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## Jumping into the New Waters of Librarian Promotion and Appointment: How We Dove in and Survived

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Bridget Euliano and Carmel Yurochko, "Jumping into the New Waters of Librarian Promotion and Appointment: How We Dove in and Survived" (2010). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314846>

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## **JUMPING INTO THE NEW WATERS OF LIBRARIAN PROMOTION AND APPOINTMENT: HOW WE DOVE IN AND SURVIVED**

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### **ABSTRACT**

At Duquesne University, librarians have non-tenure track faculty status and were asked to develop a system of academic rank for themselves similar to that of tenure track faculty. After much discussion and debate, the Gumberg Library at Duquesne University approved a system for Librarian Promotion and Appointment in 2008. Librarians initially had five years to apply for promotion and all librarians were required to reach at least the level of Librarian II within that time. Not much progress was made in the first year of this endeavor. In order to encourage librarians to jump into the pool with both feet, the Expedited Process was born.

The Expedited Process would enable librarians to submit professional portfolios without traditional peer review. This seemed to allay some hesitancy about traditional peer review while still keeping some form of peer review in the process. After considering the Expedited Process, most of the librarians decided to dive right in.

In this session, two librarians from Gumberg Library share their experiences of going through the Expedited Process. Both librarians have less than ten years of professional experience yet are at very different stages in their careers. Both librarians are in technical services and work closely together on electronic resources. One of them is a newlywed and the other is a grandmother. They offered each other support and guidance while navigating through the new waters of Librarian Promotion and Appointment.

Does your institution have a system for librarian promotion and appointment already in place? Or is your institution considering a system like this? Come and find out the lessons we learned from this process. This was a major change for our organization as it would be for any organization. We'll examine how this change affected the library faculty as a whole and two librarians in particular.

## **JUMPING INTO THE NEW WATERS OF LIBRARIAN PROMOTION AND APPOINTMENT: HOW WE DOVE IN AND SURVIVED**

At Duquesne University, librarians have non-tenure track faculty status and were asked to develop a system of academic rank for themselves similar to that of tenure track faculty. After much discussion and debate, the Gumberg Library at Duquesne University approved a system for Librarian Promotion and Appointment in 2008. This presentation shows how the organization developed and implemented such a system and how two individual librarians navigated these new waters.

Duquesne University is a private, Catholic university located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It has approximately 10,000 students. Gumberg Library serves all ten schools at Duquesne University. The library is staffed by thirteen full-time librarians not including the University Librarian.

In 2002, a new University Librarian was hired. After familiarizing herself with the organizational structure, she realized that all librarians held the same rank of "Librarian," which made us a very flat organization. There was no room to advance and no room to hire a new librarian in at a higher level. She began talking to the librarians about developing what she called a "tiered system" for librarian promotion and appointment. In order to be promoted in this system, a librarian would submit a professional portfolio which would be subject to peer review.

Understandably, this started to create some small waves which led to considerable discussion. These discussions mostly took place during meetings of the Library Faculty Committee which is comprised of all full-time librarians at Gumberg Library. Questions started to arise. What did this mean? How would this affect us?

Librarians were all hired under "the old system." There was never any expectation that they would have to develop and submit documentation of their professional activities and accomplishments. The librarians had some questions and concerns. How does an organization create a system like this from scratch? Why should we do this? Will we be reviewed fairly? Who will review us? Is there any money attached to promotion? We felt we were in the deep end of the pool.

In 2002, a task force was charged to develop documentation for a tenure-like process for librarian promotion and appointment. The task force developed, produced, and presented a document outlining a process in 2004. The first document contained very broad guidelines for requirements of each level of "librarian." A librarian at each level is expected to make contributions in the areas of Librarianship, Scholarship and Service. While some were comfortable with the general guidelines, others wanted specifics as to what documentation was required of them and how their achievements fit into the three categories.

Librarians held positions with different responsibilities that required different types of work. Some librarians were involved in teaching while others were not. Some librarians had budgetary and supervisory responsibilities while others did not. How could the guidelines be broad enough to fit the diversity of our work while being specific enough for us to understand the expectations? After much debate, it was decided that a revision was needed.

In 2005, a second task force was created to revise the document. Discussion and debate continued. In 2007, a third and final task force convened. In November 2007, the University Librarian reminded the library faculty that developing a system of academic rank was part of the library's strategic plan. She encouraged us to move forward assuring us that this was a living document. We would learn from this process but we had to *start* the process. Our tier process was implemented January 1, 2008. According to the guidelines, we had five years to apply for promotion. There was also no guarantee of a salary increase. We finally had a process but very little action was taken in a year-and-a-half.

We were on the shore but no one wanted to dip their toes into the water. We needed a lifeboat. That lifeboat became known as the Expedited Process. In looking at how other libraries initiated similar tiered systems, the library faculty became aware of a process that helped jump start a new system for promotion and appointment. For us, it seemed that a key deterrent to getting in the water was traditional peer review. Some librarians had worked together as colleagues for fifteen or twenty years. Perhaps one of the reasons the earlier process did not move forward was that some felt that peer review was a little daunting. To overcome this, an expedited process option would try to incorporate some positive aspects of peer review without the perceived negative aspects. The University Librarian offered such an option for the library

faculty at the Gumberg Library. The Expedited Process became a safe vehicle from which to get into the water.

The Expedited Process would apply to full-time librarians hired prior to January 1, 2008. In this process, our portfolios would be reviewed only by the University Librarian and the Provost. To incorporate the positive aspects of peer review, those seeking promotion via the Expedited Process would hold meetings in which librarians could share their portfolios if they wanted to. They could also ask each other questions about developing CVs or documenting their accomplishments. This would all be in an effort to make this a positive and encouraging experience.

The time had now come for each librarian to make a decision. Do I stay on shore and think about it for three-and-a-half more years? Or, do I jump into the lifeboat and try to do this? What did the librarians decide to do? All of the librarians except for one decided to get on board. We will now take a look at how two librarians in particular, Bridget Euliano and Carmel Yurochko, decided to jump into the boat – for different reasons.

Bridget was promoted from a Librarian I to a Librarian II at the university library she worked at prior to coming to Duquesne. She was now faced with having to go through a similar process again. When she was hired at Duquesne, she knew the library was working on implementing a tier system but it was not in place when she was hired. If the system had been in place, she most likely would have been hired in at a Librarian II. Bridget would have had to submit a portfolio either now (as part of the Expedited Process) or within the next three-and-a-half years and be subject to traditional peer review. Bridget decided there is no time like the present and got in the boat.

While Bridget had no choice, Carmel had a choice. Even though Bridget and Carmel earned their MLS degrees within a year of each other (2003 and 2002 respectively), Carmel had worked at Gumberg Library in various capacities since 1985. In 2008 when the tier process was first approved, everyone had until 2013 to apply for promotion. Carmel quickly did the “retirement math.” Why would she consider doing this when it might be a moot point and there was no guarantee of a salary increase? Carmel considered requesting to be exempt from the process.

Looking beyond her particular situation, Carmel saw how establishing the tier system would ultimately be good for the library as a whole. Bridget’s situation was an example of how beneficial it would be if newly hired librarians could be placed at a level appropriate to their professional experience. By being part of establishing this new system, Carmel could help make that a reality for future librarians. Carmel also thought this would benefit the library in attracting qualified candidates with experience. For Carmel, the Expedited Process made the idea of submitting a portfolio more palatable.

Once Bridget and Carmel both decided to participate in the Expedited Process, they helped each other in different ways. Since Bridget had already gone through a similar process, she made her previous portfolio available to Carmel so she could get formatting and organizational ideas. For Bridget, the Librarianship section of the portfolio was new to her. Carmel tried her hand at distilling years of work into key innovative processes and achievements. Bridget found Carmel’s approach to this section beneficial as she put her own portfolio together. Bridget and Carmel submitted their portfolios before the April 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

The portfolios were reviewed by the University Librarian and the Provost. All librarians who applied for promotion via the Expedited Process were successfully promoted effective July 1, 2010. In total, ten librarians received promotions. Eight librarians were promoted to Librarian II and two librarians were promoted to Librarian III.

While the outcome of this process was a successful one, there were some lessons learned along the way. When our portfolios were sent to the Provost, it was recommended that we use the same University Candidate Recommendation Form that tenure track faculty use. We realized that the terminology in our documentation is different than the terminology used on the form. For example, our Expedited Process guidelines referenced “effective” and “ineffective” while the University Candidate Recommendation Form adds “excellent” as a third evaluative category. The Library Faculty Committee has agreed that our guidelines will be revised to more closely match those categories.

Going through the Expedited Process has also made us more aware of the importance of providing service opportunities to those who will be going up for review in the future. There is now a concerted effort to make sure that university service opportunities are more widely available instead of having just a few librarians serve for long periods of time on the same committees. We are actively seeking out new avenues of engagement at the university level – in areas where we can be of service and effectively partner with our faculty colleagues.

We now have the structure in place to hire new librarians at a level that is commensurate with their experience and the position for which they are being hired. In our recruitment, we can clearly delineate expectations for each position based on the amount of experience desired. In fact, the library has recently advertised for a Librarian I position.

It was challenging to usher in a new structure but we now find ourselves more in line with other academic libraries and have the opportunity to apply for in-rank promotions. Librarians seeking promotion in the future have the benefit of knowing that these waters have been successfully navigated and may feel more comfortable going through the process. They have a template to follow and while it may need revision from time-to-time, they do not have to create a system from the ground up. The development of this process was not easy or quick, but in the end it was worthwhile, and it has placed the library in a stronger position for the recruitment and retention of librarians.