth and interest through meeting attendance at great financial sacrifice.

Time pressure is another serious problem, though less tangible. In a 40 hour work week, not much time is left for personal growth and development (factors which are vital to our professional performance) if we must spend our out-of-work hours on research and creativity related to our work. In the first year or two we are told performance on the job is the most important aspect of our work, but pressure is still felt to perform in the other two categories as well.

I would offer as a partial solution to the meeting attendance problem the option of funding one trip every two years per library faculty member, and at the same time removing the pressure put on everyone to attend every year. People serving on national-level committees should probably be given funding every year, and perhaps for a librarian's first conference attendance, full funding could be given that year to offset the limitations of the low first-year salaries.

Anonymous junior librarian

I am in a quandary as I try to answer this question: it is easy to see problems, far more difficult to devise solutions. I wish, therefore, to qualify my remarks by saying that I feel that what is referred to as "professional development" is a personal responsibility and a proper measure of one's professional commitment. It should not need to be induced, but should be a natural extension of the interests that led one into the profession. I am also aware of the financial constraints facing both the library and the university as a whole. Having said this, however, I do feel that leaving the implementation of such growth strictly to the individual at times constitutes a strain.

For example, it is a commonplace that much material published in professional library journals is trivial and/or of poor quality. However, since I have been a working librarian, I have come to appreciate the time and financial constraints that might tend to foster poor research performance on the part of individuals. In the day-to-day activities of a large library there is much work to be done and few to do it. One often works far more hours than the traditional 40 hour work week. Indeed, maintaining one's "production," keeping current with the applied aspects of one's art, and maintaining one's "tools" demand much extra time if they

are to be done properly. A willingness to make the extra effort is proper and should reflect the degree of one's job satisfaction. However, much of this effort is necessary just for "maintenance" and leaves little time and energy for theoretical thought, much less for the design and implementation of rigorous research. Nevertheless, such activity is necessary on the part of the practicing librarian as well as those sequestered in library schools. It not only serves to upgrade the profession as a whole, but it creates the type of theoretical and practical understanding of librarianship that typifies the professional as opposed to the clerical approach to an occupation, and is vital for true professional growth.

A second example, and one which is shared with other university faculty, is that of attendance at professional meetings. While the importance of these meetings is obvious, given the low level of financial support for such attendance, the strain on an entry level salary is also obvious. Some effort at equalization might be desirable, e.g., more support for those at the lower salary levels and/or for those whose attendance is mandated because they hold organizational offices or who are engaged in organizational activities of direct benefit to the I.U. Libraries.

Anonymous junior librarian

Assuming that the primary expectation for professional development in librarianship is to attend national conferences on an annual basis, then it seems unfair and unrealistic to expect junior librarians to attend these meetings. These librarians receive such low salaries that they are fortunate if they can provide themselves and their families with basic necessities, let alone finance the cost of attending a yearly convention. With fewer dollars available for travel assistance and raises in salaries which are disproportionate to the increase in the cost of

living, librarians on the lower end of the salary scale should not be coerced to attend a costly convention, the professional benefits of which are questionable, at best. Rather, the junior librarian should be encouraged to participate in local or state activities for the first two to three years, and then be encouraged to attend a national conference. Publication in professional journals is one way in which a junior librarian may build a national reputation without attending conferences.

At the heart of this problem lies the matter of

money. One solution is for library schools to limit the enrollment of their students by instituting tougher screening requirements. With fewer people then entering the profession, salaries should increase by the law of supply and demand. A healthier economy would also help to alleviate the salary problem. But the better solution lies in recognition; the recognition of

It's a difficult problem to sort out because the library does encourage our professional development. They do want us to learn more, participate in our profession more, and for our own sake as much as the library's. But it's all mixed up with career, with tenure and so forth. I feel we're expected to shine; i.e., participate in professional organizations and do research or whatever, but the day to day work makes this

librarianship as a profession worthy of commanding a higher amount of financial recompense. When this fact is acknowledged, then perhaps there will be fewer, if no more, discussions about whether or not junior librarians should be expected to attend national conferences.

Anonymous junior librarian

difficult. There's more daily work to do than time. If you become interested in something, a project or area of research, its extra. I'm not sure this is wrong, but its hard to do all the things I think are demanded of us equally well. I wish there were more practical support, release time to do projects or work in professional organizations. I sometimes think this is a job for superwoman.

Anonymous junior librarian

How are hiring patterns for professional librarians changing?

My initial response to this question was to quickly underscore the fact that I have been a personnel librarian for all of seven months and that I was not sure if I had actually observed any change or whether my observations after such a short a period would have any validity. I was assured, however, that my untested and relatively inexperienced view would be welcomed. With that disclaimer in mind, let me comment on the searches for library faculty which I have been and am still involved with. And let me add a second disclaimer. These are

my own personal observations and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the library administration.

As libraries are rapidly advancing into the age of computers and automation so must the library faculty and staff advance with them. It would be a rare occurrence today to see an advertisement for a professional librarian which did not require, or at least prefer, some background, experience and/or knowledge of computers and automated systems. It would, of course, also be as rare to find a librarian with a

degree obtained in the last five years who did not have these qualifications. But where then does that leave the librarian who has the pre-computer MLS? Either these people decide not to place themselves on the job market or they make the effort to acquire this knowledge and experience through formal coursework or within the scope of their library positions. As libraries become more and more automated, it will be difficult for librarians to avoid some contact and work with these systems, whether they like it or not. This is not to say that librarians lacking in computer skills will not be marketable. They will continue to be, but they are now increasingly competing with those who have all the basic skills as well as the latest knowledge of library automation. Few would question that this is the direction in which libraries must move if they are to continue being a viable and essential force in the academic world. Does it not follow, then, that librarians with computer expertise are a vital necessity to libraries?

While it may sound trite to speak of "these uncertain economic times," the economy is without a doubt a factor in the pattern of hiring in any organization. Libraries are no exception. Those who have some job security, either through tenure or simply because they know their performance is satisfactory, are reluctant to move. They prefer not to take the chance even though the opportunity may look attractive. It is also costly to relocate and there are few institutions which are offering moving expenses.

Benefits are being looked at much more carefully by job applicants. Where salaries are not high, benefits will be stressed in advertisements. Here at Indiana University, it is estimated that the benefits add about 20% to salaries. Although not the best in the country, the benefits package here is certainly substantial and is being emphasized in hiring.

Another factor which is only just beginning to be recognized which affects the number of

applicants we get for positions is the consideration of the partner's employment possibilities. Whether through economic necessity or choice, there is an increasing number of two-career families. Having careers in different disciplines could be difficult enough, but if both partners should be librarians, the likelihood that they will be able to find positions in the same area is significantly reduced. The probable result is that these people will rarely come onto the job market.

As has always been the case in the past, librarians with academic backgrounds in the physical sciences, particularly women, are difficult to find. This presumably is changing with more and more women being encouraged to pursue careers in the physical sciences, but I imagine it will be some years before this trend is felt in libraries.

One of the things that I have particularly noticed since I have been here is the number of people who have three to seven years of post-MLS experience, but have not managed in that time, to get any managerial or even more importantly, supervisory experience. It would be difficult to imagine a library job that did not require some supervision, especially when one considers the number of student workers in most libraries. Yet, there still are librarians who do not get this experience. For the most part, they have gone straight from library school to a "cozy" library position that would perhaps be more than the new graduate could have hoped for. It may be in a small college or small public library and, while allowing those librarians tremendous scope for experience that might not have been so easily and quickly accessible in a larger setting, offers few supervisory responsibilities. These are the librarians who are finding it difficult to move ahead in their careers. There are few jobs beyond entry level positions which do not require some experience in supervising staff.

What may be the most obvious and important factor affecting the quality and quantity of

applicants is salary. While salary floors for entry level positions are low, I am not sure that for positions beyond entry level, salary is a major factor in attracting qualified applicants. Salaries are certainly a factor in keeping people once they are here, but in terms of attracting the qualified applicant, I can only observe that we have had many good applicants for the positions which have been advertised since I have been here. There is no way, of course, that

I can assess the number of people who might not have applied for positions because of the salary offered.

In conclusion, there are many other factors regarding hiring which I have not even touched on and a myriad of other points of view. The ones I have mentioned are simply the obvious things that come to my mind in reviewing applications and working with the search and screen committees.

Anne Rimmer, Personnel Officer, Indiana University Libraries

Is there a conflict between serving the profession and serving the organization?

The anxiety librarians feel about activity in the profession, as distinct from professional work in a library, reflects a fairly constant tension in all professional life. It is one of those problems to which there is no satisfactory general answer, only individual choices. The fact is that our loyalties, attention and energies are naturally divided. It's not just that we are simultaneously part of the community of all librarians and members of Indiana University Libraries; we are members of one *because* we are part of the other. What a professional wants to or could do as a member of a profession and what that same professional can do because he or she is a member of an institution under financial stress makes the issue especially problematic. To serve one well is not necessarily to equally serve the other.

Nor is it an abstract issue. This pot of mixed loyalty and labor is represented in the very organization of the library. It is at once hierarchical and participatory, and necessarily so. Professions are characterized by their self-govern-

ance and their self-directed work. But the service the library provides requires schedules, accountability and organizational discipline. As an institution, the library needs these. The need felt by both the library and individual librarians for professional development is very difficult to square with the equal need to meet our daily obligations to the library and the university community.

In the long run, we can expect academic libraries to adapt their organizations and funding patterns to the need for professional development. As libraries increasingly demand professional attainments comparable to other academic units, methods of support for professional participation will be devised that will come to seem ordinary and natural.

In the short run, our very anxieties make participation in professional activity even more important. Attending conferences can be discouraging and few things are as forbidding as trying to write or do research. But the most fundamental participation is the daily and ac-

tive conversation with other librarians about technical and professional issues. It will be through discussion with our peers that a more positive professional definition can be

hammered out and the obligation we owe both our profession and our libraries can be made more concrete and communicable.

John Curry, Head of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Library

Reviews

Geahigan, Priscilla, Harriet Nelson, Stewart Saunders, and Lawrence Woods. "Acceptability of Non-Library/Information Science Publications in the Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians." *College & Research Libraries*, Nov. 1981, p.571-575.

This article probes the issue of whether publications outside the field of library and information science should be considered in promotion and tenure, and presents the results of a survey of eighty-two libraries on this question.

The problem arose in 1978 at Purdue University Libraries, whose promotion and tenure policy stated that publications in library and information science literature weighed more heavily than those in other fields. Some felt that library and information science has the stature of a discipline in and of itself, while others argued that most fields, including librarianship, are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, and librarians must have a broad base of knowledge. Further, there is a clear relationship between subject knowledge and job performance in the case of subject librarians, and so research in these areas is relevant to their jobs.

The authors searched the literature, and found there is an increasing number of subject Ph.D.s among both practicing librarians and those just entering library school. Most library administrators encourage librarians to conduct

subject research, and to be active in nonlibrary professional associations. They support this, however, to a lesser degree than they do activity in professional library associations.

A questionnaire returned to the authors by eighty-two ARL university libraries revealed two facts: most libraries do not favor either library and information science publications or subject publications in their promotion and tenure standards, and that the issue has never been raised at most libraries. When correlated with the size of the library, the authors found that those which gave less or no value to subject publications each had a staff of fewer than 100 professionals, and these were the libraries where the issue of the acceptability of subject area publications had been raised.

From this they inferred that larger libraries have long employed subject specialists who published in their own fields. This was established and accepted before faculty status became a concern. It is only some of the smaller libraries which are having to face this question as they are dealing with faculty status and with

the hiring of larger numbers of subject specialists.

Clearly, they conclude, the requirement that

librarians publish in the field of library and information science is "not a national trend at this time."

Birdsall, William F. "Librarianship, Professionalism & Social Change." *Library Journal*, Feb. 1 1982, p.223-226.

Historically, a profession has been characterized by the acquisition of a specific body of knowledge and the protection of it. An architect, for example, will design a structure but will not train the client to design the next one on his or her own. Librarians, in their eagerness to be counted among the professional ranks, have tried to fit this model. Citing the predictions of several well known futurists, William Birdsall maintains that society is undergoing changes, and librarians will have to redefine their ideas about professionalism if they are to cope with these changes.

Technology is allowing lay persons to become better informed and more self-sufficient, and so the gap between the professional and the client is narrowing. A new type of professional is emerging, the personal professional, who shares information and aids the client in using it. Further, as the amount of available information grows, with the proliferation of home computers, for example, these new professionals are developing high degrees of specialization. Many besides librarians are engaged in the management of information, and we must share the limelight or be out of it entirely. Another trait of the personal professional is that she or he is most often employed

by an agency, where political activity, at least within the bureaucracy, is demanded.

In summary, Birdsall proposes guidelines for librarians: be sensitive and responsive; be politically active; use new technology to improve access to information and foster self-sufficiency; do not be concerned with old models and definitions of professionalism; cooperate with other information professionals.

None of this is new to librarians, and Birdsall himself admits it. His final paragraph—two sentences long—makes the most sense. In it he says that he has merely reiterated "...long-standing practices and principles of librarianship, not always adequately applied...but still valid." We've always lived with the nagging feeling that we were somehow different from other "professionals." That's the reason we've had to spend so much effort convincing the public that we really are professionals. So why all the blathering about deprofessionalism, new professionals, impersonal professionals, etc.? Birdsall does present some valid and thought provoking analyses, yet he could have sufficed with a simple admonition that now, more than ever, we must objectively view our roles and do our jobs well. Forget all the labels.

Amy Novick, *Librarian at Archives of Traditional Music*