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# Academic Librarianship and the Redefining Scholarship Project: A Report from the Association of College and Research Libraries Task Force on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards

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# Academic Librarianship and the Redefining Scholarship Project

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*A Report from the Association of College and Research Libraries Task Force on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards  
March 1998*

## **Members of the Task Force**

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## **Introduction and Background**

**Introduction.** At the July, 1996 Annual Conference of the American Library Association, the Board of Directors of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) appointed a task force to write a formal statement defining and describing the kind of scholarship performed by academic librarians, using as a framework the taxonomy developed by Eugene Rice and elaborated by Ernest Boyer in his 1990 book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*.<sup>(1)</sup> The task force's statement, upon approval by the ACRL Board, is intended to become part of a larger movement established by Syracuse University's Center for Instructional Development, entitled the Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards project. The project, which is being funded by the Lilly Endowment, with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, is providing assistance to academic associations for the development and dissemination of definitions of scholarship for their disciplines. The definitions are intended to extend the range of activities recognized as scholarly for the purposes of tenure, promotion, merit, or reward system guidelines. The following is the report of the ACRL task force.

**Background Information.** The movement to gain faculty status for American academic librarians that began in the 19th century celebrated a major milestone when the Association of College and Research Libraries adopted the "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians" in 1971. The Standards were intended to define and describe the rights and responsibilities that ACRL believed should be exercised by librarians at American colleges and universities. However, a concern of many has been that academic librarians perform a wide range of activities that go unrecognized in promotion and tenure reviews because the activities have not fallen neatly into the traditional model of faculty performance expectations. But with a new and growing awareness in academia that the traditional model is too narrow to encompass much important faculty work in most academic disciplines, the time is right to reexamine the work for which academic librarians should be rewarded.

In "Making a Place for the New American Scholar," Eugene Rice describes Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* as having "called on faculty to move beyond the tired old 'teaching vs. research' debate . . . What moves to the foreground is the scholarly work of faculty, whether they are engaged in the advancing of knowledge in a field, integrating knowledge through the structuring of a curriculum, transforming knowledge through the challenging intellectual work involved in teaching and facilitating learning, or applying knowledge to a compelling problem in the community."<sup>(2)</sup> These four types of scholarship, which we shall call inquiry, integration, teaching, and application, provide a framework for considering how the activities of academic librarians may fit into the broader, more complete understanding of what constitutes academic work. Such a reexamination is very timely in light of

the similar efforts being carried out in the Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards project by dozens of other professional associations on behalf of their academic disciplines. The next section of this report will consider the primary activities of academic librarians as they relate to the different categories of scholarship and other faculty responsibilities. It is important to reiterate here that the following is an explanation of what librarians do that should be rewarded, classified according to the Rice/Boyer taxonomy. This document itself is not designed to be an outline of a promotion and tenure document.

## The Roles of Academic Librarianship

The roles of faculty members are usually considered to fall into three categories: teaching, scholarship, and service to the institution and profession. Efforts to place the activities of librarians into these categories have not been problematic as far as service was concerned, since academic librarians are committed to the strengthening of their profession through formal associations and other activities, while service on campus benefits the librarians as well as the institution by virtue of the librarians' participation in the planning and decision-making process. Where difficulties have been encountered are in the categories of scholarship (because of the objections described above) and teaching, where attempts to equate responsibilities such as reference, cataloging, and collection development with classroom instruction have been met with skepticism. However, by using the taxonomy of Rice and Boyer it becomes clear that while the teaching of librarians is different from that done by most other faculty, many of the primary faculty roles of librarians, roles which they perform on a daily basis and which in a promotion and tenure document for librarians are usually and appropriately found in the performance category labeled "Librarianship," are in fact scholarly in nature.

## Scholarship

As previously noted, a major proportion of the work done by librarians qualifies as scholarship.

**Inquiry.** Librarians have applied a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in advancing the discipline's knowledge base. They engage in the scholarship of inquiry in order to apply their findings to the everyday challenges of providing library services. Especially important areas of inquiry for librarians include:

- conducting citation studies;
- analyzing how people seek and use information;
- constructing means for organizing bodies of data and information, and designing methods for precise and efficient information retrieval;
- establishing methods for evaluating the effectiveness of library services and processes;
- researching the effects of environment and library practices on the "life span" of the various information media found in libraries;
- discovering the communication modes and related factors that lead to the most effective reference interview, one that has the best chance of determining any given user's precise information needs;
- preparing analytical bibliographies;
- investigating the history of the book and recorded knowledge.

**Integration.** Academic librarianship has drawn upon a wide range of other disciplines for knowledge that informs and transforms library work. The considerable extent to which academic librarians integrate knowledge from other fields makes for a highly interdisciplinary profession.

Examples of the integration of knowledge from other fields into the scholarship and practice of librarianship include:

- drawing upon learning theory in order to design effective instruction;
- employing communication theory to improve the reference interview and establish sound communication throughout the library organization;
- applying the findings of ergonomic studies to the design of space for library users and personnel that will be conducive to human work and comfort;
- protecting for future generations of scholars the library's collections from environmental and usage-imposed dangers by means of preservation techniques;
- assisting users by interpreting and analyzing the components of their information needs and helping construct efficient and comprehensive research strategies, which often requires a thorough knowledge of the literature of several disciplines;
- integrating administrative and management techniques into the operation of a complex service organization;
- advising fellow faculty about the constraints of copyright and the allowances for educational fair use of copyrighted materials in print and multimedia formats.

**Pedagogy of Teaching.** The scholarship of teaching involves developing, testing and improving pedagogical techniques for meeting library instruction objectives, and communicating to peers the results of testing the techniques.

**Application.** Academic librarianship applies the theory and knowledge gained through inquiry, integration, and pedagogical experimentation to meeting the research and learning needs of the academic community. By employing the results of the scholarship exemplified in the foregoing sections, academic librarians attempt to improve and refine their processes and programs. Many librarian activities typically reported in "Librarianship" sections of dossiers could equally well be described as the scholarship of application. For instance, descriptions of typical cataloger, bibliographer, and other similar librarian activities can benefit from using the ideas and language of Boyer and Rice.

## Teaching

The teaching that is most characteristic of academic librarianship involves instructing people in becoming "information literate" independent scholars who can find, assess and use information resources effectively. A 1987 ACRL document recommended the following general objectives for an instruction program:

- the student will understand how information is defined by experts, and recognize how that knowledge can help determine the direction of his/her search for specific information;
- the student will understand the importance of the organizational content, bibliographic structure, function, and use of information sources;
- the student will be able to identify useful information from information sources or information systems;
- the student will be able to understand the way collections of information sources are physically organized and accessed.(3)

Librarians teach users to plan and carry out search strategies appropriate to given needs, and to evaluate the extent to which various texts and databases may be considered authoritative and up to date.

Librarians teach these skills in a variety of ways; most commonly, instruction is delivered as librarians serve individuals at the reference desk or meet with classes as guest lecturers. At many institutions librarians conduct for-credit classes that last the entire academic term and teach library research skills in depth. Other effective means of teaching library skills include term paper clinics, workshops on electronic

information retrieval skills, and extended reference consultation with students, faculty and other library users. Just as with other kinds of library skill teaching, research consultation involves a considered judgment about a patron's educational background and capabilities, and an understanding of the relative intellectual merits of the library's resources.

## Service

Academic librarians are heavily involved in service to their academic institution, profession, and to the general public in the form of outreach. Service activities benefit both the librarians-increasing their ability to design and manage responsive and effective library services-and the groups to which they contribute. By participating in institutional planning and decision-making, librarians are better able to ensure that library goals, services, and collections reflect and support the institutional mission and priorities. The scope and character of library resources are essential components in delivering quality education, and institutional service enables librarians to manage those resources effectively as a result of a thorough understanding of the institution's curricular goals and requirements, teaching methods, faculty research interests, and student learning abilities and styles.

Professional and outreach service activities are the means by which librarians attempt to serve their clientele by influencing information policy development, the research into improved preservation techniques, information science research, and the development and application of information technology. This often includes identifying and collaborating with strategic partners and allies, such as national and local governments and industries and nonprofit organizations concerned with information policy and technology. Professional library organizations are also instrumental in setting standards for information organization, delivery and preservation. In outreach service, librarians apply their expertise to situations outside of the academy, and educate the lay public on issues relating to access to information.

The importance of academic librarians' service activities to the library, institution and greater community typically calls for such activities to be valued highly in performance reviews.

Service in academic librarianship includes, but is not limited to:

- Institutional service-participation in committees, councils, task forces, the faculty governance body; participation in institutional activities such as colloquia and seminars; fund raising on behalf of the institution or library.
- Professional service-serving as an officer in professional organizations; participating in committees, councils, accrediting bodies, or task forces; editing a scholarly journal; refereeing competitive paper sessions or scholarly articles submitted for publication; serving as reviewer of new publications for professional journals; reviewing grant proposals.
- Outreach service-sharing professional expertise with parties outside the institution, such as serving as a consultant; writing for lay audiences on subjects related to librarianship, intellectual freedom and censorship.

A word on the above categorizations: As other associations have found when attempting to apply the Rice/Boyer taxonomy of scholarship to their own disciplines, there can be some overlap among the various categories which results in occasional uncertainty over how a certain faculty activity ought to be classified. However, we agree with those associations that a certain degree of imprecision and fuzziness tends to be inherent in any system of categories, and this should not detract from the big picture. While individual institutions might interpret the four types of scholarships somewhat differently, the overriding principles espoused by the categories are not undermined by minor variations.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Although it is all too common that we speak as if postsecondary educational institutions were identical in their aims and goals, the fact is that the missions of some colleges and universities emphasize research much more than do other institutions. Even within this dualistic picture there are varying degrees of value placed on the different performance categories. It is therefore to be expected that reward structures will differ according to institutional missions. It is natural that departments of chemistry or philosophy at research universities might focus on developing outstanding programs of scholarly inquiry while their counterparts at liberal arts or community colleges would concentrate much more on teaching and service. However, the basic functions and responsibilities of academic librarians for ensuring high quality library services will vary much less among institutions with differing missions. In light of that, we recommend that institutions should develop reward structures for academic librarians that recognize and encourage their roles as articulated in the foregoing, whether the librarians have faculty status or not.

The reward structures and the criteria for assessing performance should be clearly documented and shared with the academic librarians. The extent to which different weights are given to each performance category should be related to the institutional mission and library goals. As an example, a land-grant university's emphasis on outreach might lead to its valuing service by the librarians to an even higher degree than service may be valued at other institutions. Similarly, some institutions will place a high value on the publication or presentation of academic librarian scholarship, while others will expect the librarians to engage in scholarship but not necessarily write for publication.

Where librarians are expected to share their scholarship through books, refereed articles, presentations, etc., it is essential that the institutions take into account the fact that librarians' work schedules too often make it difficult for them to conduct extended research: they usually must engage in non-research activity 35 to 40 hours per week, and they typically have 12 month rather than academic year contracts. On the one hand, it is critically important to both the quality of library services and to the efforts of librarians to publish their scholarship that sufficient time and resources be available to allow for scholarly writing. On the other hand, where librarians are not required to write for publication it is expected that they should show evidence of having applied continual critical professional judgment in staying abreast of and applying the latest trends and knowledge in their areas of expertise.

It should also be noted that different individuals make different kinds of contributions to the success of a program. Librarians should not necessarily have to perform in all of the possible categories; for example, a cataloger should not necessarily be expected to meet a teaching expectation, depending on the nature of the library, its mission, size, etc. Performance criteria and reward structures should enable librarians to contribute in the ways that best utilize their individual talents, which should in turn assure that the overall goals of the library are achieved.

Finally, much of the work of academic librarians is interdependent or carried out through the collaborative work of professional service, e.g., setting standards for the discipline, or influencing public policy. As Janet Swan Hill described the situation:

In librarianship, some activities may be individually attributable, but most are not. For instance, a cataloger may prepare a bibliographic record for an item, but the individual work must be absorbed successfully into the catalog, and the highest quality work stands out least. Even activities that seem to be individually attributable may not be. For example, a reference librarian who is unable to find a useful information resource may owe that inability to a bibliographer who did not request it, an acquisitions librarian who could not identify it, a cataloger who did not analyze it fully, or a system vendor who failed to resolve a programming bug.(4)

Therefore we recommend that higher education institutions seek means of recognizing and rewarding collaborative accomplishments rather than continuing to focus solely on individualistic conceptions of faculty work.

**Notes**

1. Boyer, Ernest L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
2. Rice, R. Eugene (1996). "Making a Place for the New American Scholar." American Association for Higher Education Working Paper No. 1.
3. ACRL/BIS Task Force on Model Statement of Objectives (1987). Model Statement of Objectives for Academic Bibliographic Instruction: Draft revision. *C&RL News* 48, 256-61.
4. Hill, Janet Swan (1994). "Wearing Our Own Clothes: Librarians as Faculty." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 20 (May 1994), 71-76.

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