

Spring 2002

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## Recommended Citation

Munch, Janet Butler. "Librarians with Faculty Status: Reassignment Leaves in the Libraries at The City University of New York (CUNY) as a Vehicle of Professional Development." *Urban Library Journal* 12, 1 (Spring, 2002), 32-48.

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**Librarians with Faculty Status: Reassignment  
Leaves in the Libraries at The City University of  
New York (CUNY) as a Vehicle of Professional  
Development**

*Janet Butler Munch*

Most academic librarians today are familiar with the concept of faculty status.

Some twenty years ago, it was thought of as:

“an official recognition by an institution of postsecondary education that librarians are part of the instructional and research staff by conferment of ranks and titles identical to those of faculty, and commensurate benefits, privileges, rights and responsibilities” (Young, 1983, 90).

Though the faculty status issue has been discussed in the literature for decades, there is no uniformly accepted definition of the concept today (Cary, 2001, 510). In fact, academic librarians across the country now function under a variety of statuses which can include academic status, professional status, faculty status with rank, faculty status without rank, or even non-tenured faculty status (Weaver-Meyers, 2002, 25).

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has long supported the granting of faculty rank, status and tenure to college and university librarians and has been in the forefront of promoting standards (ACRL, Guidelines, 2002). These standards focus on the academic librarian's: professional responsibilities; participation in library governance; eligibility and membership in college or university governing bodies; compensation equivalent to teaching faculty; tenure; promotion in rank consistent with campus standards; sabbatical and research leaves; access to research and professional

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*Urban Library Journal, Vol 12, No. 1, Spring 2002, 34-48.*

development funds; and academic freedom.

In recognition that not all academic librarians have faculty status, the ACRL prepared separate guidelines for academic status (ACRL, Guidelines, 1990). While these guidelines are largely similar to those cited in the faculty status standards, the one significant exception is tenure. Of necessity, the guidelines compensate for the exclusion of tenure by affirming fairness in such central issues as the terms of employment, dismissal, non-reappointment and grievance procedures. The latest comprehensive survey on faculty status in academic libraries was conducted in 1999 by ACRL (Center for Survey, 2000). This survey was sent to 3,087 baccalaureate, masters and doctoral-granting colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. With a total response rate of 44.28 percent, the survey attempted to determine the depth of institutional commitment using ACRL's nine standards of defining faculty status ranging from fully, partly, not at all, and don't know through decline to answer). Institutions supporting ACRL's faculty status standards, either partially or fully, were identified and this data was summarized. The survey determined the percentage levels by which responding college and university libraries adhered to each ACRL faculty status standards as follows: professional responsibilities, 75.3 percent; governance structure, 78.5 percent; eligibility for governance bodies, 69.6 percent; salary equivalency with teaching faculty, 56.7 percent; tenure, 64.5 percent; peer review, 64.8 percent; research leaves 87.9 percent; research funding 87 percent; and academic freedom 99.7 percent. It is not possible to give an accurate, overall percentage on the number of academic libraries in the United States and Canada with faculty status today. What the ACRL survey does make clear, however, is that the recommended conditions for faculty status are being met to some extent at the vast majority of academic institutions.

**Purpose**

Since faculty status brings perquisites and responsibilities, library faculty must strive to meet its special requirements. This article will focus on how research leaves (just one of the nine criteria espoused by ACRL as a component of faculty status) can be manifested in academe. The experience of such leaves by library faculty at the City University of New York (CUNY) will be explored in this study.

Officially known in CUNY as Reassignment Leaves in the Libraries, these leaves play an important role in the professional development of library faculty. In order to understand their use, it is important to briefly explain the evolution of faculty status for librarians at CUNY.

**Library Faculty at the City University of New York**

Librarians working at The City University of New York (CUNY) have held faculty status since 1946 and have held the faculty ranks of Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor since 1965 (Zeller 1990, 35). Like teaching faculties who are evaluated by the triad of excellence in teaching, service and scholarship, library faculty at CUNY are also expected to demonstrate excellence in performance. For CUNY librarians, however, excellence in performance is judged in terms of librarianship, service and scholarship.

In 1978, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the CUNY negotiating unit for its faculty and professional staff, secured reassignment leaves in the library for two weeks per year for library faculty. This initiative was meant to help library faculty achieve some "equity in research opportunities" and as a step toward the goal of "full annual leave for librarians as for the [teaching] faculty" (Ibid.). In 1982, this contractual benefit was extended for library faculty to three weeks, and in 1987 to four weeks. Reassignment leaves in the library are defined in the PSC contract as:

"... a paid leave not to exceed four weeks during any year commencing September 1 and ending August 31 for the purpose of permitting members of the instructional staff who serve in the libraries to be reassigned for research, scholarly writing, and other recognized professional activities that enhance their contribution to City University. The reassignments shall be subject to approval by the personnel and budget committees of the respective library departments and appropriate college-wide committees. The parties accept as a goal the reassignment of 50 members of the instructional staff in the University libraries during a one-year period" (City Univ., 2000, 25:4).

Reassignment leaves afford an excellent staff development

opportunity which benefit the individual librarian, their Library department and the College. Variouslly termed in the literature as professional development leaves or release time, reassignments are especially helpful in affording librarians time to work on research and scholarly writing, usually the most difficult and time consuming element of the evaluation criteria which all faculty must fulfill (Ring 1978, Emmick 1984, Havener 1994). Librarians have used reassignment leaves to work on books, chapters, articles, bibliographies and other research projects. The untenured, who face the constraints of the tenure clock, are the most vulnerable and perhaps in greatest need of reassignment leaves in the library. This opportunity, however, is available to all library faculty regardless of the stage in their career or their faculty rank.

It should be noted that a small number of CUNY librarians do not have faculty status. These librarians work under a personnel classification known as Higher Education Officer (HEO) lines. While librarians working in this classification are members of the instructional staff, they do not earn tenure like those in faculty lines and cannot serve on personnel and budget committees. Because the university does not hold HEO's to the research commitment expected from its library faculty, they are ineligible for reassignment leaves.

#### **Libraries as Working Laboratory**

The Library is a work place for librarians, but it can also be thought of as a working laboratory for further exploration, study and research in librarianship and allied fields. Opportunities for professional development can oftentimes grow directly out of one's daily activities and job demands. If such opportunities are realized, they can be coupled with reassignment leaves to help fulfill the criteria of excellence in librarianship, service and scholarship against which CUNY library faculty are judged. Sample scenarios of growth opportunities emanating from the workplace and realized through the benefit of reassignment leaves follow:

#### Librarianship

A special collections librarian is contacted by a rare book dealer who has dealt with the Library in the past. A collection of photo-

lithographs of interest to the Library is available for sale. The collection is acquired and selections from this series about mansions are chosen for display in the library's exhibit area. The exhibit requires research about the individuals whose mansions are depicted and about the architects who are identified in the accompanying plates of floor plans. This means that the librarian needs to visit numerous libraries, archives and public record offices in order to use their resources.

A reassignment leave affords the needed time for research on the exhibit. This work additionally results in a manuscript submission which is accepted for publication. Perhaps more important than either the exhibit or the publication themselves, however, is the fact that this librarian has actually used and gained familiarity with a tremendous range of research materials: books, journal articles, biographical and obituary sources, maps, wills, affidavits, deeds, personal and organizational papers, correspondence, electronic databases, etc. This first hand familiarity with sources, repositories and contacts in the field can only enhance the knowledge and ability of a librarian in the practice of librarianship and in an ability to emphatically assist faculty, students and others in their own research and scholarly contributions.

#### Service to the Department

A supervisor asks a public services librarian to establish a Friends of the Library group in order to generate donations for a matching grant and to augment the college library's materials budget. The librarian explores the topic, seeking documentation on the implementation of library Friends groups. A literature search reveals that most Friends groups exist in either public libraries or otherwise in large university or research libraries. Little is reported on the existence of groups similar to the type of college library in which the librarian works. To bridge the gap in the professional literature, a survey and cover letter are prepared and sent to identified institutions meeting the specified institutional criteria (Carnegie, 1994). The results indicate that there is indeed interest and activity in institutions similar to the one in which the librarian works.

A reassignment leave allows time for follow up on the completed

surveys and analysis of the data received. A manuscript on the findings is prepared, submitted and accepted for publication. The Library is the direct beneficiary of the service provided by this librarian's work in that new knowledge is gained from this original research. As a result, the Library is able to apply this information and more effectively launch its own group. The Library, too, profits from the helpful suggestions made by survey respondents who willingly share information and even sample literature about their own Friends groups.

#### Scholarship and Publication

As part of her collection development responsibilities and interests, a reference librarian subscribes to several listservs. She reads the announcements emanating from these sources regularly. The listservs: pose queries; discuss issues in the field; announce upcoming conferences and meetings; review and call attention to newly issued publications; and advise scholars of editors calling for contributors to special journal issues or upcoming reference publications. Through such listservs the librarian learns over a period of months of upcoming publications in which she is interested and can make a contribution to the literature. The editor's request for a vitae and writing sample from the librarian result in the selection and ultimately assignment of a number of biographical and topical essays.

A reassignment leave affords the librarian the time to do indepth research for appropriate background material in various books, journals, electronic databases, the Internet, archives and other sources. Once research is completed, the essays are prepared and submitted in the required style and format. The essays are accepted for publication, contributing to the librarian's scholarship and assisting, along with other works, in enhancing her publication record and her bid for a promotion in rank. Reassignment leaves for librarians fulfill an important staff development need for time. As the scenarios above attest, much good can be accomplished through reassignment leaves in the library. The most favorable choice for professional development is a reassignment project which flows from the expertise of the librarian. If the project can be brought into alignment with the criteria against which library faculty are traditionally judged, (i.e.), librarianship, service and scholarship, then

reassignment leaves will not only bring professional satisfaction and recognition, but should also help secure positive outcomes in terms of annual reappointments, tenure and ultimately promotion in rank for the academic librarian.

#### **Why Are So Many Reassignments Unused?**

As worthwhile as reassignment leaves can be in assisting librarians complete projects which help fulfill the criteria for their reappointments, tenure and promotion decisions, many allocated leaves go unused each year at CUNY. Are librarians disinterested in their own development or do their diminishing numbers tell a different story? Thirty-one years ago the university had 319 library faculty lines in the libraries (Library Assn. 1970-71) but in 2001-02 this number was down by 33.5 percent to 212 (Library Assn., 2001-02). When reassignment leaves of two weeks per year first became a contractual benefit in 1978-79, there were 263 eligible library faculty. (Library Assn, 1978-79). This benefit expanded to three weeks per year in 1982-83. Simultaneously a 5.3 percent hiring spike in 1982-83 brought the library faculty count to 277 (Library Assn., 1982-83). This figure dipped 2.1 percent in 1987-88 when the new PSC contract lengthened the leave to its current four weeks per year. While the 1987-88 contract expanded the amount of time for the reassignment leave, the drawback was that the vacation time for newly hired librarians was reduced from 30 days per year to 20 days. These librarians earned one additional day per year of employment, until 30 days total was achieved in year 11. From 1978-79, when reassignments in the library began, to 2001-2002 the number of library faculty eligible for leaves declined from 263 to 212, showing a 19.7 percent decrease.

#### **What Do Librarians Think of Reassignment Leaves?**

In June 1999, the Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY) Professional Status & Grants Committee used the librarians' listserv CULIBS-L to query the membership about their experiences with Reassignment Leaves in the Libraries (LACUNY...Survey, 1999, #2). Though only a handful of librarians answered the query, their responses were detailed and informative. On a positive note, there was a genuine appreciation of the time which library faculty were given to engage in serious research.



Librarians had the opportunity to easily visit libraries and collections that do not maintain evening or weekend hours. Additionally, library faculty liked the fact that the system had some flexibility in reallocating unused reassignment leave lines from the pool, when such requests were made by the home library.

On a less enthusiastic note, there was a perception that the advantages of reassignments were not fully understood. It was felt that experienced colleagues were not necessarily offering guidance to more recently hired or untenured librarians. Frustration with the amount of time allocated for reassignment leaves was also voiced. Part of this was because some libraries tried to spread reassignments around and only granted two weeks in leave time. It was thought that reassignments were most helpful for beginning a project or completing one substantially underway. What was harder, however, was completely taking a project from start to finish during the time allocated. This was the case even for those receiving the full four weeks of reassignment leave.

A certain frustration was evident over how reassignment leave time could actually be scheduled given the work flow and short-staffed situations in most libraries. Generally, leaves were taken during the quieter summer months or over intersession. In some cases, it was difficult to even schedule two consecutive days for reassignment leave and time had to be taken at the rate of one day a week. This type of schedule did not always work well and it created difficulties for some library faculty in sustaining momentum on research and writing. Librarians were also concerned about the lack of available personnel for coverage of their regular duties during leaves. No libraries provided funds to hire replacements. Internal factors, such as these, discouraged some librarians from even taking their full allocation of time for leaves. Having no relief from regular duties left library faculty inundated with work and with a sense that their research was not supported by their institutions. Some librarians secured grant funding in conjunction with their reassignments that allowed them to hire personnel to assist in their projects. It was noted, however, that the amount of energy expended in the process of obtaining the grant was discouraging.

Reassignment leaves continued to be a topic discussed among CUNY librarians in the years following the posting of the Professional Status Committee's thought provoking query. It is clear that for many, the day-to-day demands are so all consuming and immediate that it is hard to pause and consider longer term what is in one's best professional interests. Then too, there is the ever present issue of how to juggle all the usual responsibilities especially if personnel lines are lost, or vacant positions go unfilled in the home library. Newer service emphases (such as information literacy, distance learning, and the development of Web pages) and the learning curve needed for the mastery of new system platforms and the protocols of increasingly complex databases also add to the sense that one is constantly trying to catch up with a fuller workload.

To address some of the problems with librarian equity issues, the PSC-CUNY specifically requested in its most recent contractual negotiations that the university approve a provision that would automatically grant reassignment leaves to all librarians annually, provided that they submitted a research proposal. This provision was not included in the PSC-CUNY contract ratified on May 24, 2002. Provisions that would have restored the original allocation of 30 days annual leave for all librarians, and reduced the librarian's workweek to 30 hours per week were also not included. The lack of any contractual progress on their workload and reassignment leave concerns left many librarians disenchanted. What was even more galling for librarians however, was that an item was approved in the contract, specifically ensuring that " untenured Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors (except Librarians and Counselors) ...will be eligible for reassigned time not to exceed a total of 12 contract hours for their first three annual appointments." It was also noted that "implementation of this benefit will include further negotiation of the possibility of a one-time cash payment to accommodate the phase-in of such reassignment time for untenured faculty appointed between September 1, 2000 and September 1, 2002" (What's, 2002, 2).

Considering that CUNY libraries have underwritten reassignment leaves since 1978, and that librarians were pointedly omitted as a group in this contract provision, it is questionable if library faculty are

treated equitably in the university. This provision additionally underscores what seems to be a general lack of understanding that librarians in tenure track positions must fulfill the research and publication requirements of their individual colleges. Tenure track librarians hold either two master's degrees or a doctorate and are fully capable of making scholarly contributions to the profession and beyond. Many librarians in CUNY, too, have distinguished publication records in monographs and peer-reviewed journals which bring credit to the university. There seems to be an implicit assumption in the latest PSC-CUNY contract that the needs of non-tenured teaching faculty members are somehow greater than those of their non-tenured library faculty colleagues.

**What Do Chief Librarians Think About Reassignment Leaves?**

In May, 2002 this researcher surveyed CUNY chief librarians about their attitudes and experiences with Reassignment Leaves in the Libraries. Essentially the survey asked chief librarians: if and how their library faculty were made aware of the contractual benefit of the reassignment leaves; if library faculty were encouraged to participate in this benefit; if the leaves helped library faculty fulfill the requirements of tenure and promotion; and if the Library itself had benefited through the use of reassignment leaves by library faculty. Lastly, chief librarians were asked if they were satisfied with reassignment leaves in their libraries and if there was any significance to the fact that reassignment leaves are not structured to make reimbursements. With 15 of 19 chief librarians participating in the survey, there was a favorable response rate of 78.9 percent. The results of the survey indicated that 93.3 percent of the responding chief librarians felt that their library faculty were aware of the contractual benefit of Reassignment Leaves in the Library. (The sole respondent replying in the negative indicated non-use of reassignment leaves because that site had initiated internal reassignments spread across eight months over the academic semesters.) Reassignment leaves are made known to library faculty through a variety of formal and informal means: the PSC contract; the College; LACUNY; the chief librarians; the Library's Personnel and Budget Committees; and through discussion with more experienced colleagues. The availability of the reassignment leaves is also made known in departmental meetings, during faculty orientations and evaluations,

and through the distribution of announcements and deadline reminders.

Reassignment leave applications are encouraged by 80 percent of the respondents, especially for non-tenured and junior faculty. It was noted that short staffed library situations can make reassignments a lesser priority; and that fellowship leaves (sabbaticals) are sometimes requested in lieu of reassignment leaves. Factors discouraging participation in reassignment leaves include: time limitations; staffing and non-replacement for librarians on leaves; difficulty in providing coverage for those in supervisory or administrative positions and the accommodation of managerial responsibilities; a heavy work load and worry about falling behind in regular duties; and the lack of flexibility in libraries for reassigning those duties and a misperception of the amount of time needed to fully train a replacement.

Overall chief librarians indicated, by an 80 percent affirmative response, that reassignment leaves help library faculty fulfill the requirements of tenure and promotion. The degree of help, however, varies from institution to institution. One chief librarian noted "multiple re-assignments may be needed to make a significant difference." Several others indicated that a "tangible outcome" (e.g., a draft or article submission) could help determine tenure and promotion outcomes. There were mixed responses as to whether benefits accrue to the Library through use of reassignment leaves. Eighty percent of the respondents replied in the affirmative, but added qualifications such as "sometimes" or "probably." The general perception was that the "reputation of the department is enhanced through use of reassignments," but not necessarily that Library operations benefited. When chief librarians were asked if they were satisfied with reassignment leaves, 60 percent of respondents indicated "no" Among the remaining 40 percent (affirmative) their responses were qualified. Factors that chief librarians identified as negatively impacting on reassignment leaves were: limited amounts of time given (4 weeks) and the lack of reimbursement given to libraries. A full 100 percent of the chief librarians responding to the survey considered the non-reimbursement of libraries for reassignment leaves a significant factor. Many chief librarians indicated that the demands of maintaining library operations

discouraged library faculty from taking leaves, left staffs juggling to cover work flow, and possibly even engendered some resentment among remaining staff left to "fill in." Reimbursement of funds to hire adjunct replacements was suggested as a means of effecting smoother library operations, especially during busy periods or in short-staffed libraries. Such reimbursement was also seen as a means for using alternative staff development initiatives, such as mentoring for tenured assistant professors stalled in rank.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

After nearly twenty-five years in use, CUNY and the PSC need to question the status quo, reassess the implementation of Reassignment Leaves in the Library and introduce changes to maximize the benefits intended by the initiative. With its numbers down by more than one-third from 1970-71, monetary compensation should be given to the home libraries of library faculty participating in reassignment leaves. This cost needs to be projected and phased into the university budget. It is only after careful reassessment of contractual benefits and funding that fuller and more effective participation in Reassignments Leaves in the Library will happen. Library faculty, confronted with increased expectations and continual change in their work environments, need ongoing professional development and access to an improved version of the current reassignment leave benefit.

Overworked librarians, in short-staffed libraries need the personnel relief that reimbursement of time could buy. Libraries, already coping with inflation in their materials budgets, continue to subsidize a contractual benefit, which has inherent costs. While the individual librarian on a reassignment leave continues to receive the usual paycheck, the home library receives no additional monetary compensation to cover the assignments usually fulfilled by the library faculty member on leave. Receiving no financial compensation for the Library means that there is no additional money to hire a substitute or adjunct librarian to: fill the void, to cover a reference desk, conduct library instructional services, catalog books, or even be able to share new skills or subject expertise which could potentially reinvigorate the other professional staff not on reassignment leaves. In receiving no monetary compensation, the Library Department lacks budgetary flexibility, which could help an administrator think

creatively about maximizing the impact of professional development of their librarians. Expanded opportunities such as conference attendance or participation in other current awareness or continuing education opportunities could be realized through financial compensation, especially if an adjunct librarian could be hired.

The fact that the recently ratified PSC-CUNY contract specifically speaks of "the possibility of a one-time cash payment to accommodate the phase-in of...reassigned time for untenured [teaching] faculty" is a tacit recognition by the university that reassignment leaves have costs ("What's, op cit.). While the need and value of Reassignment Leaves in the Library is acknowledged, this contractual benefit must be balanced with current realities of library staffing situations, the continual learning necessitated by implementation of various technologies and the library profession's bedrock commitment to the provision of quality patron service. To do otherwise is to undermine the status of dedicated CUNY librarians, as fewer library faculty feel they can avail themselves of a benefit meant to provide them with greater equity and increased opportunities as members of the university faculty.

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