Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Typology of Librarian Status Created for U.S. Land Grant Universities is Applicable to U.S. Research Libraries

A Review of:
Bolin, Mary K. "Librarian Status at U.S. Research Universities: Extending the Typology." Journal of Academic Librarianship 34.5 (August 2008): 416-24.

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Abstract

Objective – To describe and categorize the status of librarians at 119 American research libraries using a typology of librarian status first developed for 50 U.S. land grant universities.

Design – Survey.

Setting – U.S. research universities.

Subjects – 119 American research universities. Included are those universities whose library is a member of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), in addition to land grant universities who are not also ARL members, and any flagship state universities who are neither ARL nor land grant universities. All subjects are classified as either "research – very high" or "research – high" in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The 119 institutions represent a total census of the selected population.

Methods – The websites of the 119 institutions were surveyed and data on institutional characteristics such as governance, size and geography collected. Additionally, data describing librarian status characteristics such as administrator title, rank systems and tenure status was gathered from sources such as promotion and tenure documentation, faculty handbooks, and policy manuals available on websites. Data was compiled on a spreadsheet and imported into SPSS which was used to create frequencies and cross tabulations. Data was categorised and cross-tabulated using a typology of status originally applied to 50 land grant universities in a previous study. The typology comprises four possible status types for librarians:

Type 1 – Faculty: Professorial ranks.
Type 2 – Faculty: Other ranks with tenure.
Type 3 – Faculty: Other ranks without tenure.
Type 4 – Non-faculty: Professional or academic staff.

Main Results – In the 119 institutions surveyed, librarians held faculty status at 74 (62%) institutions, of which 63 (51%) provided tenure track positions. At the remaining 45 (38%) institutions, librarians were considered non-faculty.

Of the 50 "land grant" institutions in the population, 40 (80%) had librarians with faculty status and 35 (70%) provided tenure track. Ten universities (20%) considered librarians non-faculty.

Of the 97 ARL libraries in the population, 55 (57%) had librarians with faculty status and 44 (45%) provided tenure track. Non-faculty librarians were found at 42 (43%) of these institutions.

Of the 90 public institutions in the population, 68 (76%) had librarians who were faculty, 57 (64%) provided tenure track, and 22 (24%) had non-faculty librarians.

Among the 29 private institutions the status ratios were reversed with only 4 (13%) institutions having librarians ranked as tenure track faculty (type 1 or type 2) and 23 (80%) having non-faculty librarians.

In the total population (119) type 3 "Faculty: Other ranks without tenure" was the least common category, 48% (57) of libraries were headed by a dean, 67% (80) of institutions had librarian representation on faculty senate and as the size of an institution increased the likelihood of librarians having faculty rank decreased. "Dean" was the most popular administrator title in the population; it correlated with professorial rank and was strongly associated with tenure. Having tenure was, in turn, strongly associated with faculty senate representation. In the Northeast census region type 4, non-faculty staff predominated while type 1 was rare; in the Midwest there was an almost even split between type 1 and type 4; in the South there was a fairly even spread across all four types, and in the West a fairly even spread across types 1, 2 and 4.

Finally, the data showed that as the size of an institution increased, the likelihood of librarians having faculty rank decreased.

Conclusion – The typology created for land grant universities can be extended and applied to a wider population. It is valid and reliable both for organizing information about librarian status and for comparing institutions and population segments.

Commentary

Reading Bolin's original paper on the application of the typology created for 50 US land grant institutions is essential to put this paper on extending the typology into context**.**

Reading Bolin's original paper on the application of the typology created for 50 U.S. land grant institutions is essential to put this paper on extending the typology into context. This study will be of interest primarily to academic librarians in the U.S. One of the many interesting results is that U.S. librarians at private institutions included in the population have markedly different status from those at public institutions, as measured by the characteristics identified in the study.

The paper is generally well written and the presentation of data is clear. The literature review clearly places the study within the framework of the long-running and ongoing debate on the role and status of academic librarians in the US. The explanations of prototype theory and linguistics adequately explain the decisions behind the typology created. Limitations to the study are articulated and further research areas are identified.

While Bolin is clear about the inclusion of subjects within the population and includes details of the 119 universities in the appendix, the Carnegie Classification lists 199 institutions designated as "research – very high" or "research – high" and the number of "land grant" universities varies depending on which cohort of "land grants" is selected, 1862, 1890 or 1994. This means it is unclear which institutions have been excluded, whether there was any reason for this, (for example, Stanford University and Tufts University were not found in the list of institutions studied), and whether it would make a difference. Furthermore, the methodology for reviewing data on web sites could have been described in more detail and the exact source of all supplementary data provided.

The typology is not applicable in countries where the terms "faculty" or "tenure" have little or no association with academic librarians. However, those interested in the role and status of academic librarians elsewhere could consider using the Bolin's methodology to generate a locally relevant typology.

Works Cited

Mary K. Bolin, "A Typology of Librarian Status at Land Grant Universities." Journal of Academic Librarianship 34.3 (May 2008):220–30.