



Faculty status of librarians at U.S. research universities



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ABSTRACT

This survey of 124 library directors reveals that 52% of U.S. research universities grant nominal faculty status to librarians. The proportion granting faculty status has declined since 2008. Further survey results are provided for 12 distinct components of faculty status: nominal faculty status, tenure, professor ranks, peer review, scholarship, faculty senate, other committees, sabbaticals, flexible work, 9-month year, research funds, and equivalent salaries. Certain components of faculty status are substantially more or less common than faculty status itself, and nominal faculty status does not correspond to a clear-cut set of working conditions, rights, or responsibilities. A 5-tier hierarchy of faculty status indicators can be identified, and factor analysis can be used to create a single faculty status index that fully represents 9 of the 12 components of faculty status. The individual components that correspond most closely to the faculty status index are peer review and sabbaticals—not nominal faculty status.

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INTRODUCTION

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, most college and university librarians were selected from the ranks of the regular faculty (Church, 2002).¹ “Libraries were invariably run by people who considered themselves scholars, not administrators or even necessarily librarians” (Biggs, 1981, p. 183). Since then, however, librarians and regular faculty have become increasingly divergent in their educational backgrounds, subject expertise, scholarly contributions, and teaching experiences (Cronin, 2001; Hill & Hauptman, 1986).

Although librarians are counted as faculty at more than half of all U.S. colleges and universities, the differences between librarians and regular faculty can be seen in their responsibilities, backgrounds, benefits, and working conditions (Blixrud, 2000; DePew, 1983; Downs, 1964; Drobnicki, 2014). For example, librarians with faculty status may or may not be eligible for promotion, sabbaticals, and internal research funds. About 70% of librarians with faculty status are eligible for tenure, and fewer than 10% have nine-month contracts, according to Davidson, Thorson, and Stine (1983). In Ohio, only 44% of those with nominal faculty status have working conditions that conform to the faculty-status standards of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) (Byerly, 1980). Even when librarians' official status is identical to that of the regular faculty, significant differences in interpretation and implementation persist. As Davidson, Thorson, and Trumpeter

(1981, p. 210) have noted, “Equivalence between library faculty and teaching faculty is more often theoretical than real. ... One [survey] respondent commented that while librarians were eligible for research leave, none had ever been granted. ... Another responded that while eligibility for promotion existed, ‘the possibility of promotion is almost nil.’”

Several hundred papers on librarians' faculty status have appeared over the past few decades.² Most deal with one of several themes:

- prevalence of faculty status and its various components
- arguments for and against faculty status
- differences between the faculty role and the librarian role; socialization and other processes that contribute to those differences
- faculty status as a means of protecting librarians' academic freedom
- faculty standards for promotion and tenure, and the ways in which librarians can meet those standards
- impact of faculty status on outcomes such as job satisfaction and scholarly productivity
- implications of faculty status for library management.

Faculty status is itself a nebulous concept, with meanings that differ widely among institutions (Bolin, 2008a). Any one component of faculty status, such as eligibility for tenure, eligibility for sabbaticals, or the use of peer review in promotion decisions, is likely to be found at only some

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¹ Regular faculty refers to full-time, tenure-track or tenured faculty with teaching, research, and service responsibilities (e.g., an associate professor of economics). Although some authors use the term *teaching faculty* to refer to non-librarian faculty, that term is inappropriate because it disregards the teaching component of librarians' work.

² For current reviews and commentary, see Bernstein (2009); Coker, vanDuinkerken, and Bales (2010); Fleming-May & Douglass (2014); and Hill (2005). For summaries of research and opinion prior to 1980, see Axford et al. (1977); Biggs (1981); Krompart & DiFelice (1987), and Toy et al. (1978).

Table 1
Percentage of colleges and universities where librarians have various components of faculty status, 1980–2015.

Study	Faculty status	Tenure	Prof. ranks	Peer review	Promot. criteria	Faculty senate	Other cmtees.	Sabbaticals	Release time	9-mo. year	Rsrch. funds	Equiv. salaries
ACRL standards for faculty status												
Association of College & Research Libraries (2012)	X	X	–	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	X	X
Research universities (mean value)												
Davidson et al. (1981)*	92	91	73	–	91	–	100	95	95	–	82	–
English (1983)	46	43	24	–	–	–	–	51	81	25	72	–
English (1984)	45	43	30	–	–	–	–	47	–	26	70	–
Payne & Wagner (1984)	59	61	–	–	29	–	–	–	46	8	84	–
Mitchell & Swieszkowski (1985)	36	59	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Cosgriff, Kenney, & McMillan (1990)	39	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	87	–	43	–
Bradigan & Mularski (1996)	36	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Leysen & Black (1998)	53	33	35	–	–	–	–	77	78	0	70	–
Mitchell & Reichel (1999)	–	54	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Blixrud (2000)	53	38	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Welch & Mozenter (2006)	72	43	35	–	76	79	87	–	60	–	–	–
Bolin (2008a)	80	68	42	–	–	86	–	–	–	–	–	–
Bolin (2008b)	62	51	28	–	–	67	–	–	–	–	–	–
Taylor & Lee (2014)	44	45	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
This study	52	41	27	75	–	67	95	55	–	5	78	14
4-year institutions (mean value)												
Byerly (1980)*	57	48	50	23	42	73	91	49	–	2	58	46
Davidson et al. (1981)*	65	80	75	–	83	–	100	83	80	5	70	–
Sharma (1981)*	82	88	78	–	30	–	–	–	–	3	–	19
Gray & McReynolds (1983)*	75	–	50	–	–	–	–	27	–	7	–	–
Hegg (1986)*	55	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Park & Riggs (1991)	–	–	41	–	29	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Park & Riggs (1993)	41	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Bolger & Smith (2006)	53	–	34	30	–	–	68	–	–	–	50	–
4- and 2-year institutions (mean value)												
Benedict, Gavryck, & Selvin (1983)*	65	56	53	46	–	54	–	48	54	11	65	39
Horenstein (1993)	68	58	55	–	–	–	–	58	–	20	68	–
Rogers (1996)*	80	–	–	–	–	–	–	21	55	3	–	–
Cary (2001)	–	44	–	45	–	31	–	48	–	–	71	39
Darby & Weatherford (2002)*	89	86	74	–	–	–	–	–	40	11	–	–
Vix & Buckman (2012)*	52	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	–	–
Freedman (2014)*	33	35	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Librarians with faculty status												
Davidson et al. (1983)*	100	70	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	–	–

Four-year institutions include four-year colleges and universities of all types—liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, research universities, etc. Cary's (2001) data are from an ACRL survey conducted in 1999.

* Asterisks indicate surveys that are statewide or regional rather than national (U.S.) in scope.

of the institutions that grant faculty status to librarians. As a result, studies of faculty status—case studies, in particular—often report findings that are not directly comparable with those of prior investigations.

This paper explores the relationships among the various components of faculty status, first by presenting key findings from 30 studies that have evaluated the prevalence of faculty status in American colleges and universities, then by reporting on a faculty status survey completed by the library directors at 124 U.S. research universities. The survey data are used to clarify the relationships among 12 components of faculty status: nominal faculty status, tenure, professor ranks, peer review, scholarship, faculty senate, other committees, sabbaticals, flexible work, nine-month year, research funds, and equivalent salaries.

The study addresses three main questions:

RQ1. How prevalent is faculty status, and its various components, among U.S. research universities?

RQ2. Is there a hierarchy among the components of faculty status? For instance, are nearly all the librarians with tenure also eligible for sabbaticals? Are nearly all those with professor ranks also eligible to serve on faculty senate?

RQ3. Can the various components of faculty status be represented by a single dimension—a faculty status index—that measures the extent to which librarians' working conditions match those of regular faculty? If faculty status has multiple dimensions, can factor analysis be used to represent them in a complete but parsimonious way?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

TRENDS IN FACULTY STATUS

Table 1 shows the relative number of colleges and universities that grant faculty status to librarians. (See the *faculty status* column, which refers to nominal faculty status—the designation of librarians as faculty rather than administrators or staff.) The table covers every U.S. faculty status survey published in a peer-reviewed journal from 1980 to the present, along with two related content analyses (Bolin, 2008a, 2008b) and two surveys sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) (Blixrud, 2000; Taylor & Lee, 2014).³

Two opposing trends might be expected to influence the proportion of librarians with faculty status. On the one hand, recent information literacy initiatives have brought greater recognition of the library's teaching function (Pinto & Sales, 2015; Pinto, Cordón, & Díaz, 2010; Salisbury & Sheridan, 2011) and perhaps a corresponding increase in the proportion of librarians with faculty status. On the other hand, the

³ Literature searches were undertaken in Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA); Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA); Library and Information Science Source; ProQuest Library Science; Education Source; and Academic Search Complete. Works dealing only with specialized groups (e.g., law librarians or librarians with doctorates) were excluded, as were surveys that made no distinction between faculty status and tenure (e.g., Siggins & Naylor, 1992).

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