

The status of professional librarians in African universities. /
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The Status of Professional Librarians in African Universities

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The question of the status of librarians in American and Canadian colleges and universities has been exhaustively discussed in recent years, and remains, at least among librarians, a subject of controversy.¹ In Africa, however, despite the importance of equal status for librarians and faculty members in order to attract committed and dynamic graduates into librarianship, relatively little attention has been paid to the problem. Much of the literature is only available in the form of mimeographed papers, and is difficult to track down.²

In an attempt to establish what value African universities place on their professional library staff, a questionnaire was sent to 40 member libraries of the Standing Conference of African University Librarians, 13 of them French-speaking and five Arabic-speaking. Replies were received from 23 libraries, 13 of them Anglophone, seven Francophone, and three Arabic-speaking. It should be noted that the regional campuses of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland and the Université Nationale du Zaïre have separate libraries and are treated separately.

The definition of "professional" that was offered was the Anglo-American one of the holder of a bachelor's degree "with some kind of

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¹ Nancy Huling (1973). Faculty status—a comprehensive bibliography. *College and Research Libraries*, 34, 440–62. Lists over 200 items, only two of which are from non-library journals.

² See, for example, C. M. Darch (1972). "The status of professional librarians at Haile Sellassie I University." Addis Ababa: HSIU Libraries. (Mimeographed); C. M. Darch (1974). "Le Statut des bibliothécaires professionnels à l'Université Hailé Selassié." Trans. F. J. Leroy. Kinshasa, Unaza. (Mimeographed); J. O. Dipeolu (1972). "Status and classification of university library staff". Paper presented to the Standing Conference of African University Libraries, Western Area, 1st, Lagos 1972; Monique Dosdat (1974). "La Formation Professionnelle chez les Francophones: le Cas de la Côte d'Ivoire". Paper presented to SCAULWA, 2nd, Dakar 1974; K. Mahmud (1974). "The professional structure in the Anglophone university libraries". Paper presented to SCAULWA, 2nd, Dakar 1974; Jean-Claude Roda (1973). "La formation du personnel technique". Paper presented to SCAUL Eastern Area, 2nd, Mauritius 1973; Salaries and status of librarians (1965). *SCAUL Newsletter*, 1, 23–36.

post-graduate or tertiary qualification in library science, i.e. ALA, FLA, MLS, DLS, Ph.D in LS, etc.” “Détenteur d'un diplôme de fin d'études universitaires, plus un autre diplôme de bibliothéconomie”. This definition cannot normally be applied satisfactorily to French practice,¹ but one respondent did reply that “Quant à ce qu'on appelle dans les pays anglophones 'Assistant Librarian' nous avons adopté, du moins provisoirement, les termes de bibliothécaire et sous-bibliothécaire”. It may be, therefore, that the next few years will see an attempt to produce a pan-African set of norms and definitions that will transcend the colonial and neo-colonial heritage.

Although there are clearly certain objectively verifiable criteria of librarians' status, it can be argued that it is at least as important that librarians should think that they have academic status, as that they actually have it. Table 1 summarizes the answers received to the question “Are librarians in your institution treated as Administration, as Faculty, or as a separate group?” Some of these answers were clearly contradicted by answers to later, more detailed questions. It seems possible that some librarians are deceiving themselves, through lack of a real analysis of what their status is.

TABLE 1

Self-assessment of librarians' status

	<i>Anglophone</i>	<i>Francophone</i>	<i>Arabic-speaking</i>	<i>Total</i>
As Administration	5	4	2	11
As faculty	7	0	1	8
As separate group	0	3	0	3
Total	12	7	3	22

The next question asked, “Are the requirements for various ranks identical in terms of experience, advanced degrees, and publication with those for Faculty?”

The results in Table 2 confirm the element of self-deception in Table 1, since only two libraries report equal requirements for professional

¹ “In France . . . university libraries are responsible to the *Direction des Bibliothèques de France* . . . which even plans the building of each individual library; staff recruitment is on a national basis.” University Grants Committee (1967). *Report of the Committee on Libraries*. P. 6. London: H.M.S.O. Sénégal and the Malagasy Republic have similar systems.

TABLE 2

Equation of requirements for librarians and faculty

	<i>Anglophone</i>	<i>Francophone</i>	<i>Arabic-speaking</i>	<i>Total</i>
Equal	1	1	0	2
Not equal	2	1	0	3
Similar	9	0	1	10
No answer	1	5	2	8
Total	13	7	3	23

librarians and for faculty members, compared with eight reporting "Faculty status". An even stronger confirmation is contained in the results of a series of questions on equal rights to tenure, vacations, etc.

TABLE 3

Entitlements of professional librarians

	<i>Anglophone</i>	<i>Francophone</i>	<i>Arabic-speaking</i>	<i>Total with entitlement</i>
Tenure	1 1 1 1 1 x 0 0 0 1 x 1 1	0 1 x x 0 0 x	1 1 x	11
Vacations	0 1 1 1 1 1 x x x 0 x 1 1	0 1 x x x x x	x x x	8
Pensions	1 1 1 0 1 1 1 1 1 0 1 1	0 1 x 1 0 0 1	x 1 1	16
Sick leave	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	0 1 x 1 1 0 1	1 1 1	20
Mourning leave	1 1 1 1 1 x x 1 x 1 1 x 1	0 1 x 1 1 0 1	1 1 1	16
Conference leave	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	0 1 0 1 0 0 1	1 1 1	19
Sabbaticals	1 1 1 x 1 x x x 1 0 1 x	0 1 0 1 0 0 0	1 1 x	10
Study leave	1 1 1 x 1 1 1 x 1 1 1 1 1	0 1 0 1 0 0 1	1 1 x	16
Study grants	1 1 1 0 1 1 1 x 1 1 1 1 1	0 0 x x 1 0 1	x 1 x	14
Faculty titles	x x x x 1 x x x 1 x x x x	0 x x 0 x 0 x	x x x	2

1 = Entitlement on the same terms as faculty.

x = No entitlement, or on special terms.

0 = Question not answered.

In terms of pay, the most crucial single issue in the whole status debate, two Arabic-speaking universities, four Francophone universities, and one Anglophone university did not pay librarians on scales equivalent to those for faculty members. Three Francophone universities did not answer this question. In passing it is worth noting that the university librarian at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria receives, as an officer of the university, a higher salary than a full professor, the academic rank he also holds. In 10 Anglophone and one Arabic institution the librarian was recognized as a full professor or dean.

Some criteria for promotion were suggested, and respondents were asked to assign relative importance to them, following actual practice in their institutions, on a point scale from 1 to 5. Table 4 shows the total points awarded to each criterion, and its position on the scale, for each of the three categories of institution.

TABLE 4
Criteria for promotion

	Anglophone	Francophone	Arabic-speaking†	Overall ranking
Professional competence	43 — 1	24 — 1	4 — —	1
Administrative effectiveness	34 — 2 =	19 — 3	2 — —	2
Service to community	34 — 2 =	5 — 4	1 — —	4
Length of experience	30½ — 4	23 — 2	— — —	3
Research and publication	26½ — 5	4 — 5 =	— — —	5
Advanced degree	19 — 6	1 — 6	5 — —	6
Success in teaching*	6½ — 7	4 — 5 =	— — —	7

* Where applicable

† The answers of Arabic-speaking universities were too few for significant individual ranking.

It is of interest to compare this table with the results obtained by Carl W. E. Hintz in 1968 in the United States.¹ Hintz discovered that in the majority of institutions where librarians held faculty status, the criteria for promotion were the same as for faculty members. The top three criteria were success in teaching, research and publication, and professional competence. In many cases, however, respondents noted that in practice professional competence was stressed in evaluating librarians. It seems fair to conclude from Hintz's results, despite his note that there was often less emphasis on publication, that faculty status and a formal or informal requirement to publish go hand in hand. If and when more African universities grant official faculty or academic status to their professional librarians, it is to be expected that research and publication will increase in general importance as a criterion of promotion. From the writer's personal experience, to require publication from librarians without granting them study leave, grants, and sabbaticals on at least as easy terms as faculty members causes great resentment; but faculty members are often equally reluctant to endorse a policy of granting librarians access to research money without some evidence that the results will bring concrete benefits. Nevertheless, in

¹ Carl W. E. Hintz (1970). *Criteria for appointment to and promotion in academic rank. The Case for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians*. Pp. 23-26. Chicago: American Library Association.

D. J. Urquhart's words "every organization operating a service has a responsibility for measuring the efficiency of that service",¹ and it is possible that the only way to get librarians to undertake such evaluation is by compulsion.² The present situation is one of reluctance to take such a step, as Table 5 shows:

TABLE 5

Research and publication as a requirement for librarians

	<i>Anglophone</i>	<i>Francophone</i>	<i>Arabic-speaking</i>	<i>Total</i>
Required	7	0	0	7
Encouraged	3	1	1	5
Not required	3	6	2	11
Total	13	7	3	23

An additional problem for African librarians is the prestige attached to publication in "international", i.e. Western journals, which may tend to discourage analysis of specifically African problems.

If African librarians are to succeed in establishing their full membership of the academic community, it is important that they should have a voice in the community's decision-making bodies. All too often new programmes are set up by University administrations, without any discussion of the necessity for library support, until it is discovered too late that there are no books on the subject. In other cases new departmental libraries have been designed and built, and even stocked, without the knowledge of the university librarian. Membership in the supreme

TABLE 6

Membership of the supreme decision-making body

	<i>Anglophone</i>	<i>Francophone</i>	<i>Arabic-speaking</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes	9	3	2	14
Yes, with colleagues	1	—	—	1
Yes, about library matters only	—	1	—	1
No, but can be elected	2	—	1	3
No, but can be co-opted	—	1	—	1
No	1	2	—	3
Total	13	7	3	23

¹ D. J. Urquhart (1967). The library user and his needs. *Research into Library Services in Higher Education*. P. 5. London: Society for Research into Higher Education Ltd.

² For a discussion of this problem and some solutions, see Rita Pankhurst (1973). "Self-study in the developing university library". Paper presented to SCAULEA, 2nd, Mauritius 1973.

decision-making body is a beginning, but the librarian needs to have members of his staff on committees for planning, curriculum, development, and so on, in order to discover, amend, and operate effectively within the new policies of the institution. In fact, in a surprisingly large number of cases, the Librarian is not even at this first stage.

It is as true in Africa as anywhere that "the concern for status among academic librarians is perhaps more than simply an anxious preoccupation with academic social climbing". In an African university, whether it is based on French, British or American models, librarians "cannot afford to be merely separate and equal, because . . . no other group other than faculty affords the essential protection of freedom".¹ Freedom, that is, to acknowledge responsibility to professional judgment and to the reader, rather than to the institution—one of the marks of professionalism.

Unless librarians in Africa are accepted as equal partners in the vital process of preserving oral traditions and, in countries like Ethiopia, of discovering and recording perishable manuscript materials, a large pool of expensive talent will be underutilized,² and much time will be lost. If librarians are underpaid and undervalued, if the concept of the *Metsahaft Zebagna*, the guardian of the books, persists, then the least dynamic, least gifted members of the university community will end up as librarians, setting up a vicious circle which may be difficult to break out of.

In granting such privileges as study leave, research grants, salary equivalence, and full membership of faculty bodies to its librarians, a university implicitly recognizes their central role, "as sophisticated, demanding and necessary as any other"³ in the academic community. As long as universities in Africa accept as their models the institutions of the West, they must join the trend towards increasing the rewards and status of a job which requires a higher level of training and competence with every passing year.

¹ Raleigh DePriest (1973). That inordinate passion for status. *College and Research Libraries*, 34, 156.

² An excellent discussion of the importance of oral tradition is Jan Vansina (1971). Once upon a time: oral traditions as history in Africa. *Daedalus*, 100, 442-68. For some recent ideas on the active role of African Librarians, see e.g. M. A. Kwaka (1972). African libraries in search of an image. *Library Association Record*, 74, 72-3 and William Martin (1972). African libraries: an indigenous concept. *Focus on International and Comparative Librarianship*, 3, 55-60.

³ Eldred Smith (1970). Academic status for college and university librarians. *College and Research Libraries*, 31, 7.