



Evidence Summary

Perceptions from Library School Faculty on Meaningful Matters to Academic Librarians: Additional Degrees, Sabbaticals, Evaluation, and Governance

A Review of:

Wyss, P. A. (2010). Library school faculty member perceptions regarding faculty status for academic librarians. *College & Research Libraries*, 71(4), 375-388.

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Abstract

Objective – To survey the faculty members of American Library Association (ALA)-accredited library schools to gain insight into their perceptions on academic librarians obtaining faculty status and how the library school curricula prepare academic librarians for faculty roles.

Design – Survey questionnaire.

Setting – An e-survey was distributed online to 57 ALA-accredited library schools during April 2007, using Zoomerang.

Subjects – The population consisted of 906 tenure-track or tenured faculty members.

Methods – The 24 item survey was designed to answer eight specific research questions and evoke responses scored on a five-point Likert scale that corresponded to (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. For the analysis of data in questions 1 and 3 through 8, the perceptions of faculty members of ALA-accredited library schools were determined by calculating the mean and standard deviation. For the analysis of question 2 a *t* test was used to determine differences in faculty members' perceptions based on gender and tenure. A one-way analysis of variance, or ANOVA, was used to determine library school faculty members' perceptions based on academic rank.

Main Results – A total of 906 individuals were sent the link to the survey, and 187 individuals completed the survey, making the response rate 20.6%. Of the respondents, 38.5% were professors, 25.7% were associate professors, 33.7% were assistant professors, and 2.1% were lecturers. The majority of respondents were female (60.0%) and tenured (65.0%).

Faculty members of the ALA-accredited library schools agreed that courses in statistical concepts, procedures, and research (both experimental and non-experimental) should be required of those seeking a master's or doctoral degree. They agreed that the Master of Library Science (MLS) degree is insufficient in preparing librarians for faculty status, and that additional graduate degrees improve performance of academic librarians in discipline-specific positions.

Conclusion – It is clear that library school faculty have a strong interest in the curriculum and the future directions of librarianship. It is also clear that faculty status for academic librarians, equivalent to that of teaching faculty, will remain a contentious issue for some time. The author had five recommendations for practice: Librarians who want a faculty-status position should earn another graduate degree, in addition to the MLS; ALA-accredited library schools should require that PhD and masters students have courses in experimental and non-experimental research; ALA-accredited library schools should require that PhD and masters students have courses introducing statistics; Librarians with faculty status should be involved in university governance as well as library governance; and, Librarians with faculty status should be eligible for the same sabbatical and research leaves as other faculty.

There are three recommendations for further study identified by the author. First is a qualitative study to identify the reasons behind the perceptions that faculty members have of the issues that surround faculty status for academic librarians. Second is a qualitative study to assess how faculty status affects the lives of academic librarians, both personally

and professionally. Lastly, additional research should be conducted to gain a greater understanding of how faculty status impacts academic librarians within the institutions they are a part of.

Commentary

Overall, this study is well written, provides a comprehensive review of the literature, and will be of interest to all individuals within the field of librarianship. Below are a few caveats to keep in mind.

The most interesting finding within this study was that there was no consensus among faculty on the MLS as a terminal degree. The viewpoint from the ALA is that a "master's degree in library science from a library school program accredited by the ALA is the appropriate terminal professional degree" for academic librarians (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007). The author believes this to be troublesome. He states "if there is no agreement among library school faculty on whether the MLS is a terminal degree, how can there be consensus in the profession of librarianship or in academia?" (p. 382). In the *Recommendations for Practice* section, the author notes that to be considered for a position with faculty status in a particular subject area, an additional graduate degree may be necessary. Before pursuing the second degree a professional should be certain of his or her end goal.

The author does not mention that at least seven of the ALA-accredited programs are within Canadian institutions of higher education, and all Canadian schools require research methods in their MLS programs, which may have an impact on the findings. It should also be noted that the author describes "schools" as accredited by ALA, but ALA does not accredit "schools" – rather, only those master's programs that are submitted by the schools for accreditation review.

The author neglected to mention the disconnect between faculty perceptions of the

need for research methods in MLS programs and ALA's explicit requirements for research training (ALA Accreditation Standards; ALA's Core Competencies of Librarianship, 2009). If ALA requires research training for accreditation, one wonders why the Association is accrediting programs that do not include it. The review could have pointed out that about half of all American programs now accredited by ALA do not require an introductory research methods course in the MLS programs.

The author presents selected demographics of survey respondents (gender, status of tenure, and rank), but neglects to address the question of how closely the responses correspond to the original population of faculty members. Data about faculty as a population are readily available through the annual reports of all ALA-accredited programs, published by the Association for Library and Information Science Education.

The author reports that a link to the survey was sent to 906 individuals, with 187 respondents, equaling a response rate of 20.6%. Even though a follow-up e-mail was sent to the survey population, the response rate was low. The low response rate does not invalidate the conclusions of this study, but it does put into question whether any major conclusions can be drawn from the findings. It should also be noted that the author did not mention this limitation himself. Limitations are a standard component of research reporting and should be included in a separate section on study limitations.

The author used a five-point Likert scale and his own interpretations of consensus and

variability by reporting the mean and standard deviations of the responses. The interpretation and use of the Likert scale leave a lot to be desired. The author claims that the SD above a 1.00 cut off is indicative of a "wide and broad variability." Using this measure to aid in the interpretation of data we do not know whether there are extreme perceptions or minor differences. Perhaps the distributions should have been provided in percentages of agreement, disagreement and neutrality (e.g., 80% agree, 20% neutral), providing a clearer picture. It is unfortunate that the College & Research Libraries review team did not identify these weaknesses and request that the author re-work the findings with a more appropriate and meaningful approach to statistical analysis.

It is also unfortunate that the author did not insert easily designable, open-ended subsidiary questions probing respondents' reasons for their responses, providing richer data and insights. Without this information, the survey instrument is far more limited in value.

References

- Association of College & Research Libraries. (June 2007). Statement on the Terminal Professional Degree for Academic Librarians. Retrieved 21 April 2011 from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/statementterminal.cfm>