Terms for Academic Library Directors

DANA C. ROOKS

ABSTRACT

IN 1973, ARTHUR MCANALLY AND ROBERT DOWNS authored a seminal article on the changing role of the university library director. This article takes a look at McAnally and Downs's findings twenty years later to determine whether the changes outlined in 1973 are still valid today. Additional sources of strife for university library directors are outlined and requirements for today's library directors are discussed.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

My first professional position, upon completing my library science degree, was with the University of Oklahoma. A few months after my arrival, the Director of Libraries, Arthur McAnally, appeared in my office, handed me a typewritten manuscript, and asked me to read it and give him my thoughts on it in a few days. The manuscript was a draft for an article which later appeared in *College & Research Libraries* under the title, "The Changing Role of Directors of University Libraries" (McAnally & Downs, 1973).

I was, of course, highly honored but also amazed that I had been asked to comment on his manuscript, given the fact that the libraries had many well-respected and widely published faculty at the time. Only years later did I realize what unique qualification I alone, within the University of Oklahoma Library faculty at the time, possessed. I was a newly minted graduate.

For those readers too young to remember McAnally and Downs's article or its impact on commonly held precepts of university

librarianship, the article was considered almost heretical when it appeared in 1973. My primary qualification for being selected to comment on the draft was my total lack of knowledge, biases, and preconceived ideas about the role of university library directors. My opinion provided, in effect, a blank slate upon which McAnally could test his premise.

McAnally and Downs's (1973) radical finding was that the directorship of a major university library could no longer be considered a lifetime post but was approaching an average span of five to six years (p. 103). Their investigation discovered that, among the seventy-eight university libraries holding membership in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in 1972, half had changed directorships within the past three years and four of them had changed twice (McAnally & Downs, 1973, p. 103). Publication of the McAnally and Downs article represented a major wake-up call to many university libraries and their directors. McAnally and Downs documented a trend that has not changed in the ensuing twenty years.

In a study published after the McAnally and Downs article, Jerry Parsons (1976) compared the sociodemographic characteristics of forty-two United States academic ARL directors in 1958 with the seventy-eight comparable ARL directors in 1973. His data showed that the 1958 directors had an average tenure of more than eight years, a median tenure of nine years, and a range from less than one year (two directors) to a high of twenty-six years (two directors). In comparison, the directors in 1973 had an average tenure of less than eight years, a median of five years, and a range from less than one year (eighteen directors) to a high of twenty-seven years (one director). Parsons (1976) noted that only nine directors appeared in both groups (pp. 613, 617). Parsons's (1976) conclusion: "Like college presidents, research library directors face so many diverse pressures that most incumbents may well opt for a short-term position" (p. 617).

A separate analysis covering forty years of terms for ARL directors was conducted by William Cohn (1976) and published by *College & Research Libraries* also in 1976. Cohn found that, of the seventy-four United States academic libraries that were members of the ARL in 1973, thirty-four named new directors from January 1970 to December 1973 (p. 137). Cohn found that the average tenure for all directors during the period 1934-1969 was 12.65 years compared to an average of only two years for the period 1970-1973 (p. 143).

Cohn's analysis revealed yet another interesting piece of data regarding the immediate predecessors of the 1973 incumbent directors. Between 1934 and 1969, the average tenure for the preceding director was 14.1 years, and in the 1970-73 period it was fifteen years (Cohn, 1976, p. 143). Cohn also noted that from 1934 to 1969, more of the

incumbents' predecessors left as a result of death or retirement than for teaching or to direct a different ARL or a non-ARL library (p. 143).

Ten years after the McAnally and Downs study, Wong and Zubatsky (1985) found in a 1983 study, "the average tenure period for chief administrators of both ARL and non-ARL libraries has been slowly rising since the mid-1970s" (p. 76). One explanation offered by Wong and Zubatsky for this increase was a cycle of fewer opportunities created by retirements or resignations during the 1973-1983 period studied, combined with the increasing number of two-professional households which might hinder or delay a decision to change jobs (p. 76). While Wong and Zubatsky (1985) found that nearly 76 percent of the responding ARL directors had held their positions for ten or fewer years, fifteen of the sixteen women directors fell into the ten-years-or-under group (p. 72).

In 1989, Anne Woodsworth authored an article entitled "Getting Off the Library Merry-Go-Round: McAnally and Downs Revisited." Woodsworth (1989) contends that over half of the ARL libraries changed directors in the preceding three to four years. "What McAnally and Downs described as extraordinary turnover seems to have settled into the norm" (p. 35).

Do these five historical studies prove a trend or do they offer conflicting data from a snapshot in time? Are the varying data at each time period illustrative of changes in higher education as a whole or proof of the growing complexity of research library administration? Are tenure rates of academic library directors attributable to societal or generational changes? Are these changes a result of economic trends or changes in the lifestyle demands of today's library administrators? Do changing demographics of ethnicity and gender play a role in the terms of directors of research libraries?

RE-EVALUATION OF MCANALLY AND DOWNS'S BACKGROUND FACTORS

McAnally and Downs (1973) cited twelve background factors within society and higher education which they viewed as contributing to the decreased tenure of library directors. These included:

1. growth of enrollment;
2. changes in the presidency;
3. proliferation in university management;
4. changes in the world of learning and research;
5. the information explosion;
6. hard times and inflation;

7. planning and budgeting;
8. technology;
9. changing theories of management;
10. unionization;
11. increasing control by state boards; and
12. no national system for information (pp. 104-09).

While the specifics of each factor may have changed in the ensuing twenty years, the general premise regarding the impact of each factor on the terms of library directors remains valid today.

Growth of Enrollment

Directors of libraries in the decade of the 1960s struggled with the problems resulting from unprecedented growth in student populations, increased numbers of faculty, and, as McAnally and Downs (1973) described, "a far more complicated institution" (p. 104).

Today the increased complexity still exists. Only the underlying causes have changed. Universities today are confronting serious issues of retrenchment and downsizing in the face of declining enrollments and reduced or stable funding.

Changes in the Presidency

McAnally and Downs (1973) outlined some of the growing pressures upon the university president as rising expectations, growing militancy of students and faculty, a newly critical attitude toward higher education on the part of the general public, political pressure from hostile legislators, increased power by state boards, and declining or stable financial support (p. 105).

Today these pressures remain largely unchanged. As presidents and senior university administrators come out of the faculty ranks, it is all too common for these individuals to opt to return to the faculty, after relatively brief tenures, as the pressures become excessive. Thus today's library director is all too often faced with the challenge of meeting yet a new set of expectations from yet a new president or provost. As Woodsworth (1989) so graphically states:

> There is a limit to the number of times a fresh and cheerful approach can be conjured up to educate someone who knows nothing about the complexity of managing a multi-million dollar service organization; has no conception of the external influences that affect research library operations; and has not a whit of appreciation of the rapidity of change needed in research libraries in order for them to remain responsive service organizations in the face of dramatic societal, scholarly, and technological changes. (p. 36)

The ability of the library director to establish a successful organization that responds effectively to the changing needs of faculty

and students and then to successfully convey this vision to each succeeding university administration will certainly be a determining factor in the tenure of today's academic library director.

Proliferation in University Management

The growth in management level positions in universities corresponded to the growth in the size and complexity of higher education institutions. McAnally and Downs (1973) noted the imposition of an additional layer of administrative officer between the library director and the president, thus reducing the power of the library to present its case directly to the president (p. 105).

With few exceptions, this has not changed today. In reality, the position of the library may have further diminished as the number of vice-presidents proliferate and as many library directors today find their reporting line redrawn from the president to the provost and, in some cases, to a vice-provost or assistant provost. In other instances, library directors are finding themselves even further removed from the academic decision-making forums as they find themselves reporting to computing and information technology administrators who are themselves outside the academic decision-making group. The integration of libraries and information technology divisions within higher education creates still greater pressures and demands for library directors, whether the library director administers the combined operation or is merely a component director within the newly created division.

Changes in the World of Learning and Research

As in 1973, the changes in the world of learning and research are rapid and dramatic. The fragmentation of traditional disciplines, the rise of interdisciplinary studies, and the demands for relevance documented by McAnally and Downs (1989, pp. 105-06) have only accelerated twenty years later.

Responding to the unprecedented changes in the world of scholarly communication brought about by technology today has become the number one challenge for library directors and a key factor in measuring the success of an academic library and ultimately its director.

The Information Explosion

In their 1973 article, McAnally and Downs cited a 1945 Vannevar Bush quote: "Professionally our methods of transmitting and reviewing the results of research are generations old and by now totally inadequate," and then stated, "No significant changes have occurred since Bush's statement" (p. 106).

If McAnally and Downs saw this inadequacy as a problem, one wonders how to characterize today's developments within libraries. The Internet, electronic journals, subject-oriented listservs, CD-ROM networks, and the future potential of the National Research and Education Network (NREN) are all major issues confronting academic library directors today. What will be the role of the library in these developments? How will the balance between traditional print collections and electronic resources be maintained? What are the implications for preservation needs, intellectual property rights, and scholarly and commercial publishing? How will libraries resolve ownership versus access issues? Today's library director must successfully resolve these highly complex issues, many with national level involvement, within their own institutions to the satisfaction of competing and diverse internal constituencies.

Hard Times and Inflation

In 1973, McAnally and Downs stated with undisguised horror: "Budgets have actually been cut, or the rate of increase slowed drastically" (p. 107). Today library directors justifiably view this period as "the good ol' days." Double-digit inflation, spiraling serial prices, and annual budget reductions or give-backs are seemingly a fact of life within most academic libraries. The universal view of the library as the heart of the university deserving of increased institutional funding on an annual basis has succumbed to the intense competition for increased support from a decreasing funding base across the university.

The library can no longer be viewed as a black hole into which more and more institutional funds are sunk. Library directors today are expected to be effective managers who administer cost-effective, highly efficient, and productive operations which yield high returns on investment. While this concept would have been heresy in earlier times, it is a reality today that will be yet another measure of the success and therefore, tenure of a library director.

Similarly in these hard times, library directors are increasingly being judged on their skills as fund-raisers. As institutional funding becomes increasingly inadequate to meet increasing demands, the library director will be expected to identify alternative sources of funding to pay the high costs for traditional library programs such as special collections and preservation as well as new initiatives in the areas of developing technologies.

Planning and Budgeting

Reassessment, restructuring, and reallocation have become the three R's of higher education today. The pressure for the library to do quality planning and highly analytical budgeting has increased

significantly. The library is, of course, a point of high visibility within the university. It frequently is the single largest budgetary unit on the campus. Typically, its materials and operating budgets are viewed with unabashed envy by deans and department chairs with little discretionary funding outside designated faculty and staff salary lines. An effective plan, widely disseminated within the university community, with a closely-related budget structure and visible results or products is becoming a mandate among library directors who wish to hold their own in the budget competition.

Technology

In 1973, McAnally and Downs stated in regard to technology: "Perhaps everyone, including librarians, had over-optimistic expectations" (p. 107). Today, while the expectations of librarians, and of our patrons, are still optimistic, reality is rapidly approaching and, in many instances, overtaking our expectations. The impact of technology on libraries today cannot be overstated.

The library director of 1994 faces a myriad of options in applying technology to the basic operations and services of the research library. The complexity of the solutions encompass issues of cost, expertise, currency, standards, and sheer capacity of the library to deal with the dynamism of technology today. The major stress point related to technology for a director today is the exponential growth in the pace of change—a pace that shows no inclination toward slowing.

It may be that the complexity and rapidity of change that results from the new library technologies will be the most prominent factors in hastening the departure of the current generation of library directors who will be replaced by the so-called Nintendo generation.

Changing Theories of Management

The collaborative theories of management heralded a new beginning in 1973. Twenty years later the participatory approach to management is espoused widely and adhered to infrequently. Despite new theories of total quality management and continuous improvement, which also advocate full participation and shared responsibility, it is still the manager at the top of the library organization who determines the tenor of the organization and ultimately assumes responsibility for its success or failure.

The value of participatory management in libraries, however, was significant in 1973, and it remains so today. As in 1973, a cornerstone of managerial success is the ability to fully utilize the diversity and talents of library staff at all levels to achieve identified goals, to compete for funding, and to build alliances within the community.

Unionization

While unionization has not progressed at the "revolutionary pace" predicted by McAnally and Downs (1973, p. 108), many of the principles which fostered the union movement in 1973 are still present in universities today. While the importance of many of these factors declined in the 1980s, the changing social values and declining economy of the 1990s are bringing unionization efforts back to the forefront today. Job insecurity, wage and benefit issues, along with a growing demand for shared governance and disillusionment with the status quo and current administrations are again raising the specter of increased unionization of higher education. As McAnally and Downs (1973) state: "Unionization is one form of participation in management" (p. 108).

Increasing Control by State Boards

"State boards of regents for higher education are becoming increasingly powerful and exerting more and more control over state-supported institutions" (McAnally & Downs, 1973, p. 108). This statement is truer today than twenty years ago. Increased demands by the public for accountability for its tax dollars are leading state legislators to empower such boards to enforce statewide master plans for the growth of higher education and more budgetary controls through performance measures or other techniques. The historical independence of higher education has given way to state board authority over academic programs, degrees, and other educational activities, as well as administrative functions such as accounting procedures, benefits administration, and even formula-based library funding.

No National System for Information

The failure to achieve an effective national system for the sharing of information was the final problem for libraries identified by McAnally and Downs (1973, p. 109). Only in recent years has this critical issue begun to be addressed through a major national effort. While McAnally and Downs (1973) acknowledged such efforts as interlibrary loan, cooperative acquisitions plans, union lists and catalogs, and the Center for Research Libraries, they also recognized that these efforts were too little and too ineffective (p. 109).

Current efforts, such as the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI), are only today beginning to address this final factor. Interestingly, McAnally and Downs (1973) identified the required components necessary to correct this deficiency when they stated:

> many agencies ought to be helping to solve the problem: the
> various professional associations in different subjects, publishers
> of books and journals, computer and information specialists,
> foundations, and last, but not least, the federal government.

> Information is a resource of national importance; certainly the
> center of an effective system will be enormous in size and
> complexity. (p. 109)

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF STRIFE

While McAnally and Downs identified twelve background factors
contributing to the turnover in directorships, there are other
fundamental sources of strife confronting academic library directors
today. Some are societal and thus not unique to higher education
or libraries. These include:

- Economic pressures
- Lifestyle changes
- Ethnic and gender influences
- The pervasiveness of technology

Economic Pressures

Economic pressures of two-income households, corporate
downsizing, escalating health-care costs, and other socioeconomic
trends of the 1990s cannot be ignored by libraries or dismissed as
not relevant for the organization and operation of the research library.
Such trends affect the staff of the library as well as its primary client
base. Increased economic pressures also impact potential funding
sources both public and private.

Lifestyle Changes

Quality of life has become a common concern throughout society.
The perception of a career and its role within one's life has changed
dramatically in recent decades. The concept of loyalty to an employer
in return for lifetime employment has effectively disappeared. Many
individuals change not just jobs but entire careers several times during
a lifetime.

This societal trend also impacts academic libraries from the
individuals they hire—who may have extremely diverse work
experiences—to the patrons they serve—who may be retraining for
yet another career change and who have highly formulated and unique
service needs and demands.

The influence of today's lifestyle changes incorporates the needs
of the working single parent as employee and as user. It encompasses
the older returning or second-career employee or user. It also includes
the individual in the commuter or marriage relationship as well as
the employee who works to support his or her true passion—whether
it be acting, writing, or competitive bodybuilding. Each of these
individuals can make a major and valuable contribution to an

organization, but each demands skilled and flexible management of resources to yield maximum benefit to both the individual and the organization.

Ethnic and Gender Influences

Twenty years ago the world of research library directors reflected the world of most major management positions, both public and private—directors were male and Caucasian. The rise of women and ethnic minorities into positions of influence within research libraries and higher education has also created additional sources of strife for today's library director. These pressures range from the need to identify, mentor, and promote women and ethnic minorities to the different and changing needs and values of these individuals. The inclusion of women and ethnic minorities into positions of influence has changed, and will continue to change, the way in which organizations are managed.

The Pervasiveness of Technology

Today's entering college freshmen are of the age of technology. They are the so-called Nintendo generation. They never knew life without a video game much less a television. They prefer the ATM to a teller behind a bank counter. They researched their first term paper on a CD-ROM encyclopedia or through a special interest bulletin board using their Compuserve account. They do not just demand access to technology, they expect it as a fact of life. They will always want more technology than the library is currently providing, and they will always know more about what is technologically feasible than the librarian does. Meeting these demands will become one of the largest sources of strife for the academic library director.

BROADENING REQUIREMENTS FOR DIRECTORS

As the demands of library directors increase, so must the range of skills and abilities required of the successful director. Some of the most significant of these include:

- Management skills
- Technical skills
- Communication skills
- Human Relations skills
- Fund-Raising skills
- Legal skills

Management Skills

The quaint concept of the research library director as gentleman scholar is defunct. Research libraries are highly complex organizations

more comparable to many medium size businesses. With multimillion dollar budgets, employees numbering in the hundreds, and assets in the hundreds of millions, libraries must demand and receive management by highly skilled administrators. As CEO of the library organization, the library director is expected to be master of all skills from planning to budgeting, from organization to staffing, and from controlling to reporting. The success of library directors today depends much more upon their management skills than their breadth of library knowledge.

Technical Skills

Library directors are often the most technologically obsolete staff within the library. Yet they are called upon to convey the library's technology needs to university administrators, constituents, and donors. They must concern themselves with issues of connectivity, electronic publishing, networks, and information access policies. They must participate as informed leaders on the national level in the design and implementation of the so-called information superhighway. Research library directors today must be versed in a full range of technical issues from national policy issues to hardware and software development.

Communication Skills

The ability and the opportunity of the library director to effectively communicate the goals and the needs of the library to library staff, teaching faculty, the students, university administrators, and external constituencies will play a major role in the continuing success of the director. Today's research library directors must be capable communicators who are welcomed by the diverse and often competing constituencies to address and respond to their individual needs. The director must be skilled at presenting the case for the library's interest and needs persuasively in each environment. Library directors must be leaders who can communicate a vision for the future of information access which is responsive both to current and future needs and realities.

Human Relations Skills

McAnally and Downs (1973) identified five different groups that exert pressure on the director: the president's office, the library staff, the faculty, students, and, in publicly supported universities, state boards of control (p. 110). The human relations skills of the director in interacting with each of these groups will oftentimes determine the perceptions and thus the success of the library director. The deterioration of these relationships, especially with two or more groups simultaneously, is arguably the most frequent cause of turnover at the director level.

Fund-Raising Skills

As institutional funding becomes increasingly inadequate to meet escalating costs of traditional services, much less new initiatives in the area of electronic information services, it is becoming incumbent upon the library director to increase funding from alternative sources. It is rare to see an announcement for a library director vacancy that does not include successful experience in fund-raising as a major criterion.

While library directors have traditionally sought external funding for specialized collections of rare book and manuscript materials, library directors today are expected to engage in fund-raising for any collections or services beyond the most basic.

Unlike departmental deans, the library director does not have a ready-made constituency of alumni to turn to for donations. There is no relevant industry with self-interests in supporting the library. The library director must identify foundations and donors, who frequently have no knowledge or understanding of library operations and services, and convince them of the value of supporting the needs of the library.

The success of the library director in fund-raising will often spell the difference between a caretaker status-quo operation and a progressive forward-looking library offering quality services to its patrons.

Legal Skills

Today's complex library environment frequently calls for a library director to also have the skills of a trained lawyer. From the maze of employment issues to intellectual property rights, from negotiating contracts to translating license agreements, the library director is responsible for making decisions on a daily basis that have legal implications for the university, the library, and often the director. The stresses of a protracted lawsuit, whether over employment or copyright issues, cannot be overstated and the potential for such may be the primary emphasis on too many administrative decision-making processes today.

REALITY VERSUS PERCEPTIONS

So what is the reality versus perception of the job of academic library directors today and the success of these individuals in retaining their positions? Are today's library directors still traditional book lovers or have they all become business managers? They are both. To be successful, academic library directors must have a love and an understanding of the printed word. However, they must also have acquired the skills of an effective and capable business manager.

Academic research libraries are still in the business of acquiring, preserving, and disseminating the world's knowledge. However, while this premise has not changed, the implementation of this mission has changed dramatically and will continue to change at a rapid pace. McAnally and Downs wrote in 1973, "the director's office now operates in a condition of constant change, intense pressures, and great complexity. These factors are of crucial importance to the director personally, demanding the highest administrative abilities as well as durability, flexibility, and determination (p. 114).

A second issue in the turnover of academic library directors is the value of long-term stability versus change. McAnally and Downs found the average terms of the library director and the university president to be five to six years (McAnally & Downs, 1973, pp. 103, 105). Stability within the directorship allows for leadership on a national level to solve national problems. It permits the development of solid relationships within the university community and it achieves continuity within the library itself. The mandate for change from the outside, through the appointment of a new director, occurs when the current director does not or will not recognize that change is continuous and is not receptive to such an evolutionary process. "Either he adapts to new ways, or another person will be brought in who has the qualities needed in the new era" (McAnally & Downs, 1973, p. 114). There is value in stability but only if necessary change is encouraged and allowed to occur. Stagnation, in the name of stability, is a negative for the director, the library, and the university.

THE RESULTS

As the job of academic library directors becomes increasingly difficult and demanding and the terms of such appointments become increasingly shorter, what is the impact on current and future directors and on the library and the institution?

Current and Future Directors

One has to question whether the best and the brightest of the profession will continue to seek the position of director given the difficulties and pressures of the position. While this may deter some individuals, the directorship will, in fact, continue to be viewed as a desirable, however challenging, position by most.

What must be addressed is "What steps can be taken by individuals and institutions to ensure that the best and brightest middle managers do not get tired, do not burn out, do not see themselves in dead-end jobs, and do not seek escape from their institution and/or profession" (Woodsworth, 1989, p. 38)?

The Library and the Institution

The result of excessive turnover in the directorship for the library and the institution is the absence of a cohesive vision and the lack of effective leadership for a major component of the university. Feelings of uncertainty among library staff, the loss of established relationships with faculty, the perception of a troubled library organization by former and potential donors, and a seemingly unending search process in the view of university administrators can all result from frequent turnover in the position of library director.

New directors can establish new visions, effect new directions, and create new allegiances within the university community. However, excessive turnover unquestionably impacts the library's role within the institution, the status of the director within and outside the library, the library's planning process, and most certainly its fundraising and development efforts, all of which take time and attention.

Options and Alternatives

One option to the uncertainty of the library director's length of tenure is term appointments. Appointments for a fixed term, perhaps five or even ten years with the option of extension or renewal, offer an orderly process for planning and structuring a change in administration.

Institutional appointment options should also be explored so that library directors, voluntarily or involuntarily, may step down from the demands of the directorship without threatening their economic livelihood or damaging their careers. Academic deans, provosts, and presidents return to their teaching departments with plaudits for their years of service as dean and with no stigma to their careers for their decision. Academic library directors need a similar option. Career options to enter the academic administrative path should be openly discussed and pursued by the library director with senior university administrators. As Woodsworth (1989) states: "There is scant evidence to suggest that even the brightest and the best can survive twenty or thirty years as a dynamic library director given the current tempo and demands of the job" (p. 38).

CONCLUSION

The position of director of a major research library is indeed becoming more demanding. McAnally and Downs (1973) identified three major qualities required of a director of libraries:

1. Flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to accept change as a way of life.
2. A stable and equable temperament and the ability to maintain an emotional balance under constant tensions.

3. Endurance (p. 122).

Certainly these qualities have only increased in value in the twenty years since McAnally and Downs first espoused them.

　　While the pressures have increased, the job of academic library director is still manageable, and it is still desirable. It may never return to the status of lifetime appointment and that may indeed be a positive for all concerned. It must, however, stabilize at some reasonable term of appointment for the good of the individual, the library, and the institution.

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