

Some Effects of Faculty Status on Supervision in Academic Libraries

Faculty status may have a disquieting effect on the management of academic libraries. In this paper some of the effects that faculty status and tenure have on supervision are explored. These include the amount of time that library faculty members devote to supervision, the interaction of the library faculty and the library administration, and the role of the library faculty in participative management.

LIBRARY ADMINISTRATORS BORROW MANY IDEAS from the business field. An examination of library management literature reveals articles on topics such as planning, programming, budgeting systems (PPBS), management by objectives (MBO), and participative management. Although library administrators use much of the terminology of management, the concepts may be modified when applied to the library. For example, although librarians use the terms "supervisors" and "middle managers," these may not be comparable to similar roles in business.¹

Goode states that librarians assume administrative tasks much earlier in their careers than do other professionals.² Lowell indicates that a large number of professional librarians have supervisory assignments:

Most library school graduates become supervisors of clerks and pages as soon as they assume their first professional position and experienced librarians have even greater administrative responsibilities.³

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Except in very large organizations, librarians are involved in supervision whether they are supervisors, middle managers, or top managers.

Several managerial problems are unique to the academic library. Among them are that faculty status sometimes creates stresses in various aspects of management. In this paper we explore some of the effects that faculty status and tenure have on supervision in libraries. Relevant background information may be found in the recent article, "Faculty Status and Library Governance."⁴ For the purposes of this discussion, we use the masculine noun and pronoun to indicate both men and women librarians. The term *faculty* means the library faculty, unless otherwise specified. We use both the terms *management* and *administration* fairly consistently to mean the library administration. We use the term *organization* to mean the library.

THREE COMMITMENTS

The academic library professional is faced with several areas of responsibility which must be fitted into a reasonable work week. Some of these areas are: (a) personal expertise, i.e., the person's specialty or major interest such as

cataloging or subject bibliography or systems; (b) the administrative position, which might range from supervising a few student assistants to supervising a large unit which includes professionals; and (c) professional status, which might include elements such as publishing papers, attending conferences, or conducting research.

Two of the aspects—professional activities and administration—often seem in opposition to each other in the individual librarian's career. For example, in university and public libraries units often are open more than forty hours per week. If there is one professional supervising a unit, usually he schedules himself for the peak use hours; and, recognizing that it is impossible to provide his personal attention for all patrons, he must train his assistants to handle routine questions from users. In order for the unit to function, the librarian must delegate tasks and must train his people to handle a portion of the work; both of these are elements of supervision. Bundy and Wasserman say that librarians are much concerned with the need to transfer certain routine chores to others less qualified. However, often they do not realize that any time they spend in administrative work is time spent in nonprofessional practice.⁵

The professional responsibilities sometimes conflict with assigned administrative responsibilities for supervising a unit. Many activities, such as conducting research or attending professional meetings, involve being away from the work station. In order to handle all aspects of his assignments, the person must either neglect his supervisory duties or become an efficient supervisor.

The "typical" day of a library faculty member who supervises a departmental library might include all three areas of responsibility. For example, it might involve discussing with a subject department representative the schedule

of vacation hours for the library; interviewing two students applying for a vacancy; attending a meeting to discuss revisions to the library faculty constitution; drafting a paper concerning results of a research investigation; assigning subject headings to analytic cards which are prepared by the library assistants; discussing a change in a journal title with the serials cataloger; signing time cards; telephoning committee members long distance to discuss plans for an ARL regional workshop to be held locally; or discussing with a teaching faculty member the purchase of a \$75.00 reprint of Copernicus for class reserve.

It is not easy to categorize all of these activities because the three areas are both overlapping and conflicting. Although research is considered a professional activity, if it involves a topic such as the extent to which abbreviations and acronyms are used in papers published in physics journals, it might be considered an area of expertise. If it involves a topic such as the effect of faculty status on supervision, it might be considered an area of administration. Attending workshops may be considered a professional activity, but a workshop could involve administration or faculty status or a subject specialty.

Libraries are not always conducive to professional development.⁶ They tend to be bureaucratic organizations which operate in a highly structured environment such as a state university or a city government. In a study, "Professionalism and Bureaucratization," librarians, when compared to professionals such as accountants, physicians, stock brokers, or nurses, were rated as working in highly structured organizations which placed great emphasis on the hierarchy of authority and the importance of rules and procedures.⁷

The providing of professional time may be a problem. A study by Plate in-

icates that middle managers, whom he defined as those supervising four or more professionals, often have a negative or skeptical attitude toward research:

Sixty-eight percent of the subjects interviewed are not in favor of providing time and resources for librarians (at any level) to engage in research and writing. Research is viewed as an avenue for personal recognition at the expense of "getting the job done" and the manager believes that "librarians haven't sufficient time to do all they must do now." Furthermore, he doubts that librarians are capable of conducting research.⁸

LIBRARY ORGANIZATION

Faculty status has an unsettling effect on the traditional bureaucracy of libraries. Library faculty members tend to regard themselves in terms of their professorial rank rather than their administrative titles. For example, the associate professors and professors may feel they should have more input into operating the library than the instructors and assistant professors do.

In some library organizations academic rank may not correlate closely with administrative responsibility. Librarians may supervise people with ranks equal to or higher than their own. For example, a subject specialist or rare books librarian may have a professorial rank higher than his supervisor or middle manager. These specialists may not care to assume additional administrative duties, and, therefore, may not accept administrative promotion.

There may then be conflicts over how much faculty input there should be to managerial decisions. For example, in a unit where only one professional at a time may take vacation leave, who would have precedence—the assistant professor who is the supervisor or the associate professor who is not? Or, should the faculty advise on a change

in administrative assignments, which usually is an administrative prerogative? Or, should all library faculty members have input into the allocation of the library budget although not all have administrative responsibilities?

The pattern of academic rank, or what Tallau and Beede call the "collegial body," is superimposed on the administrative hierarchy of the library.⁹ The library organization can thus become a jumble of conflicting authorities. The middle managers must interface between the nonsupervisory librarians, the supervisors, and the library administrators. The library director, who is the chairperson of the library faculty, has the unenviable task of steering the organization through this maze of overlapping authority.

Library faculty members are promoted in professorial rank by their peers, often based on specified professional criteria. Promotion in administrative responsibility within the library is based on criteria that are established by the library administrators. Just as in any organization, the supervisors and middle managers may recommend the discharging of nontenured faculty members for poor performance, neglect of duties, and similar reasons. However, faculty status and tenure tend to erode the authority of supervisory people to hire, fire, and promote their professional staff.

ADVANCEMENT

As people advance in the administrative hierarchy, their expertise may dwindle in importance and they may concentrate only on two areas—administration and professional activities. At the lower levels of the organization librarians must determine which of the three areas will be most likely to lead to professional and administrative advancement.

If the young librarian wishes to re-

tain his job and/or advance, he does not know whether to work on his subject specialty, take courses in supervision and management, or work toward a doctorate in information science. All are legitimate pursuits, but a person can dissipate his energies if he attempts to pursue all three. His confusion is further confounded when the young professional views the current library faculty. Some of the library associate professors and professors may have professorial ranks based on their administrative titles; thus, all department heads may be associate professors. Some, perhaps, were promoted under criteria in use five, ten, or fifteen years before. Currently most faculties, due to limited budgets and the shortage of jobs, are forced to select only the best-qualified people for promotion and tenure. If the organization requires that all people must have a second master's degree in order to obtain a promotion or be granted tenure, the appropriate response is apparent. In the 1960s it was common practice for people to spend two to four years at several libraries in order to try different types of assignments before deciding upon an area of major interest. One effect of faculty status is to stifle the young professionals who wish to gain varied experiences. They may specialize very early in their careers in order to be granted tenure, thus sacrificing their long-range career development.

One problem in academic library supervision may be that the library faculty members attempt to model themselves on the teaching faculty whom they perceive do not have any supervisory responsibilities. They may tell themselves that, in order to gain promotion, the teaching faculty need only concern themselves with teaching and research; they do not have to interview people, train personnel, or handle time cards. However, every day the librarians are surrounded by supervisory concerns, and

librarians must supervise if the libraries are to continue to operate.

PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

In participative management people from all levels of the organization are involved in discussing problems and recommending decisions creatively, thus reducing the authority of the supervisors and middle managers.¹⁰ A recent editorial suggests that the positions of middle managers be abolished in order to facilitate the implementation of participative management.¹¹

Since the library faculty attempts to superimpose its academic hierarchy upon the library administration hierarchy, it may not permit nonprofessional people to participate. As Wasserman states,

In an organization characterized by centralization of authority and responsibility, latitude in decision processes is foreclosed to those in lower-level positions.¹²

The library faculty might argue that the teaching faculty members do not permit the departmental secretaries to make decisions on the courses that are taught, so why should the library faculty permit the support staff to have any input into the library administration.

On the other hand, from the supervisory standpoint, involving subordinates in planning and decision making is a very good way to encourage their interest and enthusiasm.

Participative management may be very difficult to implement in an academic library where there is a library faculty. If participative management is restricted to library faculty and/or professionals, it may be feasible. If it includes support staff, there may be problems.

CONCLUSION

We have examined some of the areas in which faculty status affects the supervision and management of libraries.

These include the demands of professional activities which take time away from supervision and the imposition of the library "collegial body" on the library administration hierarchy. Although faculty status has many professional benefits for the individual academic librarian, it may have disturbing effects on various areas of academic library management.

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