

CRITERIA FOR TENURE AND PROMOTION
A REVIEW OF PRACTICES AMONG MEMBERS OF THE CANADIAN
ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

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Summary

This study reviews current practice relating to tenure and promotion to the highest rank by examining those libraries closest to our situation, the members of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries. A search of the literature indicates that reviews of tenure and promotion criteria and practices for Canadian academic libraries are rare. In 1995 Gloria Leckie and Jim Brett undertook a review of the key terms and conditions for librarians found in collective agreements of libraries belonging to the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Their findings indicate that practices vary widely with no consistent approach across the board. A number of factors exerting upward pressure on criteria and promotion for University of Calgary librarians led me to investigate whether this upward pressure was a widespread phenomenon, and therefore whether criteria and processes for tenure and promotion had subsequently been affected. Results from this investigation are compared to the initial 1995 survey. For comparison purposes, a literature survey was conducted and findings are summarized.

Introduction

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) has twenty-seven members. To this group I added the two Alberta universities that are not members of CARL (Athabasca, Lethbridge) for a total of twenty-nine libraries. For each library, I retrieved the appropriate collective agreement, and attempted to obtain any additional documentation relating to tenure and promotion developed internally by the academic staff. Of the twenty-nine libraries, I eliminated six libraries whose librarians do not have academic status (Laval, Montreal, Quebec, Sherbrooke, Waterloo and Western Ontario) leaving a total of twenty-three libraries. I requested additional documentation from each library, and received responses from fifteen libraries. Eight sent me additional internal guidelines while seven libraries indicated they had no documentation other than the collective agreement.

Processes and Criteria for Tenure or Continuing Appointment

For the twenty-three Canadian libraries which I reviewed, all have some form of tenure. There are a number of variations in terminology used such as 'appointment with tenure', 'appointment without term', 'continuing appointment', or 'permanent appointment'. Despite the variation in terminology, this type of appointment carries with it the condition that one can only be terminated for cause.

Ten of the libraries (43%) conduct the review for ‘appointment with tenure’ in the 5th or 6th year of employment. Eleven of the libraries (49%) review candidates in the 2nd or 3rd year of employment and one library reviews candidates after 12 months. Four libraries (14%) require external referees for the tenure process (Calgary, McGill, Queen’s and Saskatchewan). Without exception the libraries with the shorter probationary appointments do not require external referees. In six libraries (26%), promotion to an intermediate rank is tied to the tenure decision (Concordia, Guelph, McGill, New Brunswick, Victoria and York).

The common and primary criterion for all the libraries is effective professional performance. The second most frequent criterion is service, a requirement in thirteen or 57% of libraries. In the documentation, service is normally described as service to the library, the university, the profession and/or the community. The third most frequent criterion is research/scholarship. Five libraries (22%) require some evidence of research/scholarship, while, for an additional nine libraries (39%), evidence of research/scholarship is optional. The wording in the documents reviewed usually stipulates that evidence in one of a number of activities listed is required. Activities include research/scholarship, service, continuing professional development, advanced degrees or other forms of continuing education. For seven libraries, research/scholarship is not a requirement for appointment with tenure. Evidence of peer-reviewed publication is only required in one of the libraries (Saskatchewan).

In most cases, research/scholarship is very broadly defined and includes publications, presentations, grants, editorial work, creative works, performances, innovation of new services, products having an impact on librarianship, increased depth and breadth of knowledge, professional development, general contribution to the research life of the university, academic study leading to advanced degrees or other formal study, leadership in disciplinary or professional organizations. This confirms the findings of Gloria Leckie and Jim Brett in their 1995 study of academic status in Canadian academic libraries. “Research, scholarly, or creative activity was defined in numerous ways. Some agreements made a conscious effort to interpret research activity in a way that matched what librarians reasonably could be expected to accomplish given the constraints on their time...”

For two libraries, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, the definition of research/scholarship corresponds to the definition used by teaching faculty: new knowledge, widely disseminated and peer reviewed. In New Brunswick, research/scholarship is only required when specifically negotiated as part of one’s duties and responsibilities.

In all the Canadian libraries reviewed, the University of Saskatchewan has the most demanding criteria with peer-reviewed publication and a coherent body of research listed as requirements.

For nineteen of the twenty-three libraries (83%), some form of collegial process is used to review applicants for appointment with tenure. This usually consists of a formal committee with members elected by a library council or similar body. In one case, all librarians who hold tenured appointments carry out the tenure review (Concordia). As noted earlier, external peer review is infrequently used.

Processes and Criteria for Promotion to the Highest Rank

There are a number of variations on the number of ranks and the names of the ranks in the libraries reviewed in this survey. The most common number of ranks is four. This is the case for fourteen libraries (61%). Four libraries have three ranks. Two libraries have two ranks, and one library has one general librarian rank that applies to all librarians. Fourteen libraries have numbered ranks, six have named ranks, most often called General, Assistant, Associate and Full. One library has a combination where the first two ranks are numbered and the last two are named. One library has position-based titles.

For three of the libraries, processes for promotion do not exist. At the University of British Columbia, there are no ranks. All librarians are 'General' librarians, and each appointment is position based. In Athabasca, each appointment is position based. At the University of Alberta, there are three ranks and entry to each rank is based on applying for a position within that rank.

For all nineteen libraries where promotion is possible, some form of peer evaluation process is used. This is normally done through a formal committee with elected members drawn from peers.

In all nineteen libraries criteria for promotion to the highest rank are generally more stringent than criteria for tenure. A majority of libraries require a high level of professional performance variously described as superior, excellent, outstanding, significant achievement in field of service or specialization, advanced knowledge. Ten libraries (53%) require some evidence of scholarship with only one requiring peer reviewed publication (Saskatchewan). Six of the libraries (32%) list scholarship as an option – normally this would be worded to indicate that excellence is required in one or two of a number of areas such as scholarship or service or professional development or teaching. Two of the libraries do not list scholarship in their criteria at all. Evidence of service contributions is required for twelve libraries (63%), is optional for three libraries and is not specifically mentioned for four libraries. Three libraries require some administrative responsibilities to be present for promotion to the highest rank. Dalhousie states this as a requirement for 'academic administration within Dalhousie University' (emphasized in the document by the use of bold print). Ottawa has two 'streams', an administrative stream and a research stream. For both streams, the candidate must have held a 'major administrative position' during the 5 most recent years. At McMaster, Librarian V is described as "the level at which librarians undertake senior administrative responsibilities" and is reserved for very senior administrators such as Associate or Assistant Directors.

Five of the libraries (26%) require some recognition outside of the institution. This is described in a number of ways: recognition beyond the university in the fields of library science or administration (Dalhousie), superior achievement and leadership in the field of service or specialization recognized beyond the University (Lethbridge, Manitoba), widely recognized research, publications and/or presentations (Manitoba, Saskatchewan), leadership and high quality work or administrative responsibility which establishes a regional or national peer reputation (Regina).

Ten of the nineteen libraries (53%) require review by external referees. These are Carleton, Concordia, Guelph, Lethbridge, Manitoba, McGill, Queen's, Saskatchewan, Victoria and Ottawa . For Regina and York use of external referees is optional. The most common number of external referees is three.

Summary of Findings

There are numerous inter-institutional differences in criteria for tenure and promotion in the libraries reviewed in this study. For both processes, professional performance is the common and predominant criterion. Tenure and promotion is not possible without meeting the criteria for effective professional practice and for promotion to the highest rank, superior or outstanding performance is required in the majority of cases.

The lack of emphasis on research/scholarship and related academic activities is most notable in criteria for tenure, where evidence of this activity is required in only five libraries and is listed as one of several options for an additional nine libraries. For tenure, research/scholarship is required 20% of the time; it is either required or optional in 60% of the cases. For promotion to the highest rank, ten libraries require evidence of research/scholarship while it is listed as an option in an additional six libraries. For promotion to the highest rank, research/scholarship is required 53% of the time, it is either required or optional in 85% of the cases.

There was wide variation among the institutions in the definition of scholarship or of the activities included in research/scholarship. In two cases, the definition and activities reflect the normal requirements for teaching faculty. For the majority, both the definition and list of activities reflect an effort by each institution to tailor criteria specific to librarians.

A collegial or peer review process is used in the majority of cases for tenure and promotion. The use of external peer reviewers for tenure is used in only 4 cases or 17% of the time. For promotion to the highest rank, ten libraries (52%) require external reviewers. Recognition as an expert outside the institution is required in only five cases or 26% of the time.

In general, processes and criteria conformed to the CAUT “Policy Statement on Academic Status and Governance for Librarians at Canadian Universities” which states that “procedures relating to librarians’ terms and conditions of employment should be analogous to those of faculty, including a similar system of ranks, and procedures for promotion and tenure.” The standards for tenure and promotion that normally apply to teaching faculty are by and large not applied to librarians. Effectiveness in professional practice is by far the most important criterion for librarians in comparison to teaching faculty where research/scholarship is of paramount importance. Validation of research or scholarly activity through dissemination and peer review is rarely required for librarians, but is mandatory for teaching faculty. The service criterion seems to be equally important to librarians and to teaching faculty. Promotion to full professor at the University of Calgary is “reserved for those, who in the opinion of colleagues, within the University and beyond, are outstanding in their discipline” and who have an “established scholarly and professional reputation...at either national or both the national and international level” This kind of recognition is required only 26% of the time in CARL academic libraries. Peer review through the use of external reviewers for promotion to full professor is common for teaching faculty, but occurs only 52% of the time for academic staff in CARL libraries.

Please refer to Appendix I for specific details on criteria for tenure and promotion in the CARL libraries included in this study.

Literature Review – Criteria for Tenure and Promotion

A review of the literature on trends relating to criteria for tenure and promotion was carried out to compare the findings of this survey to others that had been conducted. It is important to note that the literature on tenure and promotion in academic libraries relates almost exclusively to American academic libraries as academic status for librarians occurs rarely outside North America.

Criteria

A majority of academic libraries where librarians have faculty or academic status employ some version of the classic teaching (professional practice), scholarship, and service model as criteria for assessment, tenure and promotion. (Mitchell, 2000, p.9) Effectiveness in assigned library duties carries the greatest weight in the majority of cases with scholarship and service receiving less weighting (Lowry, 1993, p.169; Park & Riggs 1993, p.75). The Park and Riggs study surveyed 304 libraries in the Carnegie Classifications of research, doctorate-granting, comprehensive and liberal arts institutions. Responses indicate that in 95% of the cases, job performance is the most important and frequent criterion. Service at 87% is the next most frequent criterion. Scholarship (defined as research and publication) is considered in 62% of institutions. It is required in 17.8% of institutions and encouraged in a further 49.3%. The Lowry study involving 459 similar libraries confirms these findings. Park and Riggs note that there is a relationship between institutional mission and goals and the expectations and requirements of academic librarians. Doctorate-granting and comprehensive universities

stress scholarship more. Lowry (1993, p.167) found that criteria are much more closely associated with faculty criteria where librarians have full faculty status (i.e. same rights and privileges, same ranks and salary as teaching faculty). Leysen and Black (1998, p.516) also found that institutions where librarians have faculty status place more weight on peer reviewed scholarship and a preference for activities at the national level. On the whole, the general consensus is that the application of criteria to librarians has been “realistically adapted to the needs of the library in the academic setting and the kinds of assignments that librarians receive. This does not differ from the flexibility evinced when criteria for promotion are applied to teaching faculty”. (Lowry, 1993, p.169) It is interesting to note that in 1998, Leysen and Black (1998, p.515) reported that publication was required by 45% of the eighty-one Carnegie Research I and II libraries that responded to their survey.

The definition of what is accepted as scholarship varies considerably. In academic libraries where librarians have faculty status, definitions of scholarship tend to adhere to the commonly understood definition in academia of creation of new knowledge, wide dissemination and peer review. As might be expected, librarians in institutions where this definition is used have a high rate of peer-reviewed publication. (Watson, 1985, p.339) Where the bar is raised, librarians have shown that they can meet expectations (Ring, 2003). There is no published evidence to indicate high attrition rates where librarians have faculty status. In fact, the reverse is true. (Henry, Caudle and Sullenger, 1994, p.433)

Academic librarians have the perception that publication is essential to tenure and promotion but as noted by Budd and Seavey (1990, p.469) “the publishing requirement in academic libraries is clearly not as widespread as may commonly be believed. The 384 institutions identified in this study as producing at least one contribution constitute only 18.3 percent of the 2,074 four-year institutions of higher learning in this country.” Budd and Seavey conclude that academic librarians, by and large, do not require publication for continued employment, or that the interpretation of publication differs and includes a variety of items in print that are not necessarily peer-reviewed. In his survey of 374 academic libraries in the Carnegie classifications of research, doctoral and master’s institutions, Mitchell (2000, p.20) found that “scholarly expectations are frequently met through achievements beyond publications and presentations. Work in professional associations, consulting, and continuing development of professional skills and knowledge are examples of accomplishments that are also often counted as scholarship.”

A number of studies have noted the high tenure approval rates for librarians (81.5%, Mitchell & Swiezkowski, 1999, p.253; 93% Henry, Caudel and Sullenger 1994, p.431; 92.2% Mitchell and Reichel 1999, p.237). This led Mitchell to conclude that “faculty status does not lead to publication requirements that severely harm the chances of academic librarians to achieve tenure.” These high levels of approval rates are likely due to the fact that “librarians may be aiming to meet expectations that take into account job responsibilities, work schedules and conditions” and are not being held to criteria which are more appropriate for teaching faculty. Another possible explanation is “that library

administrators are effective at mentoring tenure-track librarians to amass records of accomplishments that will meet tenure requirements. “(Mitchell 2000)

Summary of Findings – Literature Review

In American academic libraries, the three criteria of professional performance, research and scholarship, and service are consistently used. Normally, evidence of performance in each of the three categories is required. As in Canadian libraries, professional performance tends to be the primary criterion and requires an effective level of performance if tenure and promotion are to be achieved. The requirement for service is the next most frequent criterion followed by research/scholarship. There are great variations on what activities are accepted as scholarship. In a small percentage of libraries scholarship is understood to be new knowledge, disseminated and peer-reviewed. Where this is the case, the ability to achieve tenure is not diminished as indicated by the high rates of tenure approval.

Conclusion

It has been argued that academic librarians in gaining academic status have accepted all the rights that come with this status, but not all of the responsibilities, particularly those that apply to research and scholarship (Ring, 2000). A view has been expressed by Mitchell and Morton (1992, p.389) that “if the academic model is to be embraced, it must be embraced for all that it is.” Sewell (1983, p.216) states that “if librarians accept faculty status, they should adhere to the criteria of the teaching faculty with only minor modifications”. Leckie and Brett (1995, p.26) in their review of academic status of Canadian university librarians conclude that “the academic model....should be more than a way to dress up existing professional and institutional practices without really changing them substantially.” They go on to add “if university librarians truly wish to be considered “partners” with the teaching faculty....greater clarity about what this partnership really means, and how it might be achieved, is required.”

Unlike the teaching faculty where teaching, research and service are used consistently as criteria for assessment, tenure and promotion and where the requirements for scholarship are clearly understood, the situation for academic librarians is much more variable. Criteria in American libraries tend to follow teaching, research and service, substituting professional practice for teaching. The most important criterion is effective professional practice suggesting that librarians “want to be evaluated on, and recognized for, the things that they have always done” (Leckie and Brett 1995, p.25.) There is variation in the expectation for scholarship and research and in the definition of what is acceptable to meet the criteria in this segment.

This study confirms the major finding of the Leckie/Brett study that there is no common standard for tenure and promotion within Canadian academic libraries. The literature

review indicates that criteria in American academic libraries tend to be somewhat more stringent, however, the lack of a well understood standard exists there as well.

Within the North American academic library profession, and within its professional associations, there is currently no evidence of a desire to develop a common understanding and a common standard for tenure and promotion to the highest rank. Nor is there any consensus on how closely librarians should tie criteria to those of teaching faculty or on what kind of flexibility may be required to accommodate the more demanding time commitments that academic librarians normally experience. There is no doubt that debate on this issue will continue within the profession and perhaps in time a consensus will be reached. In Canada, it would be beneficial to conduct another review in ten years' time to establish whether any major changes occur.

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