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CUNY Librarians and Faculty Status: Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

Librarians in the City University of New York system have held faculty ranks since 1965, but their faculty status dates back two decades further. How did they achieve faculty status and faculty ranks? What role did their professional association (LACCNY, later known as LACUNY) play? Is their status secure?

Keywords: academic librarians, faculty status

Introduction

This paper, a version of which was delivered at the 9th annual LACUNY Dialogues, May 10, 2013, held at the CUNY Graduate Center, will address the journey of CUNY librarians toward four F's: Faculty Status, Faculty Ranks, Faculty Pay, and Faculty Calendar.

If one could travel back in time to the early 20th century, one would find only two colleges in what would eventually many years later become the City University of New York (CUNY): City College and Hunter College. Their libraries were small with small collections, and the "librarian" who oversaw the library was *not* a professional librarian, but rather a senior faculty member from the Classics, or the History, or the English Department – in the case of City College, the library was even overseen by the Registrar for many years. City College got its first "real" chief librarian in 1930, while Hunter had to wait until 1966 for its first professional chief librarian. However, after Brooklyn and Queens Colleges were founded in the 1930s, they both had "real" librarians as their directors right from their beginnings.

Each library consisted of four ranks: one was the Librarian, sometimes called the "Professor-Librarian" (which later became known as the Chief Librarian) – there was only *one* person at this rank in the library, so it was not something that one could be promoted to – it was tied to the job of being the head of the library; one step lower was Associate Librarian; then Assistant Librarian; and at the very bottom, in more ways than one, was Assistant to Librarian, usually referred to as "Library Assistant." The overwhelming majority of librarians (probably 90%) were classified as Library Assistants. The qualifications of the Library Assistants varied greatly, since one only needed to be a college graduate who also completed a one-year course of professional library training in a library school. But there was a loophole: until 1946, one could substitute three years of work experience in a library

in lieu of the professional training. (In 1946, the Bylaws were changed to require a graduate degree in Library Science.) Thus, as late as 1945, there were 2 Library Assistants without college degrees, 3 with only Bachelor's degrees, 23 with Master's in Library Science, 23 with Master's in other subjects, and 1 with 2 Master's degrees (Segal, 1991, p. 142). There were *no* qualifications specified for the other librarian titles, and there was not much chance of promotion – if a library had one or two supervisory positions at the Associate or Assistant Librarian level, a promotion to that level for a Library Assistant was not possible until or unless that person left. One had to wait for a vacancy.

Faculty Status

In the 1930s, New York City began to tighten its controls over many parts of the government to crack down on corruption and patronage, and this also included the municipal colleges (or, as they were known, the City Colleges of New York), which had now grown to four. The Board of Higher Education (BHE) decided to divide the staff of the colleges into instructional staff and non-instructional staff, with the latter becoming civil service employees. Perhaps a little surprising for those who live in an era of somewhat hostility and mistrust between management and staff, at that time (1938) the Board actually invited various constituencies to come and make their case before it – and a small group of activist librarians was elected by their library colleagues in the four colleges to make their case before the Board. One year later in 1939, those elected library activists would formalize their role as the Library Association of the City Colleges of New York (LACCNY).

So the first landmark on the road to professional status for librarians in the City Colleges was 1938, when that group of librarians successfully convinced the Board of Higher Education that libraries and librarians were important parts of the instructional process. When the BHE revised its Bylaws that year, the libraries of the City Colleges were made academic departments, and the professional librarians were made members of the instructional staff with voting rights in those departments. Note that this included *professional* librarians rather than *all* librarians – only those with the rank of Assistant Librarian or higher were included as faculty. The Library Assistants, who made up 90% of the librarians, were *not* included. Thus, *some*, but not *all*, librarians now had Faculty Status.

The Library Assistants were not treated very well. They were not permitted to serve on P&B or faculty committees; the New York State legislature attempted to move them to the civil service a few years later (1940), but thankfully the Governor vetoed that; and they even had the top of their rather limited pay scale cut by 20% for two years, until intense lobbying got that overturned. It wasn't until 8 years later, in 1946, that the Library Assistants were given Faculty Status, when the BHE revised its Bylaws once again and made them 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.

Faculty Status, unfortunately, did not mean Faculty Rank, Faculty Pay, or the Faculty Calendar.

Faculty Rank and Faculty Pay

Librarians still held their own distinct ranks: Assistant to Librarian, Assistant Librarian, Associate Librarian, and the Professor-Librarian. And they were not always included in the pay raises that were given to the other members of the faculty (i.e., the teaching faculty). Traditionally, Associate Librarians received the same raises as Assistant Professors, and Assistant Librarians were given the same raises as Instructors, and Library Assistants got small raises. However, starting in 1951, the librarians started to receive smaller increases than the teaching faculty, and Library Assistants began to be excluded completely from raises – this happened several times throughout the 50s and early 60s. A group of librarians even tried to sue the BHE, but were unsuccessful.

Throughout the fight for better pay for librarians, the Library Association attempted to keep the plight of the librarians, especially the Library Assistants, at or near the top of the agenda of the Legislative Conference. These were the days before public employees had the right of collective bargaining through unions, so the Legislative Conference, headed for most of that time by Belle Zeller, was a lobbying group supported by voluntary contributions of the faculty and staff. But they had a large group of different constituencies that they had to lobby for, and sometimes librarians received attention, and sometimes they didn't. The Legislative Conference helped LACCNY to get the top 20% of the Library Assistants' salary restored, and helped in the effort to get the Bylaws revised so that Library Assistants were given faculty status – but they had other battles to fight, too. And even the members of the Library Association were not always united – often their meetings didn't even have a quorum. Some members wanted LACCNY to hire an outside consultant to take on their fight with the Board and the City; some wanted LACCNY to affiliate with outside worker groups, but others found that to be either un-professional for a group of professionals or they were also worried about the repercussions of being involved with groups that might appear to be too “red.” Several individual members of LACCNY, however, such as Harold Eiberson of the City College School of Business (which later became Baruch College), were relentless in their efforts and frequently lobbied members of the Board, the Mayor's Budget Office, and legislators in Albany.

The Council of Librarians (later known as the Council of Chief Librarians) as a body was not always sympathetic to the plight of the ordinary librarians, since they tended to want to protect their own status, although individual Chiefs, such as Morris Gelfand of Queens College, who had started as a library assistant, could be quite forceful in sticking up for them. To illustrate how the Chiefs, or Professor-Librarians, didn't always care about the status of the librarians who worked under them: In 1947, the Council of Chief Librarians advocated for creation of a new title

in the libraries: Junior Library Assistant, which would be even *lower* than Library Assistant. In 1948, the Hunter College Chief Librarian hired a provisional clerk (with no library degree) as a library assistant, bypassing his department's Appointments Committee – and this was two years *after* the Bylaws were revised to require a Master's degree in Library Science in order to be appointed as a library assistant. (LACCNY sent an official protest.) In 1957, the new Staten Island Community College advertised for a librarian on a civil service line.

In her doctoral dissertation on the history of LACCNY from 1939-1965, Judith Segal (1991), formerly of the Hunter College Social Work Library, argued that it was *not* lobbying by LACCNY or the Legislative Conference that helped librarians achieve their next big hurdles: Faculty Rank and Faculty Pay. She argues that it was a combination of societal pressures and outside forces that created the conditions for the librarians to get what they had been pushing for the past 25 years. Some of these outside pressures and forces were: the G.I. Bill and then the post-war baby boom, which dramatically increased the numbers of those attending college; the United States' fear of, and competition with, the Soviet Union, which dramatically increased government funding of both scientific research and support for library collections; the sudden interest by the rival United Federation of College Teachers in wooing librarians to join their union, which got the attention of the leadership of the Legislative Conference and persuaded them to more fully support the librarians' causes; and, very importantly, the poor salaries of the librarians in the City Colleges resulted in a librarian shortage, as there was very high turnover. For example, between 1959-1964, 18 librarians had resigned from City College, 10 from Hunter, 10 from Brooklyn, and 16 from Queens (Segal, 1991, p. 300-301). The librarian shortage certainly got the attention of the Chief Librarians.

So even though the Library Association, sometimes in conjunction with the Council of Chief Librarians and the Legislative Conference and sometimes on its own, made formal proposals pushing for librarians to have Faculty Rank several times (including 1954, 1958, and 1962), Segal describes a perfect storm of societal pressures and outside forces – and she gives much of the credit to Albert Bowker, who became CUNY Chancellor in 1963. (The City Colleges of New York officially became the City University of New York, or CUNY in 1961, and the Library Association then followed suit and changed its name to Library Association of the City University of New York, or LACUNY). Bowker wanted to solve several outstanding problematic issues that he inherited, including the librarian shortage, and he appointed a Task Force to look into it. The Task Force recommended that he bring in an outside consultant – and this was the key decision, because Bowker chose to hire Robert Bingham Downs, Dean of Library Administration at the University of Illinois and a champion of faculty status and faculty ranks for librarians. Downs' librarians at the University of Illinois received faculty ranks, tenure rights, and the same salaries as the teaching faculty back in 1944. Bowker knew that he could get what he wanted by having it come from a respected outside scholar/consultant rather than from someone within the colleges whose motives

could be questioned. What better way to recruit and retain librarians in a time of shortage than by increasing their pay and equating librarians with the rest of the faculty?

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. Bowker now had the ammunition to solve the librarian problem, and both the Board and City Council approved the changes, so that as of Nov. 22, 1965, CUNY librarians had Faculty Ranks and Faculty Pay, in addition to their earlier Faculty Status. Suddenly, the entering salary for a new librarian would be what the top salary had been – and a new librarian could achieve in six months what would have taken 14 years under the old ranks and payscales (Jones, 1968, p. 208-209). Some vestiges of the old ranks and titles are visible in some of the job titles that are still around, such as “Associate Librarian for ...” rather than “Deputy Chief for...” or “Deputy Director for...”

Faculty Calendar

But what about the third F, the Faculty Calendar? That has never been solved or won by CUNY librarians. The Library Association passed a resolution calling for a 30-hour work week for librarians as early as 1945; and in 1972, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) Librarians Committee promulgated a detailed proposal calling for library faculty to have academic year appointments (i.e., the same calendar as the rest of the faculty), and a work week of 30 hours. During contract negotiations in 1972, the PSC formally proposed a 30-hour work week with three months of annual leave for librarians, counselors, and College Laboratory Technicians, which was promptly rejected as “outlandish” by the Board’s chief negotiator.

Can one really say that CUNY library faculty make the same salaries as the rest of the faculty if *they* work 9 months for that salary and *we* work 12 months (minus our 4-6 weeks of annual leave)? And *they* have approximately 12 hours of classroom contact with students per week while *we* work 35 hours per week? Is *that* pay equity? In that same 1972 document from the PSC Librarians Committee, they argued that because of the difference in workload, library faculty are deprived of 23% more in salary.

The only consolation that library faculty received toward this inequity is the so-called Professional Reassignment leave, which began as a 2-week leave in 1978, was increased to 3 weeks in 1982, 4 weeks in 1987, and finally up to 5 weeks in 2006. These, however, are not the same as having the mandatory contractual right to Summers off – one must have a specific research project, get the approval of the Department Personnel & Budget Committee and the Chief Librarian, and then the approval of the College Personnel & Budget Committee.

And, as CUNY giveth with one hand, it can taketh away with the other. Just as the Professional Reassignment Leave was increased to 4 weeks in 1987, the annual leave for new librarians was cut from 6 weeks to 4 weeks for those hired after 1988.

Beginning in 2006, new (untenured) library faculty began to receive the same contractual research leave that the rest of the untenured faculty receive – for librarians, it is 30 weeks of research leave to be taken during the first 5 years of the tenure clock. With that research leave will likely come higher expectations for publishing and research. Having that mandatory research leave should help one achieve tenure – but what research leave will be available to you if you want to be promoted (whether to Associate or full Professor)? One would only have the 5-week Professional Reassignment leave; or one could try for a Fellowship Leave (aka sabbatical), which on some campuses is far from automatic in being approved by the President. Is the 5-week Professional Reassignment leave enough? You will no doubt have to do what many of us who were hired before this new benefit of 30 weeks of research leave was granted had to do – spend a lot of your own time, be it lunch hours, time before work, time after work, time at home, and annual leave time, working on your research agenda. Conditions such as these have led to the observation that “librarians have taken on more of the responsibilities than rewards of faculty status” (Orr, 1991, p. 38).

Another faculty right that is denied to library faculty is the right to elect their chairperson, which can give the appearance that the library chair does not have to be responsive to the needs of his/her faculty. The appointment of the library chair by the college president is part of the CUNY Bylaws (section 9.1.b).

Threats to Faculty Status

Although CUNY librarians’ faculty status goes back to 1938, and faculty rank back to 1965, is the faculty position of CUNY librarians secure? There have already been attempts to undermine those faculty rights. In 1972, when the newly formed PSC was negotiating its first contract with CUNY, the Board of Higher Education at first refused to negotiate and said that there should be 3 *separate* units for collective bargaining: one for full-time classroom faculty, one for full-time non-teaching faculty (including librarians), and a third for part-time instructional staff. The PSC took the matter to the New York State Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), which ruled in favor of the PSC that there would be one single unit to represent the CUNY faculty. If the library faculty were separated out from the rest of the faculty and forced to negotiate only as part of a smaller group of non-teaching faculty, many rights and benefits of the library faculty likely would have been eroded by now.

Another attempt to undermine librarians as faculty occurred in 1979 when, after performing an audit of three CUNY colleges, the New York State Comptroller (Edward “Ned” Regan) released a report which stated that CUNY was wasting over \$500,000 a year by paying librarians, counselors, and administrators as faculty

even though they did not perform any teaching – a specific example was singled out in the press of an associate professor (“an assistant to the chief librarian”) who catalogued books and periodicals. Regan said that provisions of the contract with the PSC should be changed, and that more workers, particularly librarians, should be hired as Higher Education Officers (HEOs). (HEOs are professional staff but do not hold either faculty status or faculty rank.) This push by the Comptroller was vigorously opposed by LACUNY, the PSC, and also by their SUNY equivalents, the UUP and SUNYLA, since any attack on the status and pay of *CUNY* librarians would no doubt lead to attacks on *SUNY* librarians.

Whether inspired by the Comptroller or not, over the years some Chief Librarians *have* elected to hire librarians on HEO lines rather than on faculty lines, whether as replacements for persons who left or as new lines. Many of us would say that this practice undermines and ignores 75 years of CUNY library history. If it’s faculty work, it should be done by a faculty member on a faculty line.

Conclusion

To sum up, then, the accomplishments of the past 75 years in the CUNY libraries: Faculty Status and Faculty Rank. Not quite Faculty Pay. And definitely not Faculty Calendar.

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