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The Y Factor

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Should librarians have faculty status? Why? The answer to the first question, as given by librarians, is normally "Yes." It is time to examine the second question—the Y factor.

There are a number of reasons that librarians seek faculty status. Those who teach—or give library instruction—consider their functions similar to those that faculty perform. This argument applies especially to classroom situations where librarians teach information literacy, which in the old days was called bibliographic instruction. Reference librarians, however, also believe they teach when they help students discover information. Therefore, should not all campus personnel who teach students—including librarians—be considered faculty? There is logic to this line of reasoning.

Until librarians can hang their Ph.D.s on the wall — and do what faculty do — they will not be accepted as equals.

But librarians typically have not been assigned classroom teaching opportunities by their institutions. Campus administrators do not seek faculty to teach BI (or information literacy). They are concerned about finding faculty to teach English, history, math, etc. Campus faculty also do not seek colleagues to teach in the area of information literacy. All they normally expect is for librarians to give students an orientation to the library (tell them where the stuff is). Since neither administrators nor faculty, then, are seeking teaching librarians, from where comes the demand?

Is it from the students? Many surveys, and the lack of excitement for library instruction exhibited by most students, argue otherwise. Students do not generally perceive that they need library instruction. Tom Eadie, in his oft-cited article, "Immodest Proposals," suggests somewhat irreverently: "I think user education...arose not because users asked for it, but because librarians thought it would be good for them." In other words, the classroom-teaching role of librarians is almost totally the result of professional self-promotion.

Since librarians are not trained as teachers (although neither are most faculty), their drive to be recognized as teachers seems somewhat suspect. It becomes understandable, however, when it is realized that the underlying motive for teaching—and being recognized as teachers—is to gain status, specifically faculty status. The act of teaching is really a means to attaining the primary goal—academic respectability. But because administrators, faculty, and students must all be persuaded that librarians have something worthwhile to teach, the road to recognition of librarians as faculty has been an arduous one. Even where it has been achieved, its continuance is often uncertain.

Faculty know what faculty status means. For those librarians who have achieved it, the definition varies from institution to institution. At some institutions it means you run the library, since it is given only to the director. At others, it means practically nothing—or it can include the total package: faculty rank, tenure, 9-month contracts, for example. To put it another way, at some institutions, librarians hold none (or few) of the privileges and responsibilities of faculty, while at others, they hold all the privileges and responsibilities—and add these to the responsibilities that adhere to the position of librarian. This can be a very heavy load to bear.

Does faculty status mean that library faculty are seen as equals by other faculty? Are they welcomed into the club? Not really, in most cases. There is a caste system even within faculty culture, a system that usually does not give serious regard to those who are outside it, including librarians (although individual librarians may be held in high esteem).

I think it can be safely concluded that the drive of librarians for equal status with faculty has failed. Why? One important reason is that faculty and librarians do different things; that is, their tasks are not equal. Faculty develop a course from start to finish. They prepare a syllabus and create learning assignments. They meet with the class regularly over an extended period of time. They try to assess student learning in the course. Librarians normally do few, if any, of these things. In a developed collaborative situation, they may contribute to the creation of learning activities—possibly even a role in the assessment of student papers—but all too often their contributions are limited to infamous 50-minute how-to-do-it sessions. How well they contribute to student learning is not assessed. All that is usually evaluated (if evaluation occurs) is the performance of the librarian during the presentation. If the students are not learning from the experience, however, or if it cannot be demonstrated that learning is occurring, it does not really matter what the students think of the librarian's presentation. Robert Hauptman, in a recent *Research Strategies* article entitled "Bibliographic Instruction: A Failed Enterprise" echoes this sentiment.

As a library manager, I want to know whether the scarce personnel resources that are assigned to teaching are really accomplishing something. If it cannot be demonstrated that learning is occurring, then it seems that the money could more profitably be spent elsewhere. The "status thing" is not worth it.

Another important reason for the failure to achieve equity with faculty is that success is impossible within the constraints of normal library budgets. When librarians finally get into the