

Administrative Succession in the Academic Library

Data from a national sample of academic library directors indicate that directors hold their positions longer than had previously been supposed. Library size does not appear to contribute to rapid turnover at the top. A multivariate analysis suggests that female library directors are much more likely than male directors to have been hired to their positions from within the library and that this relationship cannot be accounted for in terms of institutional characteristics. The attitudes of hiring committees or the constrained geographic mobility of many female librarians may account for this finding, though only future research could determine this with authority.

WHETHER IN A UNIVERSITY, an army, a library, or any other form of bureaucracy, the inauguration of a new head administrator frequently marks the culmination of a period of deep concern and the beginning of a time of reevaluation and redirection. The task of appointing a new leader consumes significant organizational energies, an expenditure of resources well justified by the power that leaders hold to shape the futures of their institutions. For these reasons, the issue of turnover in top administrative positions has excited keen research interest, both among social scientists interested in formal organizations in general and among academic librarians concerned with the effects of succession on their particular organizations.

The interest that administrative succession holds for social scientists can be traced to a series of seminal articles by Oscar Grusky, who noted that the twin potential of succession for constructive change or for destructive internal jealousies made succession a rewarding research topic.¹ Studies by Grusky and Kreisberg focused on the frequency of succession and indicated that frequency of succession may be positively associated with organizational size.²

Somewhat less research attention was paid to determining the conditions that affect the choice of internal or external successors, but when this secondary issue was addressed, studies by Newcomer and by Helmich and Brown suggested that larger organizations also tend to hire their top administrators from within more than do smaller organizations.³

Within the library field, the most influential contribution has been McAnally and Downs' important essay, "The Changing Role of Directors of Academic Libraries." Although McAnally and Downs' findings replicated the previously found positive relationship between organizational size and frequency of succession, their principal interest was in demonstrating that, at the time of their study and within the domain of the large academic libraries they considered, succession was occurring with shocking frequency.

They found in 1973 that the median tenure of the directors of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institutions was only three years. Sixty percent of the directors of the larger libraries in their sample and 45 percent of the directors of smaller libraries had succeeded to their positions within the previous three years. McAnally and Downs interpreted frequent succession as a consequence and sign of heavy pressures borne

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by the directors of research libraries, such as the information explosion, the pincers of growing enrollments and financial hardship, increased administrative distance from the leadership of the parent colleges and universities, and changes in management theories and in the attitudes towards administrators of library staff.⁴

Other library studies have considered various aspects of succession; for example, Louis Kaplan has recently pointed out that various individual factors may play a role in the retirement decision and has provided historical data on the frequency of early retirement among ARL directors.⁵ But McAnally and Downs' essay remains the only nearly comprehensive piece of research devoted to the topic.

While the research currently available on administrative succession in academic libraries increases our knowledge of the phenomenon, it has left some questions unanswered and others unasked. We do not, for example, know where new library directors come from or what factors shape the choice of a successor. The purpose of the present study is to illuminate further the most significant aspects of succession by addressing the questions of frequency of succession and the determinants of what kinds of successors are chosen. The study particularly deals with the factors that influence the critical choices made between insiders and external candidates to library directorships.

METHODOLOGY

The data reported here come from the author's doctoral study in sociology at the University of Michigan, "The Academic Library and Its Director in Their Institutional Environments."⁶ Most of the quantitative data come from a questionnaire that was mailed to a random sample of the directors of academic libraries in the United States in 1976.

The original sample, taken from *The American Library Directory*, included 311 academic libraries. Of these, forty-five were eliminated from the sample, principally because their libraries served more than one institution (six cases), or because other reference sources did not list the parent institutions as *bona fide* grantors of the bachelor's degree (sixteen cases), or because the

potential respondents indicated that they were simply acting directors (thirteen cases). The original mailing and one follow-up yielded 215 responses from the 266 remaining institutions for a rate of response of 80.8 percent. The data from these questionnaires were collated with reference data describing the libraries and their parent institutions.⁷

Because the reference data had been coded for all 266 eligible institutions, it was possible to compare responding and non-responding institutions in order to test for response bias. The tests revealed no significant, or nearly significant, differences between the groups in terms of size (defined as number of professional librarians on the staff), public or private sponsorship, or level (graduate or undergraduate only) of the institutions. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the data represent all American academic libraries meeting the sample criteria: those libraries that serve only one institution, whose directors hold permanent appointments, and whose parent institutions are fully accredited four-year colleges or universities.

As a supplementary source of insight, informal interviews were conducted with ten practicing library administrators and library educators, representing broad varieties of experience and perspective. Because these respondents were not selected randomly, it would be unwise to consider their comments strictly as data. Rather, the interviews should be seen as informed sources for illuminating the quantitative findings.

THE SAMPLE

Data from the various reference sources and the questionnaire itself provide a profile of the responding institutions and of their directors. The libraries that fell into the final study population employed an average of 9.9 professional librarians. The mean number of volumes in their collections was 229,000. Thirty-four percent of the parent institutions were publicly sponsored colleges and universities, and 59 percent of them offered graduate programs of some sort.

The mean enrollment of the parent institutions was 3,990 students. It should be noted that, because the data represent an

unweighted national sample, the population of responding libraries includes very few large research libraries. As a consequence, inferences from this population to the body of ARL libraries more frequently considered in the literature should be made with great caution.

A number of variables from the questionnaire provide a summary introduction to the population of responding library directors. Their average age was 47.5 years. Seventy percent were men. Twenty-one percent were in their thirties, 32 percent were in their forties, and 30 percent were between fifty and sixty years old. Not surprisingly, this general sample of academic library directors is somewhat younger, less broadly educated, and more apt to be female than the selective group of ARL directors studied by Jerry Parsons.⁸ Yet as a group, their educational preparation for their positions was impressive, as table 1 shows.

TABLE 1
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS OF ACADEMIC
LIBRARY DIRECTORS

DEGREE	PERCENT HAVING DEGREE
Fifth-year bachelor's in library science	16%
Master's in library science	84%
Master's, not in library science	33%
Ph.D. in library science or D.L.S.	8%
Ed.D. or Ph.D. not in library science	8%
Professional degree, not in library science	5%

n = 215

FINDINGS

The first conclusion supported by the data is that McAnally and Downs may have overstated the problem of high turnover in the administration of academic libraries or may have identified a problem that has abated since the troubled times in which they wrote. Whereas McAnally and Downs found that the median tenure of directors in their 1973 sample of ARL directors was only three years and suggested that the average was no more than five or six years, the median tenure of directors in the present sample was six years. The mean survival in the head administrative post was 8.1 years. Of

course, McAnally and Downs' sample was restricted to large research libraries; but even when the present analysis was restricted to the 24 libraries in the sample with 500,000 or more volumes in their collections, the average tenure of directors was 10.9 years, somewhat more than the overall mean. While the differences between the samples must make any conclusion tentative, it appears that library directorships do not change hands with their earlier frequency.⁹

The data did not provide useful explanations for variations in the frequency of succession, except to suggest that earlier sociological findings about administrative succession in formal organizations in general may not apply to academic libraries. When the tenure of head administrators in their positions was regressed on library size, public or private sponsorship, and degree-granting levels of the parent institutions, not one partial correlation exceeded .10. None was statistically significant at the .05 level. This negative finding suggests that, at least within academic libraries, it may be more profitable to explain succession on a case-by-case basis than to seek an overall explanation in any set of organizational or environmental characteristics.

The issue of whether successors should be hired from within the library or from the outside is a sensitive one and evoked responses from the interview respondents that indicated its delicacy. Most noted that hiring from within raises a number of organizational problems. The mere consideration of an internal candidate may evoke intralibrary jealousies, and the selection of an insider may indicate an excessive resistance to change. Yet the prospect of advancement to the top position may promote motivation within the library, and the appointment of an insider may foster a useful continuity of policy.¹⁰ While selection committees may not formulate explicit policies for preferring insiders or external candidates, these considerations must inevitably help to shape their attitudes toward specific candidates.

The data show that the dilemma is typically resolved in favor of external candidates. As table 2 demonstrates, internal administrative succession is relatively uncommon in academic libraries. This finding,

TABLE 2
PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT OF LIBRARY DIRECTORS PREVIOUS TO PRESENT POSITION

STATUS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Employed by present library	60	28%
Employed by another library	121	56
In nonlibrary position	14	7
Attending school	16	7
Unemployed	4	2

n = 215

which is consistent with Parsons' inferences from his sample of ARL directors, probably reflects a mixture of a conscious avoidance of internal candidates (who may be *too* well known, as several interview respondents noted) and a desire to seek new directions.¹¹

DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESSOR ORIGIN

While it is important to know how common internal succession in academic libraries may be, it is equally important to discover the circumstances that account for variation in hiring patterns. Such a causal analysis is essential to an understanding of the phenomenon. The analysis aimed at determining the circumstances that promote internal succession was first performed along traditional lines of sociological analysis, which would suggest that characteristics of the employing organization are most significant.

Contrary to earlier findings in the sociological literature, internal succession was not found to be a function of organizational size. The data revealed that, if anything, larger libraries are more likely to hire from the outside. However, as table 3 shows, this relationship was not strong and did not achieve a satisfactory level of statistical significance.

Stronger results were obtained when the professional origins of library directors were

TABLE 3
ORIGIN OF SUCCESSORS IN SMALL AND LARGE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

	Internal Successors	External Successors	Percent Internal
Smaller libraries	39	82	32.2
Larger libraries (six or more professionals)	21	73	22.3

Chi-square = 2.5

.10 < *p* < .20, one degree of freedom

TABLE 4
ORIGIN OF SUCCESSORS IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

	Internal Successors	External Successors	Percent Internal
Public institutions	11	62	15.1
Private institutions	49	93	34.5

Chi-square = 9.1

p < .01, one degree of freedom

examined in terms of the sponsorship of the parent colleges and universities. This portion of the analysis proceeded from the hypothesis that private institutions might feel fewer pressures to conduct wide-ranging searches for outside candidates. As table 4 indicates, private institutions are indeed significantly more prone to hire their library directors from within. The proportion of internal successors among library directors in private institutions is more than double that within public colleges and universities.

The interpretation of this finding was confounded by differences between the directors of academic libraries in private and publicly sponsored institutions that had been revealed elsewhere in the data. There are significant disproportions in the distribution of male and female library directors between private and public institutions. Female directors are heavily concentrated in the libraries of private institutions of higher education. As table 5 indicates, the proportion of women among the library directors of private institutions is nearly triple that among the directors of public institutions.

This interaction within the data suggested the possibility that the sex of the potential successor, rather than institutional sponsorship, might account for the origins of directors and called for the inclusion in the analysis of data on the sex of library directors. Pursuing the notion that sex, and not

TABLE 5
SEX DIFFERENCES OF DIRECTORS ACCORDING TO INSTITUTIONAL SPONSORSHIP

	Women	Men	Percent Women
Public institutions	10	62	13.9
Private institutions	55	87	38.7

Chi-square = 13.9

p < .01, one degree of freedom

TABLE 6
SEX AND SUCCESSION AMONG ACADEMIC
LIBRARY DIRECTORS

	Internal Successors	External Successors	Percent Internal
Women	34	29	54.0
Men	26	121	17.7

Chi-square = 28.4
 $p < .01$, one degree of freedom

institutional sponsorship, might be the operative variable, the relationship between the administrator's sex and succession patterns was examined. The data on sex and administrative succession confirmed the suspicion that, in fact, female directors are more apt to have been hired from the inside. As table 6 shows, women are three times as likely as men to have been hired to their directorships from within the library.

The analysis to this point suggested a number of very different possibilities. The data could be used to argue that either sex or institutional sponsorship was the operative variable and to suggest, in either case, that all other relationships were spurious. In order to determine the true relationships among all the interacting variables—institutional sponsorship, sex, and administrative origins—it was necessary to perform multivariate cross-tabulations by controlling for one variable while examining the relationship between the others.

This analysis showed that the effects of

institutional sponsorship are spurious, once sex is accounted for. Table 7 shows that the preference of private institutions for inside candidates is almost solely due to the concentration of women among successors in those institutions. That is, when the analysis is conducted separately for men and for women, the original relationship between institutional sponsorship and administrative origins virtually disappears. What is left of the relationship falls far short of statistical significance.

When the analysis is reversed, with sponsorship as the control and sex as the independent variable, the effects of sex emerge as all-important. Table 8 shows that the greater propensity of women to be hired from the inside exists in both public and private institutions. A separate analysis (not shown) indicated that the sex-succession relationship also persists with controls for library size. This finding is consistent with, and greatly extends, William Cohn's discovery that, of the four women who were hired to ARL directorships in the 1970-73 period, all had been internal candidates.¹²

The main task posed by these strong findings is to explain why women who direct academic libraries should be hired from the inside and men from the outside. The analysis that used sex as a control variable shows that it is not possible to attribute the findings to the concentration of female directors in private institutions and suggests that any explanation must involve more

TABLE 7
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP ON ORIGINS, WITH CONTROLS FOR SEX

	Women				Men		
	Internal	External	% Int.		Internal	External	% Int.
Public	4	5	44.4	Public	7	53	11.7
Private	30	24	55.6	Private	19	68	21.8

Chi-square = .38
 $p > .50$, one degree of freedom

Chi-square = 2.5
.10 < $p < .20$, one degree of freedom

TABLE 8
EFFECTS OF SEX ON ORIGINS, WITH CONTROLS FOR INSTITUTIONAL SPONSORSHIP

	Private Institutions				Public Institutions		
	Internal	External	% Int.		Internal	External	% Int.
Women	30	24	55.6	Women	4	5	44.4
Men	19	68	21.8	Men	7	53	11.7

Chi-square = 16.7
 $p < .01$, one degree of freedom

Chi-square = 6.3
 $p < .05$, one degree of freedom

than institutional characteristics.

A number of potential explanations for the internal hiring of women can be explored. Unfortunately, the data do not allow for a comparison of these *post hoc* explanations, which must be considered as new hypotheses subject to appropriate future tests. Further study of the issue of administrative origins would clearly be the only means of identifying any explanation of the findings as the correct one. Despite the tentative nature of any theory, two lines of reasoning do seem most promising as potential explanations of the phenomenon and might profitably be the basis for future research.

It may be that an external female successor is regarded as especially threatening or disruptive. The data indicate that neither women nor insiders are preferred for directorships. This hypothesis suggests an interaction between the variables of sex and external succession such that the "wrong" combination of the two, for whatever reason, is considered especially unacceptable. The traditional values that might lead academic officials to feel a particular fear of external female candidates might also lead to their seeing the female *internal* successor as especially acceptable.

Institutions that regard the library directorship in a special light—as a "safe" position for a maintainer of the status quo or as one administrative position for which a large salary need not be paid—may regard such a position as appropriate for an insider, who is not threatening and whom it requires little effort to find. The same institutions may perceive women as less ambitious and may feel that a woman hired from the inside is ideal.

The restricted geographic mobility of many women may provide an alternative explanation for the finding. Anita Schiller's research shows that as of 1967, 40 percent of female academic librarians were married and another 14 percent had been married at one time.¹³ Since men constitute the majority of the working force, a woman who has the opportunity of relocating for professional reasons is more likely than a man to be put in the position of asking an employed spouse to relocate as well. This predicament may exact financial losses and may further entail a high psychological price for many couples. If this is the case, the consequence, from the point of view of an employing library, is that if it wants an internal successor either a man or a woman may be available, but if it wants an outsider (and most do), it may find it hard to hire a woman.

Women are underrepresented in the ranks of library administrators in proportion to their numbers within the profession. The data show that the directorships they find it hardest to obtain are those that are awarded to external candidates. While the data do not allow for a comparison of the hypotheses considered here, the argument based on the employment situation of spouses seems to be the more grounded in observable realities. Clearly, further research, which includes data on marital status and other variables not measured here, will be required before the relationship between sex and administrative succession can be fully understood. The serious underrepresentation of women in administrative positions justifies the necessity for such research.

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