

A Staff Librarian Views The Problem of Status

By JANE FORGOTSON

"THE PROFESSOR loves librarians like his grandmother—there's always a little room for them behind the stove." Heine would doubtless approve this paraphrase if he could visit many colleges and universities in the United States today, for probably a majority of college librarians find themselves occupying on the campus the social and professional status of poor relation.

Status is the position an individual occupies with relation to a social group or organization. Each status carries with it a set of rights and duties, or a role to be performed. Status, then, represents the relative value assigned by the group to the role, and hence the rewards to be given for the performance of the role. The individual staff librarian may experience the vague discomfort engendered by his status as a poor relation without being aware of the precise nature of his problem nor its wide scope. For clarification he may turn to the library literature. It has much to tell him about the academic world's evaluation of his role on many college campuses.

On the majority of college campuses, most of the librarians are not granted the social acceptance which the teaching faculty member would accord to another professor. The librarian's official status may be quite nebulous. Where his official status is clear, his actual status is nevertheless frequently ambiguous, with students and faculty alike regarding him as some kind of super-clerk or administrative aide. In matters of retirement and sick leave, he is apt to be on the same footing as the professorate.

In matters of vacation and salary, there is considerable difference in the treat-

Miss Forgetson was formerly Supervising Science and Technology Librarian, Los Angeles State College.

ment accorded him as contrasted with the teaching faculty. In medium-sized universities and colleges, his annual salary for twelve months is generally lower than salaries paid to instructors for nine months, according to the most recent survey. In leading universities, the majority make no effort to establish comparable salary scales for librarians and teaching faculty. Where there are differentials, library salaries are "not necessarily inferior," but in a majority of cases no cognizance is taken of the longer work period required of librarians, or adjustments are made only on an individual basis.¹

Sabbatical leaves for librarians are relatively rare. Provisions regarding tenure vary. Participation in group insurance or hospital plans are frequently on the same basis as faculty. Minor forms of recognition are often granted, such as membership in faculty clubs, attendance at faculty meetings, membership on faculty committees, and marching in academic processions. In perhaps 30 to 40 per cent of college libraries, all professional librarians enjoy full faculty status. From another viewpoint, in 60 to 70 per cent they do not. These facts have led one wit to conclude that while the library, in the language of college presidents, is the "heart of the institution," the librarian is certainly not the main artery.

In psychological terms, this means that

¹ Robert B. Downs, "The Current Status of University Library Staffs," *CRL*, XVIII (1957), 377.

there is a conflict in the collective mind of the academic community as to the role played by the librarian, and hence the rewards to be accorded for its performance. While this conflict is not healthy for either college or library, the primary victim is the staff librarian. A clear sense of identity is essential to a feeling of belonging. The resultant integration of the individual into the group is generally recognized not only as a condition of job satisfaction, but as a factor in the optimum functioning of the organization.

The pressing need of college librarians for a clear identity led McEwen, as long ago as 1942, to write: "Primarily they want status, any satisfactory status. They are concerned about it because their situation makes difficult any wide recognition of their specialized functions, marks them off as a minority group separated from the satisfactions of group-belongingness, places them in overlapping areas of functions which are not clearly defined."² And as recently as 1957, Downs declared the firm conviction "that the morale, sound development, and all-round effectiveness of professional university librarians are related directly to the place assigned them in the institutional hierarchy."³

Staff librarians can cheerfully echo the call for a clarified status. Without a satisfactory identity, the effort and expenditure involved in four years' undergraduate, and at least one year's graduate study seem futile and wasted, since lack of intellectual acceptance means rejection by their environment of the contribution they are able to make. They are hampered professionally by isolation from the body politic, of which the library is an organ. As human beings, they need the feeling of belonging and the stimulus of many intelligent minds. Without these things they lose their incentive to grow and develop, and their

wish to contribute. Thus they want and need a public definition of their contribution and their role, and the status which should accompany this.

With regard to official classification, where does today's college librarian stand in his seeking for identity? The multiplicity of statuses accorded librarians around the country indicates the general confusion as to their role in an educational institution and points up the need for defining it. In his survey of 115 leading American universities Downs disclosed three prevailing patterns: (1) academic or faculty status; (2) separate professional group, called either administrative or professional; (3) civil service or other classified service plan. This survey revealed that in 35 institutions professional librarians enjoy faculty status with titles. In approximately 27 they enjoy academic status without titles ("academic" being subject to various definitions). In 43 they are regarded as belonging to a separate professional group. In 11 institutions they fall under civil service or some other similar classified scheme. Thus in approximately 80 institutions out of 115, the majority of librarians do not enjoy faculty status, although in a considerable number, 45, it is the practice to grant faculty titles to selected members of the staff and to classify the remainder in some other fashion.

In his report of a questionnaire survey covering 49 medium-sized universities and colleges in 1953, Muller found that in only 19 of the libraries did all the librarians have faculty rank. In 7 not a single librarian had faculty rank; in 14 only the head librarian had faculty rank; in 9 some librarians had faculty rank. In 30 institutions out of 49, therefore, the majority of the staff did not have faculty rank.⁴

An interesting sidelight on these surveys is the fact that even the granting

² Robert W. McEwen, "The Status of College Librarians," *CRL*, III (1942), 259.

³ Downs, *op. cit.*, 375.

⁴ Robert H. Muller, "Faculty Rank for Library Staff Members in Medium-Sized Universities and Colleges," *American Association of University Professors' Bulletin*, XXIX (1953), 424.

of faculty status does not necessarily bring with it better salaries or improved standing. As a matter of fact, the terms "faculty status" and "academic status" are frequently meaningless unless implemented by equivalent faculty titles. For example, at a nationally known research institution, where librarians have been granted "faculty status," their salaries, vacation and other privileges bear no relationship to the teaching faculty's. Their prerogatives are limited to participation in the teacher retirement plan and attendance at general faculty meetings once or twice yearly. Their place in the scheme of things is clearly indicated by the Christmas letter sent out one year: "Christmas greetings and a happy New Year to all employees of Whiffles College. For whether you may be custodians, stenographers, clerks or librarians, you are all members of the great Whiffles College team. (signed) The Chancellor."

In other institutions assigning faculty status, other small prerogatives may be added without tending to equalize salaries or produce any real improvement in the social or professional status of the librarian. To the staff librarian, faculty status without privileges is indeed worse than meaningless because of the resentment it generates at being placed in an anomalous situation insulting to the intelligence. Faculty privileges without status, on the other hand, are apt to convey material benefits without the psychological ones which help to provide the most favorable climate for development.

Not all staff librarians would agree upon the desirability of achieving faculty status. Most would agree that their present status is not satisfactory, and that a more equitable status is greatly to be desired. But higher status, like charity, begins at home. It begins in the mind of the staff librarian. In many cases librarians lack proper academic preparation; academic instincts; willingness to assume

committee work, to write for publication, etc. Some old-school anti-intellectualism persists, whereby emphasis is placed on clerical routines and the quality of the whispering voice. Moreover, McEwen's definition of college librarians as a minority group⁵ calls to mind the existence in staff circles of an interesting phenomenon common to such groups, namely self dislike and abnegation. Librarians can not infrequently be heard belittling the work they do. They also disparage their academic preparation in such terms as: "So much of library school is a lot of busy work." "Yes, they give you a Master's degree nowadays, but it's really the same as the old Bachelor's degree." Standards vary in library schools, just as they vary in other departments of study. Nevertheless, the Master's program of library schools must pass the inspection of the college deans, and a great many library schools are accredited by an appropriate scholastic agency. It may therefore be assumed that many of the librarians framing such remarks are merely accepting the inferior evaluation placed upon them by the majority group, and by their acceptance, are tending to reinforce it. The staff librarian must conceive of himself as an intellectual person with a valuable function to perform, and accept the challenges of such a role, if he wants others to visualize him in the same light.

Higher status must also begin in the mind of the chief librarian. He too should conceive of himself and his staff primarily as intellectual workers. He must free his staff from clerical duties and encourage them to spend time on projects leading to growth and development. He must guard against bestowing the highest prestige and rewards on those who are neither scholars nor experts in human relations, but technicians concerned with the manipulation of budgets, purchase of equipment, plans for new buildings, etc. If the chief contribution of librarians is to be adminis-

⁵ McEwen, *op. cit.*, 257.

trative, then college librarians can hardly lay claim to being academic, nor can many of them be administrators.

Another contribution which the chief librarian can make toward improved status inside his own library is the clear delineation of responsibility and authority assigned each position. Generally this is best accomplished through written job descriptions. This is the initial step toward achieving identity for the staff librarian. Moreover, it usually results in an intellectual upgrading of each position as clerical work is squeezed out and the granting of much-needed authority makes possible a significant improvement in the fulfillment of responsibility. These things in turn provide a valuable psychological boost. Such job descriptions are also extremely useful in defining the contributions of librarians to the college.

A subtle barrier to recognition of college librarians as worthy members of the educational community is social hierarchism within the library. If association within the library is obviously restricted to hierarchic lines, this conveys to the teaching faculty the idea that the majority of the staff are not fit to associate socially and intellectually with the administrators. Since the library administrators are generally accepted as the equals of the teaching faculty, how then can the majority of the library staff be fit to associate with the professorate? How can these same librarians be of such stature as to contribute anything substantial to the educational program? It is a case of the college community viewing the staff librarians through the chief librarian's eyes, for he it is who sets the pattern. Social hierarchism is common in most organizations, whether they be industrial, religious, cultural, military, or educational. It is not necessarily harmful. Yet in the already disadvantageous context of the college situation, it cannot but reinforce the inferior status according to staff librarians.

Numerous top library administrators in the college field, over a period of many years, have made serious and productive efforts toward improving the status of college librarians. To those far-seeing and generous individuals, college staff librarians everywhere must accord the most sincere respect. But still other head librarians, in the words of Muller, "may have a tendency to be satisfied with the status quo." Muller infers a relationship between the failure of college librarians to secure faculty status and the attitude of the chief librarian.⁶

Complacency is a human failing toward which staff librarians cannot be unsympathetic. But in addition to the inertial component involved in the maintenance of the status quo, other less acceptable motives may be observed from time to time on the part of library administrators. At some colleges chief librarians may gain in self esteem by being the only librarians accepted by deans and teaching faculty on a basis of equality. At the same time, an autocratic chief librarian may prefer maintenance of the status quo as a tool to keep absolute control over the library. So complete may be the isolation of the staff librarians from the rest of the campus, and so lacking may they be in personal weight, that bad administrative conditions may be indefinitely perpetuated within the library, and a continuous, and somewhat mysterious, arrival and departure of professional librarians may be observed. There is yet another form of personal prestige to be gained by the chief librarian in maintaining the status quo. The problem of better status for staff librarians is a difficult one to solve on any campus. Aside from the effort and mind-searching which it might require of faculty and college administrators, it also touches upon the delicate problem of jealousy of prerogatives. By "sitting on the lid" a chief librarian may profit by his thoughtfulness in not injecting

⁶ Muller, *op. cit.*, 426.

these disturbing forces into the orderly world of the academic faculty.

Many of these chief librarians, while skeptical of faculty rank for others, insist upon academic rank for themselves. Carlson feels: "Certainly we have reached a point . . . where a chief librarian can no longer with easy conscience accept faculty rank and academic status for himself, leaving his staff in a vague kind of academic no-man's-land between the faculty and the clerical staff."⁷ Certainly staff librarians have reason to wonder at a chief librarian who makes no constructive efforts to integrate his group into the body politic, and to question whether or not he is fulfilling his functions as a chief executive to the best of his ability.

When the staff librarian speaks of improved status, it is with reference to the teaching faculty. It would appear natural for the teaching faculty to be inclined to resist improvement in the staff librarian's status, for the same motives which resulted in the bestowal of this status. To some extent this may be due to an understandable desire to be the exclusive possessors of academic prestige. This prestige is all the dearer because in the past it has often had to take the place of bread and butter. There may be a reluctance to see a group of "outsiders" acquire the material benefits the teaching profession has won the hard way, by the simple expedient of acquiring "faculty status." To some extent, the faculty attitude may be due to a not-always-ill-founded conception of the librarian as a nonacademic or unintellectual being. It has been observed, however, that in many colleges, non-intellectual workers such as athletic coaches, extension staff, editors, student counselors, etc., are quite frequently accorded full academic status and prerogatives.⁸ It would seem possi-

ble, therefore, that the faculty attitude is based partly on the feeling that, academic or non-academic, the staff librarian does not perform very weighty or useful functions. The impact of the librarian both in the library and in the total college program is intangible. Perhaps the only method of determining the exact value of librarians would be to remove them from the library for a few months. This is akin to a method known in engineering as "destructive testing."

It is fairly obvious that where the faculty do not value the intellectual caliber of the staff librarians, they will not make the maximum use of the library facilities. By not making the maximum use of library facilities, they reinforce their evaluation of librarians as adjuncts of no great value. One significant aspect of the faculty-librarian relationship is the mechanism of book selection and purchase. College libraries apparently fall into three categories with regard to their role in book selection: (1) self-effacing libraries, in which the entire function of selection is in the hands of the faculty; (2) libraries in which materials are selected by the faculty with the aid and advice of the library; and (3) libraries in which the materials are selected by the library with the aid and advice of the faculty. Those in the first and last group are not very numerous, and apparently the most widespread pattern is that of the middle group.⁹ In this group the principal responsibility and authority rest with the teaching faculty. It is not known what correlation exists between the pattern of book selection and the status of librarians. But one thing appears obvious. Book selection in libraries outside the college field has always been regarded as one of the major intellectual functions of librarianship. In pattern (2) above, the book selection function of li-

⁷ William H. Carlson, "The Trend Toward Academic Recognition of College Librarians," *CRL*, XVI (1955), 29.

⁸ Robert M. Pierson and Howard Rovelstadt, "The Case for Faculty Status for Librarians," *The Status of*

American College and University Librarians ("ACRL Monography," No. 22 [Chicago: ALA, 1958]), p. 50.

⁹ Harry Bach, "Acquisition Policy in the American Academic Library," *CRL*, XVIII (1957), 446.

brarians has been watered down to "aid and advice" which is frequently minor and ineffectual. It would seem that any program to improve the status of staff librarians should take into account the pattern of book selection on the campus and, if necessary, include an effort to bring a more equitable share of the responsibility and authority into the hands of the library. This does not mean that the professor and the librarian should become as two dogs fighting over the same bone. Rather they should share the function because it is to their mutual interest.

The faculty members are not alone in their doubt as to the librarian's role. The librarians themselves are confused, and so are the college administrators. The intangible nature of the librarian's services and the difficulties of measuring his accomplishments have been mentioned. Downs and Pierson and Rovelstadt describe the instructional nature of the librarian's work. Pierson and Rovelstadt go so far as to make the statement, "No reputable and well-administered higher educational institution can be found which would maintain that its librarians, regardless of the status it assigns them, do not make a significant contribution to the teaching and research program."¹⁰ Probably a number of staff librarians could be found who would not be willing to subscribe to the idea that under present conditions they make "significant contributions." But perhaps most could be brought to agree that under conditions of proper integration and acceptance the implications of this statement would be basically true.

In a survey of colleges conducted in 1948, with 50 responding, Gelfand reported that 50 per cent of the librarians regarded the library as an instructional department, and 34 per cent as a combination instructional/administrative department. Thirty-eight per cent of the

faculty regarded it as instructional, and 20 per cent as a combination instructional/administrative department. Thirty per cent of the administrators regarded it as an instructional department, and 26 per cent as a combination instructional/administrative department. Most of the remainder in each case regarded it as administrative, with a few being uncertain.¹¹ Thus the majority in each case ascribed a considerable educational role to the library. Yet there was a difference of opinion on the part of librarians, faculty, and administrators, and among librarians, among faculty, and among administrators. Obviously the status of librarians cannot be subject to clarification until their role is defined to the college community at large.

According to the Downs survey, "An overwhelming majority of university library administrators . . . have apparently come to the conclusion that close identification with the teaching faculty is most likely to accomplish our aims."¹² Nevertheless, granting of faculty status should always be equated with proper academic preparation, activities, and attitudes. This means that at the present time, for many librarians, it is not a valid status. Short of such a far goal, it appears possible for almost any college to adopt a positive program to bring the staff librarian out of his poor relation's nook behind the stove, and set him in an environment conducive to personal and professional development.

First must come the contribution of the librarian himself: (1) In addition to a Master's degree in library science, every librarian should commit himself to a continuous program for acquiring knowledge in an appropriate area or areas. He must know the inside of books as well as the outside. He must be willing to participate in his professional organization, write for publication, and engage in com-

¹¹ Morris A. Gelfand, "The College Librarian in the Academic Community," *CRL*, X (1949), 132.

¹² Downs, *op. cit.*, 384.

¹⁰ Pierson, *op. cit.*, 50.

mittee work. (2) The librarian must guard against accepting the demoralizing and inferior picture of himself as an un-intellectual person which is stereotyped into the minds of the college community at large. He is constantly invoking his social intelligence, logical intelligence, and informational background in the performance of his duties.

Next must come the adoption of a dynamic attitude by the administrators of the library: (1) They should set up a program for the construction of job descriptions. These job descriptions, among other things, should eliminate clerical work. (2) They should attempt to arrange for the staff librarians to participate substantially in book acquisition, where this is not already the case. (3) They should call upon the president of the college to make good his oft-repeated assertion that the library is the heart of the institution by drawing up a statement of the library's function and relationship to the college and its program, and the role and educational qualifications of librarians. (4) They should adopt, with due modifications, a program similar to that undertaken at Stephens College, whereby arrangements are made for appropriate librarians to attend certain classes, meet the faculty and the students. If possible, arrangements should also be made for librarians to attend certain appropriate departmental faculty meetings. In this manner, librarians and teaching faculty can come to know each other. (5) Through press release to the school paper at appropriate times, the library administrators should publicize the specific services of the library, and the role and training of specific librarians. (6) National Library Week should, for them at least, be turned into "College Librarians' Week," with an open house and displays and exhibits revealing the college librarian's training and the nature of his work as related to the college. (7) The library administrators, in their personal relationships with their staff, should indicate

to the academic public their own high evaluation of their librarians. (8) Courses should be offered by the library for general orientation of freshmen and more intensive and specialized instruction in the use of the library facilities at a higher level. (10) The library staff should be encouraged to do research and write for publication. They should be allowed time for this on the job, in view of their year-round employment and restriction to the library routine. (11) To make possible continued education of the staff, staff members interested in taking courses should be allowed three hours' time off weekly to devote to this purpose.

What is required for the adoption of such a program? First, a group of librarians who are willing to accept the responsibilities, as well as the privileges of higher status. Second, a group of administrators interested in the welfare of the library profession and of the librarians who form their staff. If the administrators are concerned principally with maintaining personal prestige and control, they will not be interested in improving the status of their librarians. The problem is aggravated in small colleges by the fact that promotional opportunities for the lower brackets are few. Hence the staff librarians are expected to leave after a couple of years. This situation militates against any dynamic action on the part of the chief librarian, particularly if his own situation is agreeable.

The academic community stands to gain considerably by improvement of the librarian's status. Closer liaison is a necessity for the librarian's morale, growth, and development. It would enable the librarian better to understand the problems, objectives, methods, and programs of the teaching and research staff. It would thus result in a more effective total performance. Perhaps this is what Downs meant when he declared: "Just as we can judge the college or university in terms of its library, so we can

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in acquisition and processing with an estimated worth of gifts received. Since those figures represent the prices and salaries during the years, it is advisable to estimate also the budget required to build a comparable collection in 1960. To do this it is necessary to arrive at the cost of ordering, receiving, and cataloging as well as the average price of books acquired during 1959/60 fiscal year. The cost of adding a volume to the existing collection is estimated as \$9.63:

Average price (after discounts)	\$6.24 per volume
Cost of ordering and receiving	1.31 per volume
Cost of cataloging (and end-processing)	1.99 per volume
Cost of material (cards, glue, etc.)	.09 per volume
TOTAL	\$9.63 per volume

The above figures were the same for both libraries.

Using these figures it is calculated that

in order to replace the collection of 55,328 volumes in 1960 it would have been necessary to spend \$532,808.64:

Estimated cost of books (55,328 volumes @ \$6.24	\$345,246.72
Estimated salaries ⁴ and materials @ \$3.39 a volume	187,561.92
TOTAL	\$532,808.64

The amount of \$532,808.64 needed to build a collection in one year is \$71,181.36 more than was actually spent to acquire the collection during the last eighteen years (actually spent by both libraries: \$461,627.28.)

Neither of the estimates takes into account the value of a physical plant or the cost of setting up an efficient operation. It is virtually impossible to estimate how much it would cost to train the staff nor how long it would take to accomplish the training.

⁴ The staff includes two professional librarians, four clerical personnel and 20 hours of student assistants a week.

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judge the library in terms of its staff. . . . If the professional library personnel are in some nondescript category, without clearly defined status, with no institutional understanding of the contributions which they can make to the educational program, and placed outside, or made ineligible for, the usual academic perquisites and prerogatives, we can be . . . certain that the library is inferior, falling far below its potentialities. . . . The institution can pay its money and take its choice."¹³

It does not seem feasible to advocate a blanket acceptance of college librarians as academic faculty members at this time.

¹³ Robert B. Downs, "Are College and University Librarians Academic?" *CRL*, XV (1954), 10.

The identity which most staff librarians would presently aim for is rather "any satisfactory status." That is, a status recognizing the close link between librarians and teaching faculty, a niche symbolizing honestly the education and achievements of the librarian as an intellectual person contributing substantially toward the total college program. It is a transitional stage looking forward to the day when the college librarian will in all cases, beyond a doubt, be as thoroughly qualified and esteemed as his colleague in the teaching ranks. It is a status which expresses a positive idea, fruitful for the entire college world, saying "We, the academic community, base our evaluation of you, the librarian, on what you are, rather than on what you are not."