The Status of Librarians on Campus: Challenging our Own Promotion and Tenure Tradition

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Abstract:

The status of librarians as faculty in academia continues to evolve. There are many campus models for library faculty with variations on rank, promotion and tenure guidelines, expectations for scholarship and service, and level of participation in faculty governance. This chapter will briefly review the pros and cons of academic librarians having faculty status but then focus on a three-year process of changing the nature of library faculty status in the University Librarians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Those changes include finally adding ranks to our faculty guidelines after decades of having faculty status but no ranks, and next adding quality and quantity specifications to our expectations for scholarship and service. These were bottom-up initiatives driven by both tenured and untenured librarians but with full support of library administrations, the Provost, and leaders in the UNCG Faculty Senate.

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Chapter:

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The literature on librarians having faculty status is large. Walters notes that "several hundred papers on librarians' faculty status have appeared over the past few decades" and analyzed the findings from 30 studies.[1] Coker, VanDuinkerken, & Bales provide a lengthy literature review on faculty status.[2] Before summarizing pros and cons of faculty status, we first need to define the different types of faculty status. As Walker writes, "Faculty status is itself a nebulous concept, with meanings that differ widely among institutions"[3]

Types of Faculty Status

The Academic Librarian Status blog maintained by Chris Lewis at American University, identifies 253 U.S. colleges and universities with some type of faculty status or tenure-like status (as of August 27, 2019).[4] Those 253 libraries are divided into four categories:

Category	Number of libraries
Librarians with full faculty status and tenure	164
Librarians with faculty status but no tenure	51
Librarians with a mix of professional status	21
Librarians without faculty status but with status similar to tenure	17

A fifth category listed at this site is "Librarians without faculty status," but that list is not meant to be anywhere near complete.

The need for four categories of "faculty status" reflects the diverse nature of faculty status. In general, however, faculty status for librarians usually implies full participation in faculty government on campus, a requirement to conduct scholarship and provide professional service, detailed performance reviews for promotion and tenure, academic freedom, and a high level of job security. Tenure does not mean lifetime employment. Faculty guidelines identify behaviors that can result in dismissal. Financial emergencies can also result in tenured faculty losing their jobs. Library faculty may be contracted to work 9, 10, 11, or 12 months a year. ACRL identifies other additional standards for library faculty at http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardsfaculty.

Pros and Cons

Over the years, we have heard a number of discussions and outright debates at library conferences regarding if faculty status is good to have or not. Galbraith, Garrison, & Hales note

[1] Walters, William H. "Faculty Status of Librarians at U.S. Research Universities." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 42, no. 2 (March 2016): 161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2015.11.002.

[2] Coker, Catherine, Wyoma VanDuinkerken, and Stephen Bales. "Seeking Full Citizenship: A Defense of Tenure Faculty Status for Librarians." *College & Research Libraries* 71, no. 5 (September 1, 2010): 406–12. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl-54r1.

[3] Walters, "Faculty Status of Librarians at U.S. Research Universities," 161.

[4] Lewis, Chris. "Academic Librarian Status". https://academiclibrarianstatus.wordpress.com/ (10 Sept. 2019)

that "this is perhaps one of the most heated debates in the field of academic librarianship, as the effectiveness of the faculty status model in librarianship has been both ruthlessly questioned and valiantly defended by numerous librarians."[5]

Some of the debates (such as at ALA conferences) have been striking for oversimplifying the diversity of "faculty status" and for ignoring some of the core benefits. For example, some speakers have assumed that only peer-reviewed articles matter in terms of scholarship requirements, and that a large number of published peer-reviewed articles is required to achieve tenure. Meanwhile, the opportunity for library faculty to serve on faculty committees -- and having a vote, and sometimes even chairing a committee -- can go unmentioned in these debates.

From our own experiences working in libraries with and without faculty-status librarians, the authors have experience assorted pros and cons to having faculty-status. Gillum[6] and Silva, Galbraith, and Groesbeck[7] also identify pros and cons. The benefits of having faculty status can be significant. As noted above, library faculty usually serve on committees of the faculty senate. At UNCG, those committees include the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Student Learning Enhancement, Research Policies, Equity Diversity and Inclusion, and others whose charges overlap with the goals and work of the University Libraries. Library faculty often chair faculty senate committees, and once the chair of the UNCG Faculty Senate was a librarian. Having a voting member (if not the chair) from the library faculty helps keep the UL firmly connected to campus academic initiatives and governance. The committees benefit from the skills each librarian brings to the table.

Libraries with faculty librarians tend to provide support for the research and service the faculty are required to pursue. This support can include research leave and sabbaticals as well as time away for service roles (often but not limited to conference attendance). These libraries also usually provide travel funding for both research and service. Library faculty contracted to work less than 12 months a year might be expected to pursue research projects in their "off months".

A third benefit is harder to quantify but equally important: greater respect from other faculty on campus. The other faculty on campus hopefully know that the library faculty go through the same promotion and tenure system (even if expectations for scholarship and service will vary by academic unit) and provide the same service on faculty senate committees. Similarly, the librarian is well positioned to understand the requirements and stress that other faculty on campus face in their own tenure process. This understanding improves the library liaison services to untenured faculty.

To be fair, there can be downsides to librarians having faculty status. The "publish or perish" situation can be rather stressful. While many librarians who don't enjoy faculty status are also expected to make contributions to scholarship, expectations for quality and quantity in

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[5] Galbraith, Quinn, Melissa Garrison, and Whitney Hales. "Perceptions of Faculty Status among Academic Librarians." *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 5 (9/1/2016 2016): 582. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.5.582.

[6] Gillum, Shalu. "The True Benefit of Faculty Status for Academic Reference Librarians." *Reference Librarian* 51, no. 4 (December 10, 2010): 321–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2010.501419.

[7] Silva, Elise, Quinn Galbraith, and Michael Groesbeck. "Academic Librarians' Changing Perceptions of Faculty Status and Tenure." *College & Research Libraries* 78, no. 4 (May 2017): 428–41. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.4.428.

scholarship may be higher for librarians with faculty status. Their scholarship output (as well as service contributions) need to be well documented in their reappointment and tenure dossiers. Just preparing those long and detailed dossiers is a substantial undertaking that takes much time and usually produces its own significant stress. At UNCG, candidates for reappointment and tenure are strongly advised to consider the creation of their dossier to be their biggest and highest priority project of the year.

Another common downside is "rankism." This morale issue can bubble up in any library but concerns of having different human resource policies for professional librarians versus paraprofessionals may be stronger in libraries that provide significant financial support and research time for library faculty. Library who are faculty also hold separate meetings to discuss matters related to tenure and academic affairs on campus, which can further create a sense of isolation and division among paraprofessionals.

Challenging our own faculty status

Of the four categories in the table above, the UNCG University Libraries fall under "Librarians with full faculty status and tenure". We've enjoyed faculty status since the 1970's. However, we didn't have rank -- a UNCG librarian was simply untenured or tenured. Yet we followed all the other UNCG tenure guidelines and served on the faculty senate and the many faculty committees.

Sometimes serving as faculty while being neither an "assistant", "associate", nor "full" professor was problematic. For example, our lack of rank reduced motivation for tenured librarians to pursue higher excellence in librarianship, scholarship, or service. Having no rank proved a headache when applying to join the UNCG graduate faculty, serve on a dissertation committee, or teach a for-credit class. Our lack of rank often complicated or limited our role as external reviewers of library faculty candidates on other campuses. Three years ago, the UNCG library faculty started to seriously explore this oddity in our faculty status.

The impetus for challenging our status quo in faculty status was born in an October 2014 library faculty meeting with our provost. We had invited Provost Dana Dunn to speak with us regarding faculty salaries. She mentioned promotions in rank as a source of pay raises but was surprised to learn that the library faculty don't actually have ranks. The provost strongly encouraged us to explore the possibility of adding ranks to our library faculty guidelines.

After the discussion with the provost had ended and she left our faculty meeting, Dean of the University Libraries Rosann Bazirjian requested feedback on the issue of librarians and rank. We knew that many other library faculty have rank but also used much more detailed evaluation guidelines for tenure and promotion than we used. The details in those guidelines cover both qualitative and quantitative aspects of scholarship and service. This observation led to discussion of the nature of our tenure requirements. Several librarians commented that our expectations for tenure are vague because the nature of library departments differ greatly. Of course, the nature of library departments differs greatly within libraries that have library faculty with rank and more detailed guidelines as well.

We ended this faculty meeting with the consensus that the idea of adding rank to our faculty status should be pursued. We knew this exploration would be a lot of work, but that the benefits for newer and future UNCG librarians would be significant. With our campus having a new chancellor and a fairly new dean, we thought that the timing was advantageous to pursue change management regarding our faculty status.

Exploring Rank

Over the next three years, the library faculty commissioned a series of task forces to explore the question and issues of adding rank. These task forces included both untenured, newly tenured, and long tenured librarians, providing diverse points of view and also institutional history. One finding from the first task force was that no one knew why ranks are missing from our librarian guidelines. A later finding: after examining the websites of 115 academic libraries offering tenure for librarians, only one other library featured faculty librarians without rank, as far as we could tell from those web pages. So having tenure and rank was almost a given for library faculty. We also talked in person with library faculty from nearby campuses Wake Forest University and Appalachian State University. (The WFU librarians successfully campaigned for faculty status recently.)

Task force members and members of the library's Promotion and Tenure Committee also met with UNCG Faculty Senate leadership. Those leaders strongly supported the idea of library faculty adding rank. In fact, common responses were "Why don't you have rank?" and "How could you function without ranks for all these years?"

We speculated the Provost's office would also be happy to suddenly have many additional assistant and associate professors on campus at no cost to the existing HR budget. The number of such assistant and associate professors at UNCG would jump up with no additional salary or office space needs.

When Dean Bazirjian announced her retirement, someone at a faculty meeting asked the question "Should we put the brakes on this with a new Dean coming in?" Yet there was general agreement that the explorations should continue. Our interim dean, Kathy Crowe, continued to strongly support the process and the provost remains very supportive. Our next dean, Martin Halbert, was brought up to spend regarding our multi-year work on adding ranks and, like Deans Bazirjian and Crowe, supported the project. So the grass-roots push from the library faculty's rank and file successfully propelled our considerations despite leadership changes in the corner office.

We later learned that the Provost's office assumed our ranks would be associate librarian, assistant librarian, and librarian. But we argued successfully that as faculty, we deserve to be called professors, the standard practice at other libraries with faculty status.

Through our benchmarking, discussions with other library faculty, and our own (sometimes fairly intense) discussions, we identified a number of likely benefits of adding rank:

Possible benefits of adding rank:

- New hires who already have significant experience, scholarship, and professional service could be credited with several years toward tenure upon their appointment. (Before our change, new hires who already achieved tenure at their previous librarian had to start over from scratch in our seven-year tenure process.)
- The library faculty would become better aligned with the teaching faculty on campus, facilitating more recognition of the faculty status of librarians.
- Library liaisons would better understand the process of promotion and tenure for teaching faculty, allowing the liaisons to provide better services.
- Our role as possible external reviewers would be easier with ranks as well as tenured status. Some of us could eventually serve as external reviewers for candidates for full professor.
- Promotion from Associate Professor to Full Professor would be totally voluntary. A librarian could remain at the rank of Associate and never apply for promotion to Full.
- With the option of promotion to Full, tenured librarians interested in pursuing excellence in librarianship, scholarship, and service at the higher level would have more motivation to excel.
- Library faculty would normally get a pay raise with each advancement in rank, which would help with the problem of salary compression.
- Library faculty might feel empowered and valued at our successful, bottom-up pursuit of ranks

We also identified possible issues with adding rank:

Downsides of adding rank:

- Much time and work would be required to propose, discuss, and vote on updated procedures.
- Our guidelines for tenure do not specify quantity and quality expectations and so would also have to be debated and rewritten.
- Currently we don't have any policy on dedicated time for research, limiting our ability to pursue research during work hours.
- Adding ranks created another distinction between library faculty and library staff, possibly contributing to "rankism" and morale issues among staff.

Our task forces addressed these issues through its work and discussions with library faculty. We knew this would be a multi-year process, but it would result in a process that will work for us. Efforts to add quality and quantity specifics to our evaluation guidelines continues (see below). Meanwhile, the Promotion & Tenure Committee crafted a proposal for 25 dedicated research days for library faculty each year. The "rankism" moral issue cannot be resolved through rewriting guidelines or created a new policy. However, Library Administration has responded to general concerns about staff support by increasing the professional travel funds available to each staff person each year.

The final result of our work was a draft rewrite of our guidelines that included ranks. The library faculty had one more vote in our long process, this time to approve the revised guidelines. The

vote passed with zero "no" votes and one abstention. So ended our three-year process of exploring adding ranks to our faculty status. On July 1, 2018 untenured librarians became assistant professors and tenured librarians (a few of whom had been tenured for decades) became associate professors. Our library dean became our first (and so far, only) full professor.

However, we knew we had even more work to do. Our guidelines remained extremely vague regarding expectations for scholarship and service for promotion to both associate and full professor. We still needed a procedure to vote for full professors before we had enough full professors to serve as a normal voting committee. And we needed to push (as noted above) for official research time for us to pursue research projects.

Next Steps: Developing More Detailed Guidelines for Tenure.

Inspired by that successful project, we are now looking at improving our evaluation guidelines, which establish what levels of librarianship, scholarship, and service are necessary for each stage of the tenure and rank process. Our guidelines are very flexible in what types of work, writing, speaking, and service can count toward getting promoted or tenured, but don't provide any guidance on quantity or quality of accomplishments.

There is now consensus here that the lack of guidance has contributed to "accomplishment inflation" – every year, untenured librarians seem under pressure to write and speak more than past tenure candidates did. The lack of guidance has also resulted in occasionally contradictory messages in our annual peer review process. Not a good situation.

Out of this rank discussion and the consensus about accomplishment inflation came the realization that, before we could fully implement full professor rank, there needed to be an overhaul of how UNCG provided guidelines for untenured librarians. Requirements for achieving rank needed to be re-examined, studied and questioned. Another task force, this one titled, The Task Force for Exploring Library Faculty Guidelines on the Balance of Responsibility, came into being. Again, its makeup consisted of non-tenured and tenured librarians. Our charge was to "conduct an environmental scan of the state of library faculty workload in U.S. academic libraries with promotion and tenure and will outline potential action steps for developing guidelines for the UNCG University Libraries faculty….[after feedback and reporting at a later date] the task force will prepare draft guidelines determining the appropriate balance of librarianship, creative and scholarly activity, and service, as well as quality versus quantity in accomplishments"

There were two main parts to the work of this task force:

- Surveying library faculty about their own balance of responsibilities in order to raise awareness of issues in the library among supervisors.
- Developing a set of draft guidelines for librarians going up for tenure. Due to the very broad nature of librarianship, the focus of these guidelines became scholarship and service.

Environmental Scan

The task force first conducted an environmental scan to better understand the state of the field in terms of expectations for tenure track librarians and their work in scholarship, service, and librarianship. Each committee member was responsible for finding and then skimming publicly available tenure track documents from a total of 154 schools. The committee gathered available tenure guidelines from these libraries and summarized findings for the rest of the committee. Out of these summaries, the task force noted general patterns and chose ten libraries whose documents were considered exemplary to pull from in more depth. These documents were examined closely, and sections identified that we as a task force wished to use as a model for our own document.

In terms of trends in guidelines, we saw that many guidelines were in fact about as specific as our current guidelines. For the ten schools we focused on, what stood out was the use of categories and/or tables within the guideline, which were used to better organize and often rank different types of scholarship and service. Schools that used these techniques often listed minimum amounts of service and scholarship for each category in order to achieve the next rank. What type of scholarship and service was given more weight varied, but most schools ranked peer reviewed articles, scholarly books and national conferences as their most weighted category. Scholarship was much more likely to be broken up and categorized than service as a whole.

Survey of UNCG Faculty Librarians

To better understand the needs and concerns of librarians at UNCG, a survey was sent to all UNCG librarians with faculty status to examine how much time they are currently devoting to librarianship, scholarship, and service versus how much time they feel would be appropriate. Librarians were also asked to suggest different types of support that would be helpful and what responsibilities need additional time and attention.

We received 26 results. On average, library faculty stated that a 12% reduction in professional responsibility percentages would be ideal. In terms of time for service, a 3% increase is desired, and a 7.8% increase in research & scholarly time. Clearly, library faculty feel that the balance is slightly off for our workload and would like for this to be addressed.

Rewriting our guidelines for tenure

Based on the environmental scan, survey of UNCG faculty librarians, and group discussions, the task force developed a draft set of guidelines. For these documents, the task force agreed to focus efforts on scholarship and service, as librarianship is a deeply varied activity whose shape must be decided upon by the librarian in consultation with their department and supervisor. This was also reflected in the majority of the documents studied. From the draft guidelines, mainly using Mississippi State as a guide, we developed a table with three categories for service and scholarship. We also listed minimum numbers for each category-with a librarian going up for tenure requiring at least one product from Category A, 3 from Category A or B and any number from Category C, with the total number of seven scholarly products and service positions.

Debating what should go into each category proved to be a bit of a challenge, as determining what types of scholarship and service are more challenging and thus should count as a higher category can be contentious. While our definitions of service were easily agreed to, the question of what made a written piece scholarly or not proved harder. Questions about how one could tell the quality and selectivity of a conference based on it being national versus regional or state and if case studies of library practices counted as original research arose. There was also concern about the still inherently subjective nature of the reviewing structure for promotion and tenure, in terms of the committee having the final say about what they think qualified as each category.

The tables were presented to the full library faculty on May 6th, 2019. An open discussion was held for feedback at this meeting, and concerns and suggestions were noted. Edits were made accordingly. Major areas of concern reflected the ones brought up in the committee previously. While the service table received very little feedback and was generally agreed to as correct, the question of what exactly phrases like "book chapter, scholarly" or "article, scholarly" mean proved an area of debate. Members of the faculty provided different definitions of scholarly, from peer-reviewed to includes a literature review to presents original research. We also received feedback that the guidelines required too little Category 1s, and that the number over seven years should be raised to at least two. These comments were recorded, though not settled in the faculty meeting. While what exactly would fall under each category for scholarship still needs more finessing, the general format of charts and the different categories were approved.

Future Work

The task force has made the corrections and suggestions presented during the faculty meeting that could easily be addressed and where there was a strong consensus on how the issues should be handled. The document will be submitted to the Promotion and Tenure Committee, where it will be further refined, discussed and eventually adopted in some form. The main questions that remain for the Promotion and Tenure Committee to address are:

- Discussion on if the quantity of scholarship required in total should be increased, as it was pointed out that one product per year is well under what is currently being produced by many pre-tenure librarians
- Determining how to define what type of written scholarship should be included in category one. How does one define what makes something "category one"? If the definition is "scholarly", how does one define scholarly?
- Where do case studies fall in the realm of scholarship? Are there different levels of case studies, and if so, how is this defined or qualified?
- How do our category definitions compare to the tenure guidelines of other UNCG departments?

Cultural changes

While having these written guidelines will hopefully help with anxiety around tenure and provide clarity in terms of the amount of work expected, the survey results mentioning that library faculty feel that they need more dedicated time for scholarship especially cannot be fully addressed in tables. Indeed, these types of concerns require cultural change in terms of use of

time and what is valued by managers. Due to this, the committee provided a few recommendations to managers and staff. This included the importance of emphasizing that all work should be able to be accomplished within a 40 hour work week, that percentages of work time dedicated to scholarship should be renegotiated for most staff and that supervisors need to be understanding about this percentage shift, and that how each member of the library faculty divides their time needs to be in writing and paid attention to during annual reviews. These recommendations were also shared with library administration. Of course, these are at this point just recommendations, with no major teeth behind them.

In addition to these recommendations, Steve Cramer, one of this chapter's authors, developed a proposal for research leave. Again, based on the survey results demonstrating a need for greater time to devote to scholarship, a group of librarians proposed 25 research days a year, which would not count as normal leave, but could be taken at any time with approval from one's supervisor. This was to address discrepancy between the 12-month librarian contract and the 9-month faculty contract. While these recommendations were approved by the dean of the libraries, we eventually did meet administrative resistance from the provost. She raised concerns about the library being understaffed during the school year and librarians not doing their main job, which was serving patrons. She also wanted to make sure that librarians who took this type of leave actually were held accountable in terms of production. Her recommendations centered on moving most days to the summer and not putting anything in place until a system of assessment could be developed. Meeting this type of resistance and also lack of understanding about regular library workflows and how they vary is something that must be considered when presenting changes like this to higher administration. Knowing we might hit something like this, we intentionally proposed more days than we thought we would get, with the hope that compromise would still leave us with a good amount of research time. We now are moving into the long process of revising, developing an assessment based on the new tenure track guidelines and receiving feedback. While we hoped to get this in place by Spring 2020, as so often happens with HR changes, we likely will not be moving on this fully until Fall 2020.

Lessons Learned:

Even though it can seem scary, we learned quickly that the decision to make a change is something that must be faced head on and not be a thing that is feared. If changes need to happen, especially in terms of status, to bring librarians in line with faculty and other guidelines, and the change is desired, it is something that should be embraced. Because the design of these new guidelines came out of previous processes and grassroot discussions surrounding rank in addition to conversations had among non-tenured librarians, library faculty were on board with this process. This from-the-ground-up change process, which involved librarians from all levels and departments, made it so that the changes proposed already had general buy in, especially around making guidelines clearer and more specific. While it might take longer, creating this type of strong base and including many people in the process helped UNCG libraries actually get approval for these types of HR changes with only a little bit of argument.

However, during this process, we realized that no matter how much the general principle is supported, there will be disagreement. Deciding what counts as a higher category or what even counts as scholarship as opposed to librarianship can be tricky and can raise a lot of emotions.

Everyone in the library feels their work is important and valuable, and not having it reflected correctly can cause feelings of not being appreciated. Allowing people to have input into the guidelines and express their concern privately and publicly helps them feel heard, but the many different thoughts and opinions do mean that the process takes a lot of revision and a lot of time. We have learned that we need to allow more time than we would expect or like for these changes to occur and that conversation is vital. However, we have also learned that in the end, there likely will be a few people who are not happy with something, no matter how hard a group tries. Looking for perfection will only stop anything from happening and should not be the goal of any of these processes.

Finally, based on our conversation with the Provost about research days, we have realized that sometimes unexpected setbacks happen, and that one must always be aware that higher administration may see things very differently from the library. This experience drove home the importance of asking for the moon so when it is rejected, one still has something to negotiate with in the end. It also emphasized the gap that still exists when it comes to faculty and higher education administrators understanding the role of librarians as faculty and the variety of work that occurs in a library to make it function.   However, even though there was this gap, the fact that we as a library had kept in regular communication with the provost and regularly participated in faculty life, in fact leading many committees and regularly displaying our work to the wider community, allowed us to even consider making these changes. Building goodwill and leveraging it to make changes is essential, and will smooth out the process, even if modifications are required.

Thank you