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The Professional Development of Academic Librarians
How Should Institutions Contribute to the Process?

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Thomas Sergiovanni argued in *Moral Leadership* (1992) that the prevailing leadership paradigm, which favors bureaucratic, psychological, and technical-rational authority, was inefficient. He enjoined educational leaders to seize two additional sources of authority—the professional and the moral—in their efforts to influence their constituents' behavior. He articulated the virtues of the professional ideal as follows:

> If we can harness the power of professionalism, professional authority will become a driving force for leadership practice. Instead of relying on rules, personality, or interpersonal skills, leaders will be able to rely on standards of practice and professional norms as reasons for doing things. Leadership itself will become less direct and intense as standards and norms take hold. (p. 40)

If Sergiovanni's analysis was correct, cultivating a professional environment among teachers should rank among the educational leader's highest priorities. Presumably, this premise applies not only to school principals, but also to other educational leaders, including academic library administrators. Accordingly, this essay aims to explore the means by which college and university library leaders can facilitate the continuous professional development of their subordinates—particularly those who are identified as faculty.

Professional Development in the Education Community

At virtually every level, the education community seems to attach importance to the continuous professional development of its constituents. For example, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2003-2004) stated its position that

> Teachers and other educators should be expected to learn and grow throughout their careers. Teachers in all schools should be provided the time and other resources necessary to reflect on their experiences, investigate new approaches, learn new skills and content, and plan with their colleagues. In most schools, this would require redefining financial priorities as well as rethinking organization of the school day and year.

The higher education community shares this vision as well. In its *Principles of Accreditation*, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (2004) required its members to provide "evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners" (p. 26). The American Association of University Professors (n.d.), noted for its interest in the welfare of postsecondary educators, admitted the validity of post-tenure review and urged that it "should be developmental and supported by institutional resources for professional development or a change of professional direction" (¶ 4).

Professional Development in Academic Librarianship

The library profession, which overlaps to a significant extent with the education community, demonstrates a parallel commitment to continuing professional education. According to the *International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science*,

> the principal objective of library education remains to produce new entrants to the profession who have a broad-based understanding of professional issues and the context in which they are applied, as well as appropriate practical skills. The latter will always need to be constantly updated through continuing professional development; the former should, however, inform and underpin an entire career. (Feather, 1997, p. 265)

Another entry in the same work explained that

> Continuing professional development (CPD) is an activity strongly promoted by library and information associations. . . . It involves a systematic approach to staff development and

> continuing education, usually consisting of a programme of learning opportunities made available over a period of time. The intention is to ensure that information workers continue to acquire and adapt their skills and knowledge to a swiftly changing professional environment. ("Continuing professional development", 1997, p. 89).

As referenced above, prominent library organizations have given formal attention to the subject of professional development. The American Library Association has sponsored a Congress on Professional Development at least two times (Kniffel, 2001). The Association of Research Libraries (ARL, n.d.) investigated "the state of formal staff training and development" in member libraries, publishing its findings in the form of a SPEC Kit. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) issued the *ACRL Statement on Professional Development* in 2000. This document aptly noted that "although professional development is an individual responsibility, it thrives on partnership with the associations and the institutions that share common goals and values with academic librarians" (¶ 1). Accordingly, the *ACRL Statement* outlined the varying responsibilities of individual practitioners, their employers, ACRL, and library educators for the continuing growth of the academic library profession.

Institutional Responsibility for Professional Development

Financial Assistance and Release Time

Houle (1980) analyzed continuing education practices in seventeen professions, including librarianship. He concluded, "No consistent policy of funding has been developed for continuing professional education, and the principles that determine the sources of revenue tend to be unique to individual situations" (p. 196). Houle observed that funding for CPD can come from four sources: individual professionals engaged in CPD; society at large (via taxes, foundation grants, etc.); companies that employ professionals; and associations, commissions, and other organizations that involve professionals in a collective sense (pp. 196-197). He concluded that "ultimately a major part of the real cost of continuing education falls upon the individual practitioner; the acceptance of this obligation is part of the price which he or she must pay to secure the status, privileges, and exemptions that the occupation provides" (p. 199).

Šimsová (2000), reflecting on professional development practices in the information professions, reached similar conclusions: "Responsibility for continuous professional development rests in the first place with the individual." Nevertheless, she said, "Employers of professional staff have a responsibility to ensure that the staff are able to pursue a career path which involves a growth of knowledge, experience and potential for development. In practice this means support by means of payment of course fees, allowance of time off for study, and recognition of the new knowledge and skills acquired."

While it is unrealistic for academic librarians to expect that their professional development activity will cost them nothing, neither must they underwrite it entirely on their own. A number of surveys have shown that most higher education institutions attach enough value to their librarians' continuing development so as to support it financially and through release time. In a 1986 survey of academic librarians, "Over half of the respondents indicated that their [professional development] funding is a combination of personal and institutional resources" (Donnelly, 1987, p. 200). Hare's (1989) study of professional development practices in academic libraries located in the southeastern United States found that "eighty percent of the [library] directors encouraged activities with financial support." In addition, "Release time was provided in 92 percent of the libraries" (p. 18).

Havener and Stolt (1994) surveyed academic librarians in Oklahoma regarding their professional development activities, revealing that most of their employers supported them with financial assistance (66%) and release time (84%). Furthermore, they found significant correlations between institutional support (funding and/or release time) and the following activities: meeting attendance, association membership, committee service, workshop attendance, enrollment in credit courses, pursuit of additional degrees, and annual and career rates of publication.

Given these data, it seems reasonable that all academic libraries should invest in their librarians' continuing education. The fact remains, however, that a sizable minority of institutions take little responsibility for the continuing education of their librarians. The situation is dire where institutional support for scholarship is concerned. Kenney and McMillan's (1989) survey of Virginia academic library directors showed that (a) nearly 70% of institutions represented conferred faculty status on librarians; (b) less than 10%

of institutions required librarians to publish in order to secure tenure, continued appointment, or promotion; and (c) librarians enjoyed little support for scholarship in the form of paid leave, time off, or administrative assistance. Similarly, Havener and Stolt (1994) found that "only 26 subjects (14.1 percent) reported that research support was available from their institutions" (p. 33).

In summary, academic librarians should be grateful for the financial assistance and release time that their employers provide so that they can engage in professional development. In most academic libraries, professional development funding will probably never rise to the level that Casey (2002) recommended for public libraries, 1.6% of the total library budget. Yet, as the following paragraphs will show, institutions (and particularly academic library leaders) can demonstrate their support for professional development in other significant ways—namely, through effective planning and local programming.

Planning and Programming

Several authors have noted that professional development in libraries tends to be serendipitous rather than purpose-driven. Hare's (1989) survey of college libraries in the southeast found that only 19% of libraries represented in the survey "require that librarians have a professional development plan" (p. 18). Shaughnessy (1992) raised serious questions about the effectiveness of prevailing models of professional development in research libraries:

> It is assumed that, in offering a smorgasbord of staff development opportunities, staff development occurs. While there is considerable evidence that conference and workshop attendance promotes networking and the formation of interest groups, it is questionable whether the new knowledge and ideas gained at these sessions are imported into the library organization and contribute to desired organizational change. Second, there is even less evidence that staff who attend workshops . . . become inspired and energized and are able to put these new ideas into practice upon their return to the real world of research librarianship. (p. 285)

Reflecting on the disorderly state of professional development in libraries at large, Kreszock (1997) observed that "we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our constituents to ensure that any professional development activity . . . provides us with maximum mileage." She went on to ask, "How do we ensure maximum mileage? In order to do so, all three issues—accelerating our learning curve, transferring the learning back into the workplace, and actively ensuring high quality professional development activities, must be addressed" (p. 9).

The issues raised by Shaughnessy and Kreszock highlight the need for academic libraries to take Sergiovanni's advice seriously: Supporting professional development with funding and release time is important, but library administrators should go beyond this to nurture the professional environment of their organizations. An important dimension of library leadership is that of guiding librarians to select professional development activities that will enhance their careers and advance the mission of the organization that employs them. Shaughnessy (1992) explained:

> Although professional development is, in the last analysis, a matter of individual choice, this choice is not made in a vacuum. Professionals are influenced by the organization's culture and peer group factors. It is in the library's interest, therefore, to create an environment in which staff development is valued and facilitated. Organizational commitment to this activity is measured not by the size of the library's travel budget, but by administrative support for, and recognition of, professional development. (p. 286)

Staff training and development programs are not ubiquitous, even within the ARL, whose membership includes some of the most elite libraries in the world (Association of Research Libraries, n.d.). Nevertheless, library literature published over the last 20 years seems to indicate that academic libraries are gradually assuming more responsibility for their librarians' professional development.

Rockman (1989) described the formation of a Professional Development Committee (PDC) at California Polytechnic State University's Kennedy Library. This body provided programming over the course of three years in an effort to promote its librarians' continuing education. The PDC produced printed materials; organized workshops on publication, sabbaticals and leaves, and audiovisual technology; and hosted forums for library faculty to share current research projects and conference presentations. A similar body, known as the Library Faculty Association (LFA), exists at Oregon State University. This unit

promotes librarians' scholarship through regular meetings, seminars, and the work of a Research and Writing Group (Sapon-White, King, & Christie, 2004).

Grumling and Sheehy (1993) described the Professional Development Program (PDP), which was devised by three Chicago-area research libraries "to address concerns about integrating younger, newer professional staff members into the complex structure of large research libraries" (p. 17). The PDP was initially funded by a grant; participating institutions funded the program after the grant period expired. "The program consisted of a series of seminars . . . featuring lectures, discussions, and exercises led by experienced librarians . . . from the three institutions" (p. 18). Nine to fifteen participants—labeled as Fellows—were selected through an application process each year. When surveyed by the authors, Fellows gave the PDP a high rating in relation to program content and professional contacts. Furthermore, the PDP appears to have prepared participants to assume new responsibilities; "65 percent of the Fellows . . . changed position since PDP participation" (p. 20).

Contrasting with the group-oriented processes of the PDP were the one-on-one mentoring programs established in the libraries of Central Missouri State University (Slattery & Walker, 1999) and Louisiana State University (Kuyper-Rushing, 2001). The Louisiana State University program paired tenured and tenure-track librarians in an effort to support the latter in "their progress toward tenure and promotion" (Kuyper-Rushing, 2001, p. 445). Though the program initially met with some resistance, it gained acceptance among participants within the first year of implementation. The program was apparently unique on at least two counts: (a) a workshop (presented by a highly qualified outside speaker) introduced the program before it was implemented; and (b) new tenure-track librarians were assigned a temporary peer mentor to assist them in initiating a formal mentoring relationship a few months after beginning their employment. Though it is difficult to evaluate a program such as this in an objective manner (by the time the article was written, only one protégé had applied for tenure), subjective data suggest that both mentors and protégés found it beneficial.

As evidenced by the ventures described in the last few pages, academic libraries can bring order to the chaos of professional development by developing forums, committees, and/or programs that are appropriate to their local context and needs. As Slattery and Walker (1999) noted, schools of library science do not excel at preparing graduates to assume their role in academe (p. 2). Bodies of library faculty can work to overcome this deficiency, as one Oregon State University librarian attested: "The LFA as a whole has been very good for our faculty—it has helped us think of ourselves as a faculty" (Sapon-White, King, & Christie, 2004, p. 418).

Conclusion

Professional development is universally recognized in education and librarianship as imperative for ongoing effectiveness. Most—though not all—academic libraries support professional development through financial assistance and release time. However, while funding and release time are necessary to professional growth, they are not sufficient. The role of the leader as a steward of organizational culture suggests that academic library administrators should concern themselves with fostering an environment conducive to their subordinates' professional development. Innovative professional development programs in place at a number of academic libraries stand as a corrective to the seemingly haphazard practices of many libraries and librarians. Further research on professional development in academic libraries is definitely warranted. The appendix to this essay outlines some lines of inquiry that may prove fruitful.

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Appendix

The subject of professional development in academic libraries has not received the research attention it deserves. Both quantitative and qualitative studies are needed. The questions listed below outline some parameters of inquiry that may prove enlightening.

1. What can/should academic library administrators do to foster improved professional development among their subordinates?

2. To what extent are library professionals developing as needed to respond to challenges posed by social and professional change?

3. Are library professionals held accountable for professional development, and if so, how?

4. On average, how much professional development funding do institutions provide per library professional per fiscal year?

5. What proportion of a typical academic library's budget is allocated for professional development?

6. For what purposes is professional development funding provided?

    - conference/workshop/seminar attendance
    - membership in professional organizations
    - research
    - books
    - journal subscriptions
    - other [please specify]

7. Is there a typical limit on the amount of time that library professionals can be absent from work each year for professional development purposes?

8. Are library professionals required to engage in professional development activities? If so, how is that requirement enforced? Merit pay? Promotion and tenure? Professional development plan? Periodic evaluation?

9. How involved are library administrators in planning for the professional development of their

subordinates?

10. How involved are library professionals in planning for their own professional development?

11. Do many libraries have mentoring programs? If so, who is involved, and under what terms?

12. How are librarians' professional development activities assessed? Does assessment measure the impact on the librarian's practice? Does it measure impact on student learning outcomes?

13. Is there a correlation between personal financial responsibility for professional development and the quality of such efforts?