

# Faculty Status and Academic Librarians: Are There Second Thoughts?

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"... When asked, in a social situation, about their occupation, (male librarians) would tend to be evasive about being 'Librarians.' For example, if they were public school librarians, they would answer that they were teachers. If employed by institutions other than public libraries, they would tend to identify the organization rather than their role in it."<sup>1</sup> The foregoing quotation from J. Hart Walter's study on the image and status of librarians is both discouraging and I believe one symptom of the underlying motivation for librarians to align themselves with another profession. Librarians seem to want to hide themselves in the larger milieu of academe in order to overcome an inferiority complex perhaps derived from a sense of failure. And indeed, it does seem that librarians have failed because they have not convinced their public that the services offered by the profession are indispensable. Perhaps these are harsh words, but I am convinced both of their truth and of the inappropriateness of faculty status as a way to solve the problem. Furthermore, there seem to be others who have arrived at a similar conclusion.

In a paper published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* in November 1980, I argued against the concept of faculty status as a means to improve our image.<sup>2</sup> Although reaction to my thesis was mixed, it tended to be more pro than con. In fact, I was asked to make this presentation because the program committee felt that there may exist at least a backlash, if not a counter-trend, to the faculty status movement. Therefore, I attempted to measure the minority view which is counter to faculty status and to report on the same to you. Before I report on the results of those efforts, I would like to review my original points and add a few more. After my review and report, I would like to conclude with some remarks on appropriate directions for the future, because it is not enough only to be against something, one must also be for something.

## What I Said Before

In my earlier paper, I made several points in my argument against the alignment of professional librarians with the faculty model. First, I pointed out that it is divisive to the overall profession. It separates academic librarians from public, school and special librarians in a dramatic fashion. It's been argued that they are already separated, but I do not believe a member of any of these groups is any less a librarian than a radiologist or anesthesiologist is a physician. The underlying, fundamental base of knowledge is the same for all kinds of librarians. Alignment with faculty implies a different base of knowledge which, in turn, precipitates the need for a different kind of training school and, indeed, a new kind of profession.

Second, faculty status submits the profession to evaluation by a set of criteria inappropriate to the general mission of librarians. University wide faculty tenure and appointment review committees base evaluations on teaching and research. Librarians do neither. Pauline Wilson has made a very telling argument demonstrating that librarians do not teach.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, faculty involve themselves in research in their subject discipline area; (eg, agriculture, chemistry, and linguistics) while only a few librarians involve themselves in research in librarianship. Faculty almost never involve themselves in research on professorship. Comparing and aligning these two kinds of research is like comparing horses with tuna fish. Both of these animals are involved in our way of life, but you can't treat them the same way.

Third, faculty status will lead ultimately to collective bargaining for librarians. In that environment librarians will constitute a minority whose voice will be submerged in a cacophony of issues disruptive, if not totally destructive of the service oriented nature of librarianship. Others have shown that collective bargaining agreements, to date, appear to have had very little, if any, positive effect on improving the status of librarians.<sup>4</sup> That collective bargaining will help improve things in the future is dubious, as can be seen by looking further into the nature of professorship versus librarianship.

### Further Arguments Against Faculty Status

If librarians align themselves with faculty, they very well may be joining up with a non-profession. In an interesting paper published in 1976, a sociologist wrote that the academic teaching field is a non-profession which is undergoing a radical change which he calls "demythologization" and which he contends will lead to collective bargaining.<sup>5</sup> Implications in his paper indicate that this condition will lead to stagnation of this non-profession. If librarians are a part of this group stagnation and collective bargaining will have a detrimental affect on performance. This is reinforced by University of Guelph librarian, Margaret Beckman's warning sounded earlier based on the experience of Canadian public library unions.<sup>6</sup> She maintains that unions are a serious threat to the service function in libraries. However, warnings aside, I believe that there is some additional logic arguing against the concept of faculty status. This can be covered by examining several pertinent issues.

First, consider the status issue. Sociologist, Carroll DeWeese has pointed out that the professionalization process is driven by the individual urge for higher status and that there are three ways to improve occupational status: (1) leave the occupation for one of higher status, (2) increase one's individual status within the occupation, or (3) improve the status of the occupation.<sup>7</sup> Alignment with the faculty model, which democratization and faculty equivalence allows, is being used as the means to enhance the status of librarians, and therefore, supposedly, the self-image of librarians. However, implementation of the faculty status approach is tantamount to leaving the profession for one of a supposedly higher status. If that's what librarians are trying to do when they express reluctance to admit that they are librarians, doesn't it make better sense to get out of librarianship altogether? Why not just pay the dues required to getting a Ph.D. and an appropriate faculty position, rather than trying to slip in under the tent flap like mischievous children? When those children get caught without the needed dues they are more embarrassed than if they had stayed out and suffered the ignominy of having missed the show. At least, in the latter case they are left with some dignity.

Second, consider the image issue. Librarians continue to be saddled with the public's image of the little old lady in grey socks, spectacles and a bun; wearing, of course, a perpetual frown. Satisfaction might occur if we could trade in the frown for a smile, but promoters of faculty status want us to turn in the whole image for that of the faculty. You are aware, I'm sure, of that other image? If not, some of us at Clemson were reminded of it by a colleague at a recent honors awards day address. Let me pass it on to you. He first describes the "stereotype of the loveable, but absent minded professor, usually elderly, not very good at coping with his check stubs, perhaps, and certainly needing assistance in finding where he has parked his car; but nevertheless incisive and confident when discussing his particular discipline; tolerant of human frailty; ever ready to give wise counsel to students; beloved of alumni even while they delight in recounting his eccentricities and their practical jokes on him; a legend in his own time."<sup>8</sup> This doesn't sound like such a bad image to have, unfortunately, my colleague goes on to point out that this is no longer the image in the public mind. Instead, the professor is increasingly being seen as an arrogant, money-conscious technician, who is brilliant in his own narrow area and occupied exclusively with his own interests. He views teaching as a burden and evidences no sincere interest in his students. I submit to you that alignment with faculty may not improve our image but simply change it for one which is less desirable. There appears to be evidence — such as increasing numbers of state boards of higher education — that this image is bringing outside pressure to bear on faculty from the public and from legislatures. Our alignment with faculty may raise our profile in an unattractive way at an undesirable time.

Third, consider the alignment issue in a general way. I know of no other emerging professional group which has enhanced its status by aligning with another profession. Such a move would be self defeating and inconsistent, since it means loss of identity in the other group, especially when the profession with higher status has more members. If this approach were appropriate it would have been pursued by other professional groups such as nurses. However, the nursing profession has chosen to maintain a separate identity, rather than align with physicians. Even though both are medical professions, both are involved with caring for the ill, and both share much knowledge in common, there is no move to merge these professions. In fact, the nursing profession is vigorously active in developing a separate image.

I have expressed and reexpressed both my logic and my reservations regarding faculty status for librarians. It remains to be considered whether others also have second thoughts.

## How Do Others Feel?

In order to determine the existence of a counter trend to faculty status I developed a survey instrument to measure change in opinion toward faculty status over time. Given that insufficient time was available to repeat a simple questionnaire with the same sample group over a five to ten year period, a single instrument was utilized. The questionnaire contained two questions which attempted to determine the respondent's attitude toward faculty status five years ago and today. In addition, a number of other questions regarding peripheral interests were asked.

The population sampled was the membership of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) who were working in academic libraries. Since ACRL has a current membership of 8,991 and the *Bowker Annual* for 1981 lists a total of 9,800 academic librarians, I presumed the two populations to be reasonably equal.<sup>9</sup> I randomly selected enough names for the ACRL membership list to get a total of 100 after those employed by LC, ALA and other non-academic libraries were discarded. Given the ACRL population, using a standard statistical approach I calculated the needed sample size, assuming that I would need a 10% or less error rate at the 95% level of confidence. My calculation indicated tolerable limits if 43 responses were received. Actual response to the questionnaire was a gratifying 80 out of 100. Therefore, the margin for error was significantly less than 10 percent at the 95 percent level of confidence.

Those who responded had an average career length of over fourteen years. Fifty percent currently work in a doctoral granting or research university. Thirty-five percent work in a four year college and most of the rest are employed in junior colleges. The level of their employment in terms of administrative responsibility is distributed fourteen percent non-supervisory, twenty-four percent general supervisory, twenty-five percent at department or division head level, and thirty-seven percent at the assistant director level or higher. Since the distribution of staff between types of libraries appears to compare closely with the distribution reported in the *Bowker Annual* for 1981, it is assumed that an acceptable distribution was achieved with the sample.<sup>10</sup> Given this response I believe the following observations represent a fair assessment of academic librarians' collective view of faculty status.

The majority of academic librarians favor faculty status. However, that majority appears to have declined from 71% five years ago to 59% among holders of it today. Or put another way, while only 3.4% of those who have faculty status indicated that they disfavored faculty status five years ago, currently 19% disfavor the idea. Therefore, it appears that faculty status is held in disfavor by five times as many people today as five years ago. This is among those who currently hold faculty status. Among those who do not hold faculty status, twenty percent disfavor it.

There is a weakness in any one time survey instrument which attempts to establish a trend over a period of time, since it depends on the historical impressions of those answering the questions. The respondents were obliged to indicate their impressions of faculty status five years ago. It's possible that from today's perspective, they may have misremembered how they felt about faculty status at an earlier time. However, today twenty percent of respondents disfavor faculty status. Another twenty-five percent are neutral. A small majority favor faculty status. This seems to indicate clearly that there are indeed second thoughts among the profession. This impression can be sharpened by looking at the comment of those who changed their minds.

A detailed examination of responses from those with faculty status produces some interesting and significant observations. Of those who indicated that they favored faculty status five years ago, twenty-two percent apparently changed their minds. They either disfavor faculty status today or have become neutral on the issue. Either way, they are expressing that their experience with faculty status has caused them to have some doubts or second thoughts about it. On the other hand, those who disfavored faculty status five years ago, still universally disfavor it.

Second thoughts about faculty status were also expressed through a number of comments about it on the questionnaire. Significantly, an overwhelming majority of the commentators were negative in their assessment. Several indicated that they still felt relegated to second class status. They felt pressure because of the necessity to compete with faculty — publish or perish — without the time to do it. In other words, research and publication was being put ahead of service. One indicated bluntly that he/she felt faculty status was a mistake in that it implies the application of a title which doesn't fit. Others indicated their desire for a professional status that emphasises the uniqueness and importance of librarians.

Furthermore, through their direct answers to the questions and their comments, it appears that the benefits reaped from faculty status are insubstantial. Less than half of those who have faculty status indicated that it has increased their recognition on campus. Only a third indicated it has helped increase their salary. While half indicated that they were accepted on campus as

faculty, many qualified their answer with comments to the effect that they had not achieved the status of faculty. Only twenty percent indicated that faculty status had increased their voice in the library. About forty-five percent indicated that faculty status had increased their voice campus wide, but most because now they were eligible for inclusion in faculty committees.

Indeed, it appears that the major effect of faculty status for librarians has been to create an additional pool of bodies for campus faculty committees. If your experience on faculty committees is anything like mine, this benefit of faculty status is dubious at best.

What then is the bottom line? Of those who have faculty status about half made general comments. Most (72%) of those who commented expressed doubts about its value. Coupled with those who outrightly disfavor faculty status, overall thirty-one percent appear to have real doubts. While not a majority this is clearly a sizeable minority. Furthermore, nearly thirty percent of respondents indicated their impression that faculty status was detrimental to the profession or had no positive effect. On the other hand, sixty-four percent consider that the hierarchical organization approach does not inhibit their professional autonomy. Given these results it appears that a sizeable portion of the profession does not believe that faculty status will improve their status, and indeed, the evidence seems to indicate it won't.

### What Then in Lieu of Faculty Status?

"Professionalism involves the creation and maintenance of an exclusionary mystique. Protected by definitional and organizational boundaries, the professional enjoys the security afforded by the possession of knowledge or skills which are perceived by the client public as necessary and valuable. The lay public accepts the mystique promulgated by the professional group, thereby participating in the maintenance of professional power." That is a quotation from a recent study on professions by sociologists Clinton Sanders and Eleanor Lyon.<sup>11</sup> Put another way this same principle has been described as the "power perspective" by George Ritzer of the University of Maryland. His work has demonstrated that the most important characteristic of professionalism is the professions' monopoly over work tasks.<sup>12</sup> This monopoly is only achieved by convincing the general public and the state that the profession needs, has a right to, and deserves the monopoly. In the vernacular, "knowledge is power." Unfortunately, despite their seeming command over knowledge — or at least information — librarians don't have power.

In the June 81 issue of *JOLA*, Robert Newhard stated the situation for librarians very succinctly. He says librarians "are faced with a situation in which information is fundamentally important to societal and individual well being, but is not perceived to be so by people in the conduct of their daily affairs."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the people need us but they don't know it. We haven't convinced them of our importance, therefore we do not have the status we deserve.

On the other hand professors have been very good at convincing the public of their importance. Therefore, it seems to make sense to attach ourselves to that model. However, as my colleague at Clemson has helped to point out, this is a dangerous approach, and in fact, it may be self defeating. This may be better seen by examining the relationship of knowledge to a profession as diagrammed in Figure 1, and comparing it to the process of acquiring faculty status. Given that knowledge is the basis of a profession, its illogical to be involved in grasping status from another profession without messing up the basis. It makes no sense to say "here's our supporting knowledge base" then to go and appropriate some other knowledge base and still expect to be the same profession.

Instead, it makes better sense for librarians to attack the problem of status by gaining tighter control over its own unique body of knowledge and then convincing the public of their need for our assistance. This has unsuccessfully been attempted, in part, by the development of a complex cataloging code. One alternative and better approach has been suggested by Russell Doll in an article in the March 1980 issue of *JOLA*.<sup>14</sup> Mr. Doll very cogently makes the point that an unanticipated outcome of the use of on-line data bases may be the creation of an information elite. These are people proficient in the manipulation and use of complex telecommunications technology. As these information retrieval and manipulation technologies become more pervasive and complex, the base of knowledge required to be effective in that milieu will grow. As a result, an elite core will develop in the profession on whom the public will, in turn, be increasingly dependent. As that dependence grows so will the status of those elite information manipulators. Most of those information manipulators are currently members of the library profession. It behooves the profession, therefore, to nurture this aspect of the game by developing the necessary core knowledge within ourselves individually as professionals. Part of that is coming about automatically



# Characteristics of a Profession

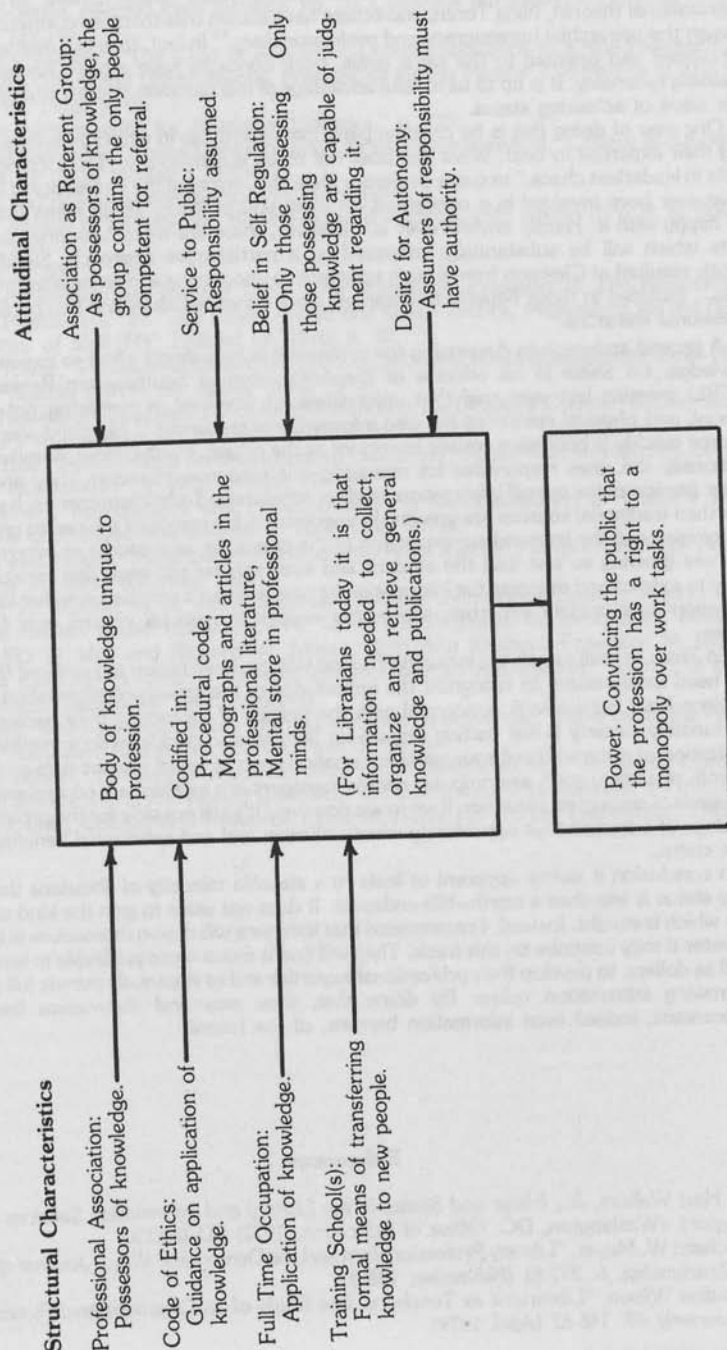


Diagram 1: Knowledge is the underpinning characteristic of a profession.

despite ourselves. It can also be enhanced through a proper understanding of the relationship of hierarchies to professionalism and by taking advantage of that understanding.

Librarians need to understand that autonomy really doesn't need to be an issue. Organizational theorist, Nina Toren, and others have shown that there is no inherent antagonism between the hierarchical bureaucracy and professionalism.<sup>15</sup> In fact, they are mutually dependent, inter-related and oriented to the same goals. Both concepts have a basic fundamental goal of increasing rationality. It is up to us to take advantage of this common interest and use it to develop other ways of achieving status.

One way of doing this is by creating participative settings in which individual librarians can bring their expertise to bear. What this does not mean is democracy. "Democratic management results in leaderless chaos," to quote professor Dale McConkey of the University of Wisconsin.<sup>16</sup> If you've ever been involved in a consensus decision, you probably would admit that you weren't very happy with it. Hardly anyone ever is. However, there are many task oriented or objective efforts which will be substantially enhanced by a participative approach. Significant benefits recently resulted at Clemson from a team approach to uncovering and articulating our automation needs.<sup>17</sup> Included in those benefits to librarians were enhanced skills and two publications in the professional literature.

A second approach to developing the profession is by a direct effort to expand the base of knowledge. Ed Shaw in his address to the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) meeting last year said that universities are involved in managing not only human, financial, and physical resources but also informational resources.<sup>18</sup> His point was that this last resource quickly is becoming equally important as the others. Furthermore, librarians have been traditionally the ones responsible for managing this resource. However, they are providing a smaller portion of the overall information needs of scholars and administrators each year, because other than traditional sources are growing in importance. He mentions the recent growth of video technologies and the tremendous expansion of the computer as a source of information. These areas are growing so fast that the student and even scholar will soon find himself completely unable to extract and organize the information he needs. Shaw's conclusion is that librarians need to develop their present expertise, thoroughly enough to gain full control over these diverse sources.

Ed Shaw as well as others, including Pauline Wilson, have begun to point out that there is a great need for librarians to recognize the importance of the growth of information in society.<sup>19</sup> Librarians have been overly concerned with the politics of promoting their personal interests. Unfortunately, society is not waiting around for librarians to decide to do something about the organization of nontraditional sources of information such as social science data archives. Other segments of society such as computer center managers are establishing control over access to these kinds of resources. However, if we move positively it's still possible for the profession to take advantage of a tremendous opportunity which will reap real and substantial benefits in terms of higher status.

In conclusion it seems apparent at least to a sizeable minority of librarians that pursuit of faculty status is less than a worthwhile endeavor. It does not seem to gain the kind of increase in status which is sought. Instead, I recommend that librarians will drown themselves in an academic backwater if they continue on this track. They will find it much more profitable in terms of status as well as dollars, to develop their professional expertise and to vigorously pursue full control over the growing information milieu. By doing that, they may find themselves becoming the entrepreneurs, indeed even information barons, of the future.

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