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CUNY Librarians and Faculty Status

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CUNY Librarians and Faculty Status

In 1938, there were four colleges in what was then known as the City Colleges of New York: Hunter, Queens, Brooklyn, and City College. In that year, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) revised its Bylaws and made the Library on each campus an academic department, with the “professional librarians” becoming faculty. However, the majority of librarians, then known as “Library Assistants,” were excluded: only the small number of those with the rank of Assistant Librarian, Associate Librarian, or Professor-Librarian were included as members of the instructional staff. It wasn’t until eight years later, in 1946, that the Library Assistants, who made up about 90% of the librarians, were made full members of the instructional staff with the right to vote and serve on faculty committees. Thus, *all* librarians had faculty status in the City Colleges of New York as of 1946.

Librarians still held their own distinct ranks, however, and were paid at lower levels than the rest of the faculty. It would take another two decades of lobbying for librarians to achieve their next hurdle. CUNY Chancellor Albert Bowker hired Robert Downs, Dean of Library Administration at the University of Illinois, to evaluate the situation of librarians in the University. The so-called “Downs Report” of February 1965 recommended, among other things, that the BHE’s Bylaws be changed to eliminate the various librarian titles and move librarians to their corresponding faculty ranks, with requisite salary increases, and that promotion to Assistant Professor in the libraries be based on advanced graduate level education. After subsequent approval by the Board and the City Council, CUNY librarians had faculty ranks and faculty pay as of Nov. 22, 1965, in addition to their earlier faculty status.

But library faculty in CUNY continue to work a twelve-month calendar rather than the faculty calendar that follows the academic year. This is despite the fact that librarians must publish research articles and meet the same standards for reappointment, tenure, and promotion as those faculty who teach in the subject departments. One could argue, then, that library faculty are still paid less than the classroom faculty, since librarians have to work a longer year for that same salary. Library faculty also do not have the right to elect their chairperson, as the other faculty do – the appointment of the library chair (i.e., the Chief Librarian) by the college president is part of the CUNY Bylaws.

CUNY library faculty have made great strides over the past 75 years, and continue to strive toward clearing future hurdles, such as achieving full equity with the classroom faculty by being put on the faculty calendar.

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(This article is adapted from a much longer presentation given at the LACUNY Dialogues, May 10, 2013.)