



# Challenges of getting faculty status: Perception of university librarians in Pakistan



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**Abstract** *Objective:* To find out the university head librarians' perceptions about the issues in getting faculty status.

*Methodology:* A qualitative research design was used to explore the issue through personal and telephonic interviews with 15 chief librarians of 18 university libraries located in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The textual data was content-analyzed and coded. The emerged themes and subthemes have been presented with the frequency of their occurrences. The findings have been supported by the selected quotations of the interviewees.

*Findings:* A majority of the librarians had vague understanding of the notion of faculty status. Almost all of them desired for granting faculty status to the university librarians. However, their opinion was divided on the prerequisites for faculty status. Most of them supported the same criteria for employment and promotion of faculty librarians, as is used in case of their teaching faculty counterparts. The study has identified that the main barriers in getting faculty status are the librarians themselves, lacking preparedness in terms of qualifications and research output.

*Implications:* The study brings into light both the possibilities of granting faculty status to the university librarians and barriers in this regard. Besides, the findings though extracted from a small number of respondents, may be of interest to other countries in the region.

*Originality/value:* This exploratory investigation identifies barriers in getting faculty status and is the first ever study on the subject in the local literature.

*Conclusion:* Faculty status will help in improving visibility, image and respect of librarians. Therefore, there is a need to prepare university librarians for faculty status, and to struggle for getting it.

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## Background of the study

At the time of independence on August 14, 1947 Pakistan had only two universities: University of Punjab (PU) established in 1882 and the University of Sind which was in the process of being established (Haider, 2004). Today there are 136 universities and degree awarding academic institutions recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan.

Asa Don Dickenson, an American who was employed at the University of Punjab in 1915, was the first university librarian to be granted faculty status. Although, Mr. Dickenson only remained at the University of Punjab for one year, he was hired to organize the library as well as to start a training program for future librarians. Following Mr. Dickenson's departure, an eminent professor A. C. Woolner was given the charge of overseeing the University library until the appointment of a trained librarian in 1934 (Anwar, 2011). Although, today the PU chief librarian receives a salary grade equal to an Associate Professor, no librarian has been granted faculty status.

University libraries in Pakistan are in a better position compared to other kinds of libraries in regard to resources acquisition, organizational structure and services provided to their patrons (Ameen, 2005). Generally, university librarians in Pakistan are part of administrative staff and as a result universities do not require them to possess a graduate degree (M.Phil, Ph.D) for their employment and promotion. Only the chief librarian is required to publish research articles along with having extensive experience. However, many universities have had to relax this condition due to the difficulty in finding qualified candidates with the required professional and research experience. Before 2005, no university was offered a regular LIS research degree program and, as a result, there were hardly any Ph.D LIS professionals in the country. Only a few Ph.Ds faculty members could be found at Karachi University (Samdani & Bhatti, 2011).

The structure of faculty positions in Pakistan required a first class Master degree for the post of Lecturer; a Master of Philosophy degree for the post of Assistant Professor; and Ph.D. for the posts of Associate Professor and Professor. In addition, a certain number of research publications were required for a person to be employed at the level of Associate Professor and Professor. As a result, university librarians were not in a position to request the same privileges and the service structure specified for the teaching faculty. Faculty was entitled for employment on tenure track, scholarships, study and sabbatical leaves, a 75% rebate in income tax deductions and one scale up-gradation (Sadiq, 2006).

However, better development opportunities now exist for librarians. The country's first regular "M.Phil leading to Ph.D. program" was established in 2005 at the University of Punjab. It has made a significant contribution to the growth of research culture in librarianship. Later, the universities of Sind, Bahawalpur and Sargodha started similar programs. Library professional associations have also organized continuing professional development workshops, seminars and conferences to improve various skills of working LIS professionals. As a result, there are a number of university librarians who now meet the eligibility criteria for faculty status.

## Research questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of chief librarians regarding faculty status?
2. What should be the designation, employment and promotion criteria for librarians, who receive faculty status?
3. What are the barriers in getting faculty status?

## Literature review

The debate surrounding faculty status for academic librarians began over a century ago and voluminous literature has been published on this topic. The authors of previously published literature have addressed possibilities, preparedness, pros and cons, qualifications and publication requirements, involvement in organization governance, tenure policy, privileges, benefits and other aspects of faculty status for academic librarians. The following section reviews selected studies on the topic.

The struggle to receive faculty status started in the 1970s in the United States (Bachtel, 1985). In spite of controversies, most of the scholars agreed that faculty status would bring librarians at par with teaching faculty. However, faculty librarians would have to accept job responsibilities and employment/promotion procedures which were already set for the teaching faculty (Hoggan, 2003).

A Committee of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), Association of American College (AAC), and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) defined faculty status for academic librarians as follows:

Faculty status entails for librarians the same rights and responsibilities as for other members of the faculty. They should have corresponding entitlement to rank, promotion, tenure, compensation, leaves, and research funds. They must go through the same process of evaluation and meet the same standards as other faculty members.

Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2007, p. 2

The above mentioned definition of the concept may not be applicable to the developing world including Pakistan, because of the differences in the working environment and employment conditions. For the present study, the following definition from Sri Lanka has been used for the theoretical framework.

Such librarians have been accorded a status equivalent to teaching faculty in terms of academic autonomy, rights and responsibility. The faculty status is built on a series of logically connected assumptions such as, (1) that teaching faculty has certain roles and benefits, (2) that administrators or other college staff do not have these roles and benefits, and (3) that librarians who are not considered faculty will be considered administrators or staff and this will not have these roles and benefits.

Jayasundara, 2011, p. 100

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