

Letters

To the Editor:

As one who worked as a library paraprofessional before becoming a librarian at a state university, I was intrigued by the broad-ranging and carefully researched findings of Oberg et al. in "The Role Status and Working Conditions of Paraprofessionals: A National Survey of Academic Libraries" (*C&RL* 53[May 1992]:215-38). But some of the conclusions made me stop and think.

It seems to me that the rapid evolution in professional librarians' tasks, caused by changes in technology and budgetary support, may mean we are in for a long period of ambiguity and overlap as the roles of the professional and paraprofessional continue to shift.

While this situation may make us uncomfortable as professionals, is it really so threatening? Maybe we should just learn to live with the ambiguity. I'm not sure it's possible to delineate professional vs. paraprofessional roles that clearly, at least in a way that would remain valid over time.

In the academic world librarians may continue to be viewed as second-class citizens by faculty, since most of us lack doctorates, many of us never publish a book, and a fair number of us are not on a tenure track. We might as well recognize that as long as academia has a hierarchical structure, each level will want to differentiate itself from the levels below it. Nowadays, possession of an M.L.S. may be the most consistent difference between professionals and paraprofessionals in a library.

I think that the desire of some professional librarians to more clearly differentiate themselves from paraprofessionals can be seen as a process of "othering." In our efforts in this direction, might we simply be more deeply buying into academia's hierarchical system?

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To the Editor:

"On Becoming Faculty Librarians: Acculturation Problems" by W. Bede Mitchell and Bruce Morton (*C&RL*, 53[Sept. 1992]:379-91) is a great article. They have identified the vital issues confronting academic librarianship. They have also proposed courses of action for educators, administrators, and all of us in dealing positively with these issues. I trust that many of us have already implemented some of their suggestions or will soon do so.

Thanks, too, for your editorial on collegial and administrative governance in academic libraries. I have been researching this topic for about ten years, and your succinct editorial captures the essence of collegial and administrative coexistence quite well.

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To the Editor:

Since *C&RL* gave 14 pages to W. Bede Mitchell and Bruce Morton's thoughts "On Becoming Faculty Librarians: Acculturation Problems" (September 1992), perhaps you can spare half a page for mine.

1. Does anyone expect lawyers, physicians, nurses, psychologists, or architects who are employed by colleges and universities—not as teachers in professional schools, but as practicing lawyers, physicians, etc.—to publish in professional journals and undergo tenure review as a condition of employment? Of course not. Why, then, are some librarians who are employed by colleges and universities—not as library school faculty, but as practicing librarians—expected to do so?
2. If the professional workload is defined to include both "on-campus and off-campus academic work" (p.389), why can't the librarians? If professors were expected to be in their offices or classrooms from 9 to 5, without being able to do research, and then expected to read and write on their own time, then it might be reasonable to expect librarians to do the same; but they aren't: the professional workweek is always defined to include time for research. Why then—if it's made part of their job requirements—can't librarians?

If Mitchell and Morton, or someone else who believes that additional-work-for-less-pay is the wave of the future, would care to provide convincing answers to these two questions, then it might be worthwhile for the profession of librarianship to devote more time to debating faculty status. Otherwise, I suggest we admit that the emperor has no clothes and get on with what we alone know how to do: providing library service. I suppose we're just lucky that law librarians aren't being required to make courtroom presentations, medical librarians aren't required to perform surgery, bank librarians aren't required to approve loans. . . .

HUBERT J. THOMPSON
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