

Challenging Promotion and Tenure Traditions in Academic Libraries

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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 briefly reviews the pros and cons of academic librarians having faculty status but then focuses on a three-year process of changing the nature of library faculty status for the university librarians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Those changes include adding ranks to our faculty guidelines after decades of having faculty status but no ranks and 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 administrators, the provost, and leaders in the UNCG Faculty Senate.

Keywords: promotion and tenure | faculty | UNCG | academic libraries

Article:

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 briefly reviews the pros and cons of academic librarians having faculty status but then focuses on a three-year process of changing the nature of library faculty status for the university librarians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Those changes include adding ranks to our faculty guidelines after decades of having faculty status but no ranks and 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 administrators, the provost, and leaders in the UNCG Faculty Senate.

Background and method

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 thirty studies.¹ Catherine Coker, Wyoma Van Duinkerken, & Stephen Bales provide a lengthy literature review on faculty status.²

As Walker writes, "Faculty status is itself a nebulous concept, with meanings that differ widely among institutions"³ That being the case, it is important to first review the types of faculty status found in academic libraries and then show the pros and cons inherent in the system. The chapter concludes with a case study of the situation at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as it reviewed, updated, and expanded its system for reviewing faculty, awarding tenure, and obtaining rank.

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 as shown in table 3.1.

A fifth category listed at this site is "Librarians without faculty status," but that list is described as being incomplete.

The need for four categories of "faculty status" reflects the diverse nature of the situations described by that phrase. In general, 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 nine, ten, eleven, or twelve months a year. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) identifies additional standards for library faculty.⁵

Table 3.1. Types of faculty status by number of libraries

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

Pros and Cons

Over the years, we have heard a number of discussions and outright debates at library conferences regarding the benefits or disadvantages of faculty status. Quinn Galbraith, Melissa Garrison, and Whitney Hales note 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."⁶

Some of the debates 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 are 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, we have experienced assorted pros and cons to having faculty status. Shalu Gillum and Elise Silva, Quinn Galbraith, and Michael Groesbeck also identify pros and cons.⁷ The benefits of having faculty status can be significant. As noted above, library faculty members 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 (UL). 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. In tum, these 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 twelve 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 members on campus hopefully know that the library faculty goes through the same promotion and tenure system (even if expectations for scholarship and service will vary by academic unit) and provides 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 scholarship may be higher for librarians with faculty status. Their scholarship output (as well as service contributions) needs 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 creating 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. Librarians 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 1970s. However, UNCG library faculty didn't have rank—a UNCG librarian was simply untenured or tenured. Yet we followed all of the other UNCG tenure guidelines and served on the faculty senate and the many faculty committees.

Sometimes serving as faculty while not being an "assistant," an "associate," or a "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 discrepancy 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. The library faculty 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 does not 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. The faculty knew that many other library faculties 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 differs 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 provost, we thought 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 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 the task force could tell from those web pages. So having tenure and rank was almost a given for library faculty. Task force members also talked in person with library faculty from

nearby campuses Wake Forest University (WFU) 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 that 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 remained very supportive. Our next dean, Martin Halbert, was brought up to speed regarding our multiyear work on adding ranks and, like Deans Bazirjian and Crowe, supported the project. So the grassroots push from the library faculty's rank and file successfully propelled our considerations despite leadership changes in the corner office.

Through our benchmarking, discussions with other library faculty, and our own (sometimes fairly intense) discussions, the task force identified a number of likely 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. Finally, library faculty would normally get a pay raise with each advancement in rank, which would help with the problem of salary compression.

We also identified possible issues with 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. We do not have a policy or procedure for dedicated time for research, limiting our ability to pursue research during work hours. Finally, adding ranks might create another distinction between library faculty and library staff, possibly contributing to "rankism" and morale issues among staff.

Our task forces addressed these issues through their work and discussions with UNCG library faculty and library faculty from other campuses. The UNCG library faculty knew that this would be a multiyear process, but it would result in a process that will work for UNCG and its unique context. Efforts to add quality and quantity specifics to our evaluation guidelines continue (see below in the section on "Next Steps"). At this writing, the Promotion and Tenure Committee has crafted a proposal for twenty-five dedicated research days for library faculty each year. It was determined that the "rankism" morale issue cannot be resolved through rewriting guidelines

or creating a new policy. However, the 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 gathered once again, but this time to vote on 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.

The library faculty 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.

However, the library faculty 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, the library faculty is 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 the library faculty 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 reexamined, 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 nontenured 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 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 two 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, the task force saw that many guidelines were in fact about as specific as our current guidelines. For the ten schools the task force focused on, what stood out was the use of categories and/or tables within the guidelines, 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.

The task force received twenty-six results. On average, library faculty stated that a 12 percent reduction in professional responsibility percentages would be ideal. In terms of time for service, a 3 percent increase is desired, and a 7.8 percent increase in research and scholarly time. Clearly, the library faculty feels 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, a 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, the task force 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, three 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 6, 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" and to "presents original research." The task force 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 as follows:

- 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 pretenure librarians.
- Determining how to define what type of written scholarship should be included in category 1. How does one define what makes something "category 1"? 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 regarding 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 forty-hour workweek, 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 twenty-five 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 twelve-month librarian contract and the nine-month faculty contract. While these recommendations were approved by the dean of the libraries, the library faculty 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 the library faculty 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 are now 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 will likely not be moving on this fully until fall 2020.

Lessons Learned

Even though it can seem scary, the library faculty learned quickly that the decision to change is something that must be faced head on and is not a thing to be feared. If changes need to happen, especially in terms of status, to bring librarians in line with the 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 grassroots discussions surrounding rank in addition to conversations had among nontenured 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 on 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, the library faculty 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 will likely 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, the library faculty has 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 consider even 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

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Notes

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