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Principles Governing the Employment of Nonprofessional Personnel in University Libraries

The work of academic libraries may be divided into two classifications: (1) that requiring professional qualifications, and (2) that requiring lesser skills or competences. Sound personnel practices must govern the relationship between the library and its nonprofessional staff if worker morale is to remain high. The essential role of the nonprofessional appointee must be clear to him and to his colleagues if he is to be expected to fulfill his assignment with dignity. Some conditions of nonprofessional appointment are enumerated which are conducive to favorable employment climate.

THIS PAPER is another in the series of statements drafted by a member of the Committee on Academic Status of the University Libraries Section of ACRL and approved by the committee as preliminary reports to elicit comment. Readers' reactions are invited and may be sent to the author or to the chairman of the committee. Following possible revision and final approval by the committee, it is expected that all statements will be submitted to ACRL for endorsement and publication in monographic form.

By far the highest proportion of the staff of a university library (in some cases 75 per cent) consists of nonprofessional personnel. The term "nonprofes-

sional" is unfortunate since it fails to convey a clear notion of the important responsibilities carried by nonprofessionals and may imply a lack of recognition or appreciation. It should, therefore, be stressed that a university library could not operate efficiently without such a supporting staff. Duties assigned to nonprofessionals include typing; filing; searching; checking; recording; shelving; labeling; bookkeeping; mending; answering simple information questions at public desks; operating printing, photographic, and other machinery; handling supplies; preparing materials for binding; keeping statistics; collecting fines, etc. The borderline between what is nonprofessional and what is professional among library duties has become more sharply defined in recent years due in part to the shortage of library school graduates and the need to operate libraries as efficiently and economically as possible.

It is recognized as a sound principle

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of library management that professional librarians should not be employed for the performance of nonprofessional tasks except in emergencies or unusual circumstances. The application of this principle requires that a competent nonprofessional staff of sufficient size be employed and retained by all libraries. If a library is unable to attract competent nonprofessional employees or if the turnover among such employees is excessively high, there is a risk that librarians will be forced into the performance of nonprofessional tasks to an excessive extent and thus provide library service that is economically indefensible and detrimental to the wider public acceptance of librarians as a professional group. Failure to provide adequate and stable nonprofessional staffing to assist the professional library staff also results in a lowering of the attractiveness of librarianship as a career and thus makes recruiting efforts to the profession increasingly difficult.

At institutions where regulations governing non-academic employees are not under the jurisdiction of or subject to the influence of the library administration, it will of course be necessary to comply with existing regulations. In cases where the library administration is in a position to bring influence to bear upon the conditions governing the employment of the nonprofessional staff of the library, the best possible conditions governing the employment of nonprofessional personnel should be maintained. The following list represents an attempt to enumerate important conditions contributing to a favorable employment situation:

1. Compensation, length of the work week, and fringe benefits should be the same as those governing non-academic employment elsewhere on a given campus. In a tight local labor market it is necessary to offer better-than-average salaries and fringe benefits in order to attract the best possible nonprofessional

employees to the library and retain them.

2. A personnel classification and pay plan assuring equal pay for equal work should provide a sufficient number of classes to allow for differences in the complexity of work.

3. Merit increases should be provided within grade.

4. Fringe benefits should include group hospitalization insurance, a retirement plan, sick-leave allowance, and a disability plan.

5. Continuing employment should be preceded by a probationary period of reasonable length. Continuing employment, however, would not be as permanent as or on a par with faculty tenure, but would mean that employment would normally be terminated only in case of proven unsatisfactory performance or insufficiency of institutional funds.

6. Minimum vacation allowance should be one day per month. If possible, vacation allowance should increase after a specified length of service in order to induce employees to continue their work in the library for as long as possible.

In addition to these basic conditions, and perhaps more important than any one of them, is the goal of giving each employee a genuine sense of identification with the team effort of the library by encouraging him to make suggestions concerning the improvement of procedures and policies and to provide appropriate incentives and rewards for such efforts. Through the furtherance of the sense of self-esteem of the nonprofessional group of the library team and the encouragement of free communication among all members of a library staff, morale can be strengthened and quality of performance improved.

Given such conditions, the nonprofessional staff of a library may be expected to develop a deep sense of loyalty to the employing library, a high degree of service-mindedness, and a respect for the mission of libraries as indispensable social institutions. ■■