

DORA BIBLARZ, MARGARET CAPRON,
LINDA KENNEDY, JOHANNA ROSS,
and DAVID WEINERTH

Professional Associations and Unions: Future Impact of Today's Decisions

The experiences of one librarians' association are the springboard for a discussion of the impact of professional associations and unions on the individual, professional, and organizational goals of librarians. Both associations are seen as necessary forms of organization. Their objectives only occasionally overlap; each has its own mode of operation and experiential opportunities. In spite of the temptation to try to solve immediate problems by turning completely to union representation, librarians are urged not to desert the professional association, which among its other functions, can be seen to have an important role for the future development of librarians.

INTRODUCTION

THE WRITERS OF THIS ARTICLE began their work as an *ad hoc* committee of the Librarians' Association of the University of California at Davis (LAUC-D), charged with the preparation of a consensus statement on a controversial report transmitted by a committee of the statewide University of California Librarians' Association (LAUC), of which LAUC-D is an autonomous unit. While the specifics of the case are unique to the University of California (UC), the issues raised are crucial to all academic librarians facing a changing structure of librarianship within their institutions, especially with regard to

the possibility of collective bargaining. Professional associations in particular are in a quandary over the labor issue: Will they become the collective bargaining agents, or is this role precluded by their very nature? Will professional associations even survive if collective bargaining legislation becomes the order of the day?

The statewide LAUC committee report urged the affiliation of the Librarians' Association with other employee associations, specifically unions, such as the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the California State Employees' Association (CSEA), and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).¹ In examining the nature and background of LAUC in relation to the other organizations mentioned, the writers discerned irreconcilable differences which made affiliation between them impossible and ultimately destructive to LAUC.² We also came to a sense of

Dora Biblarz, Margaret Capron, Linda Kennedy, and Johanna Ross are librarians at the University of California, Davis. David Weinert is a librarian at California State University, Sacramento.

some important changes taking place in librarianship, a result of both the role of librarians' associations in library administration and of factors such as library networks, increasing automation, and the offering of computerized information retrieval services. We also regretfully came to the conclusion that librarians were letting important opportunities pass them by in not being aware of the implications of these changes and their resulting need for new kinds of librarians and new kinds of services.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCE

The problem of conflicting roles of unions and professional associations inevitably arises when discussions of matters of vital concern to both groups take place. Frequently these are the areas of salary and personnel actions. The UC controversy began when the librarian series of the University of California was restructured to three ranks: Assistant Librarian, Associate Librarian, and Librarian. At the same time, new criteria for promotion and merit increases were initiated, criteria that paralleled some of those of the faculty: the requirement of professional competence, professional activity outside the library, university and public service, and research. There were no alterations in work scheduling, however, to allow the development necessary to meet the new criteria. Also, it was not to be assumed that everyone would reach the rank of Librarian: "There is no obligation on the part of the University to promote an Associate Librarian to the rank of Librarian solely on the basis of years of service."³

Librarians recommended these changes through the newly formed statewide and local campus Librarians' Association of the University of California, but had also recommended a work year that matched the faculty work year and provisions for released time for research. The administration had adopted

the more stringent requirements, but had rejected the means to meet the requirements for a majority of librarians. This caused concern in the library community, voiced through the professional association and the union as well.

LAUC had been officially organized statewide in 1968, to "create a forum where matters of concern to librarians in the University of California may be discussed and an appropriate course of action determined."⁴ The genesis of this association is found in the dissatisfaction of librarians in the University of California with established national and state associations. These were deemed insufficient to fill the needs for discussion of local problems or to satisfy the desire for a voice in university affairs.

The privileges granted LAUC—use of the university name and university facilities, released time to conduct association business—may or may not be shared by similar professional associations which have relations with a parent organization. LAUC is one example of the type of professional association which unifies librarians of similar interests and acts *internally* within a larger parent organization, rather than a detached association working on a state or national level and including librarians of diverse interests. The opportunities for librarian development offered by the workings of an association such as LAUC derive from these structural characteristics.

The university is expected to make LAUC's *de facto* status *de jure* in the very near future. Assigned duties may include advising the chancellors and the library administrators on matters of concern to librarians and the university in the operation of libraries, including matters of collections, personnel, and service. Ambiguities between the role of the union and the professional association has led LAUC to request this official status.

As LAUC progressed from infancy to adolescence, library administration increasingly asked and relied upon the membership for advice both at the local and statewide level. Each campus association became involved in the peer review process for promotion, merit increase, and appointment. LAUC, in relieving the administration of such burdens, achieved its greatest gains in credibility and influence through its efficient work. By virtue of its special relationship to the administration, it assumed that it would be consulted in the planned restructuring of salaries, an issue that had been pursued with increasing intensity from the time LAUC was formed. A LAUC-appointed study committee was subsequently superseded by an administration-appointed advisory committee. The committee documented a wide salary discrepancy between UC librarians and librarians at other California academic institutions, and within UC between librarians and other employees with similar education and experience. University salary recommendations were blue penciled from the state budget by the governor. When a special bill for librarian inequity increases was passed by the legislature, it in turn was vetoed by the governor on the grounds that the proper place for salary actions was in the budget. This and similar actions frustrated the library community. Many librarians joined unions for the first time, seeing a new and perhaps stronger avenue for action.

UNIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Many of the actions that unions were requesting had also been suggested by LAUC. With the American Federation of Teachers, the California State Employees' Association, and the American Association of University Professors working for many of the things important to librarians, it was suggested that LAUC investigate the legal and organi-

zational problems of cooperating with these associations on matters of concern to both. LAUC appointed a committee to study the relationship between LAUC and voluntary employee associations. This was done, and a report was issued to the membership.

The statewide committee was not unanimous in its conclusions and issued both a majority and a minority opinion. Four of the members advocated close cooperation with voluntary employee associations. Cooperation was to be effected by the formation of a committee composed of one member from each association which chose to participate and one member representing statewide LAUC. This group would then determine when LAUC should combine forces with voluntary employee associations in order to more effectively influence events in favor of librarians. The minority opinion, given by one member, stated that such a course of action violated the spirit and purpose for which LAUC was established. The general LAUC membership was unclear as to the best course of action, so each campus was instructed to study the report and be ready to vote on it at the next statewide meeting.

The Davis division of LAUC appointed a committee to study the statewide report and to prepare a consensus statement and recommendations for this division's voice at the statewide meeting. The authors of this article comprised that committee. We found that, at first glance, clear-cut distinctions between professional and employee associations are difficult to make, for the goals and objectives of both overlap in many respects.

The internal professional association, if we can use the objectives of LAUC as representative, seeks to create a forum for discussion of issues of common concern. It investigates professional standards and attempts to make recommendations for their establishment and

enforcement. It may participate in peer review. In addition, it seeks the full utilization of the professional skills of its members and the improvement of library service. All this is accomplished through the advisory role it has established with the organization, allowing librarians a voice in the formal structure of decision making.

Unions and other employee associations work towards many short-term goals such as inequity increases, better working conditions, a collective bargaining agreement with the administration—the “personal” aspects of the job. Unlike professional associations, they most often become active when an employee with a grievance requests their assistance after an administrative decision has been made. When collective bargaining agreements exist, they negotiate with the organization in matters of salary and working conditions. If we accept the premise that a mass statement carries more weight than a single voice when issues of personal relevance are being discussed, then we can recognize the value of such an association. Unions have the “clout” that no single person can wield, both in the fact that they work collectively and in that they have the support of affiliated employee associations. Unlike the professional association, which is limited to an advisory role, it has the freedom to take an adversary position and the power to challenge the organization.

Typical among the concerns of the union or employee association, in addition to the ones mentioned, are the maintenance and promotion of high standards of education and the latter’s availability to the general public; encouragement of true equality of opportunity for all the employees it serves, regardless of membership. The accomplishment of these is sought through lobbying in the legislature, concerted action by all local chapters, and even joint action with similar interest groups whenever appropriate.

The long-range concerns shared by the professional and employee associations are the maintenance of high standards, encouragement of equality of opportunity, and general promotion of the welfare of the members. It is in working towards the short-term goals that the tactics of the employee association conflict with the sanctioned activities of the professional ones; these include lobbying for legislation, assisting members with grievances, and negotiating for salaries and benefits at the bargaining table. The first of these would be impossible for a professional association such as LAUC to pursue, since university employees are forbidden to lobby as a group, or even to communicate with government officials on university letterhead without permission. Political communication at the employee level is thus channeled into the role of the ordinary citizen: librarians at UC may communicate with their elected representatives as individuals. Any attempt at collective action as an official group not only carries the risk of official censure, but also the risk of alteration of the nature of the professional association itself. Having aligned itself with library administration through participation in peer review and advisory committees on all aspects of library policy and operation, a group can hardly then challenge the library’s higher administration by lobbying action at the state level without severely jeopardizing the privileges it has attained.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ORGANIZATION

To understand better how librarians’ associations work within the institution, it would be useful at this point to take a broader perspective of ourselves, not just as librarians, but as human beings practicing a profession in a large organization that must apportion its resources to perform a variety of services. It may be a college, a business firm, a local, state, or federal government, or

even a school district. A library system, often complex in itself, usually exists within one or more of these organizations, which in turn provide the capital resources and operating funds while representing the constituency of the library and its services. Though we can imagine a situation in which librarians operate as architects or lawyers do, contracting their services on a one-to-one basis with their clientele, the opportunities for this are rare in librarianship (or at least unevenly distributed), given the present state of information technology.

It is fair, then, to assume that the common experience of librarians is fielded within a library *system* and includes financial dependence upon an organization that speaks for the constituency of that system. As a group, we have specialized knowledge and skills that we consider unique to us by virtue of training and inclination. We regard our professional schools and associations as depositories and spokesmen for our values. Most of us look to each other for mutual support in an on-going concern for appropriate recognition and compensation for our services.

Yet, and Patricia Knapp has phrased this well, "Whenever professionals work in the context of an organization, there is inevitable tension between the authority inherent in the formal structure and procedures (*i.e.*, the 'rationality') of the organization and the authority of specialized knowledge and training (the expertise) inherent in the professional role. This tension has potential for creative as well as harmful effects."⁵ Appropriately, the professional association might be regarded as an effort on the part of its members to pursue creative interaction.

But prior to this we are all human beings with singular experiences and situations. Firmly committed though we may be to service, we also have personal obligations and values which we find sometimes place us in an antagonistic

position with regard to our professional or organizational roles. Adjustments must be made between group and individual interests—interests that further provide for creative as well as harmful interaction.

There emerges for our consideration not two, but three complex entities interacting in a framework that extends beyond the merely sociological: the individual, the profession, the organization. Each has needs and goals for self-fulfillment that, pursued simultaneously, produce a situation fraught with conflict. While we as individuals feel these conflicts within ourselves, we may sometimes find it difficult to identify the sources of these tensions. They are often perceived as dichotomous, and we may seek relief by directing our energies to the weaker side in order to restore balance. The point here is that there are not two sides to the question, but three; and a resolution is not easily found.

Another way to approach this is to acknowledge that of the three complex entities defined above, we as individuals are the *most* complex. We can identify varying degrees of our vested interests not only in our own lives but in librarianship and the organization as well. We may wish to influence decisions from within, challenge them from without; all with the intent of modifying the organization, the profession, or other individuals. It would follow that no single institution that we might devise could address all our needs even in the limited areas of our professional lives.

The need for different modes of action should be kept in mind when considering the frequently asked question: Do we need professional associations in this age of collective bargaining? Some union leaders are advocating they be disbanded in order that librarians not "dissipate their energies." Since unions have power by right of their collective bargaining role to handle questions of salary and working conditions, this call for concerted action is all too inviting. Yet

by channeling all our energies into union activities, we run the risk of neglecting the role we play regarding our professional contributions to the management of the organization. When the requirements of the union, the individual, and the organization get out of balance, the end result may spell catastrophe to the clientele the organization is designed to serve, and ultimately the individuals and the professional association. As the phenomenon of collective bargaining spreads throughout the country, the need for rational judgments becomes more critical. A recent *Library Journal* editorial illustrates this point all too well.⁶

Perhaps an effective way to derive constructive benefits from our institutions is to recognize their limitations and to allow them to pursue the relatively simple goals they are designed to handle; while we, as individuals, exercise our right to analyze our needs and to associate ourselves with whichever combination of groups best responds to them. With wider personal encounters in divergent settings, we are in a better position to recognize opportunities for creative interaction between these forces.

What does this suggest for professional associations? We should recognize that they are instruments for enhancing our professional roles within the organization. Although individual considerations are important, their furtherance cannot be the primary goal of the professional association if it is to be effective. Unions are better equipped to handle such considerations. Making decisions as to the most effective distribution of one's affiliations demands courage and wisdom. We feel that this should be a personal decision about personal activities.

NEW ROLES AND DIRECTIONS

It is important that we take another look at the role professional associations

play in our professional lives, particularly in relation to what we perceive to be two separate crises in the development of librarianship.

The first crisis is the immediate one: the failure of our salaries to keep up with the rising costs of living and our own sense of what we are worth in terms of education, experience, and community contribution. As much as we are aware that other occupational groups are caught in similar situations, we are equally aware that, for some of these groups, action is getting results. A sense of urgency pervades the issue of salaries. Calls for alignment and collective action between the unions and the internal professional association have a convincing ring, but actions must be channeled into the association best suited to accomplish the desired goals. Few options are better than none; we still have an opportunity to think before we cast the ballot.

We urge our colleagues to view the immediate crisis alongside of another, more subtle, but ultimately more devastating one. We refer to the growing sophistication and usage of information-handling techniques and the accompanying changes in the structure of decision making on the peripheries of librarianship. That it was left to the information scientist and computer programmer to apply the computer to the "information problem" is now history; an opportunity for us was overlooked and it is gone. But that managers in outside and related professions are fast developing information-handling sophistication and are starting to offer what resemble qualifications for the administration of libraries is a present reality about which too many of us demonstrate a naive unconcern.

We invoke this observation as a cause for alarm but not panic. It is an invitation to reconstruct our perceptions of our working-day activities and their potential for change. Librarianship has al-

ways been much more than the manipulation of information, yet today we are overloaded with the routine; our energies are being drained with the just plain monotonous. Application of programming techniques to our information-handling activities is a viable solution, and we are already moving in that direction. Although we have not yet achieved a consensual definition of what it is we will be free to *do* with our de-encumbered energies, of one thing we can be certain: While library networks, automatic data processing, and the like vastly accelerate the rate of "clerical operations," they also increase the number of decisions that must be made *about* the operations. The incipient stages of this situation might be recognized in libraries relying on little or no programmed activities. By necessity they are dependent upon other libraries in the system that have introduced more sophisticated automated techniques.

This should indicate a new working mode for the majority of librarians. Presently only a portion of us fill what are termed managerial positions; and while this did reflect the proportion of guiding decisions to routine operations in the past, and may be merely inadequate today, it assuredly will not reflect the demands of the new technology. Too many choices will have to be made at too rapid a pace and affecting too many people.

Librarians, we think, should regard themselves as evolving into a management profession specializing in libraries. If we do not, we may discover that when the future becomes now, we will have nothing to inherit. Not only would our specialized knowledge be for naught if we have not developed the abilities in each of us to make good choices in applying it, but the economics of failure would turn a spotlight on the experienced managers on the periphery of our profession, and the protective

borders of librarianship could come tumbling down.

We believe that managerial roles will proliferate in the new library systems whether librarians are prepared to fill them or not. This seems apparent without venturing to project the changes that may be in store for the structure of managerial relationships. We suggest only that the widespread necessity of managerial roles will be a condition of any such structure.

The realization of librarianship as a specialized management profession is not, we admit, a universally shared objective. We urge, however, that it be universally considered. For, viewed from within this present-to-future context, the professional association's role in our professional lives gains a new dimension when it is seen that all librarians have an opportunity to develop decision-making abilities in a real context and they can do it *now*. Such an organization emerges as a managerial workshop, a keystone in our strategy for achieving true professional status.

We are left facing the possibility that the experiential level of many librarians may be seriously challenged in their own field by strong competition from without if proper thought is not directed to this matter in advance. Again, this suggests that we be especially cautious when considering the prompting of some of our colleagues that the professional association align itself as an internal professional group with external groups in common defiance of the administration. While this may appear to be a good tactic for alleviating the present distress, it has hazardous implications. In one fell swoop we will have achieved, as professionals, permanent self-identification as an employee group—*contra*-management and regained our forty-hour work week with business (you can be sure) as usual. We could succeed in closing the door on our own future, having forfeited our potential

status and our very means for attaining it.

CONCLUSION

Professional associations, particularly those closely related to academic multi-campus universities, or associations bound to a common class of clientele, must retain the objectives for which they were formed. If associations neglect their professional commitment by close cooperation with unions on immediate issues such as salaries, important though they may be, we run the risk of forfeiting our professional development by ignoring the growing requirements for managerial talents at all levels.

A judicious redirecting of our energies can have implications we can but

dimly foresee today. Although contributions of participatory management as effected through professional associations are too distant to be brought into focus, it is still clear that the librarian of the future will have to make more decisions and make them at what is now a lower level if the system is to function effectively.

Those who feel the professional association can fill all our needs may be satisfied with the *status quo* of salaries, but they are dwindling in number. Those who expect unions to satisfy all the professional needs would do well to examine all the issues and to assess them in the light of the future requirements of the profession. For a viable choice to exist, *both* associations are necessary.

REFERENCES

1. "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Study the Relationship of LAUC and Voluntary Employee Organizations," by P. Coyle, E. Eaton, P. Hoehn, M. Sassé, D. Schippers, chairperson. April 10, 1973. Unpublished.
2. "Report of the LAUC-D Committee to Prepare a Consensus Statement on the Statewide Report of the Committee to Study the Relationship of LAUC and Voluntary Employee Organizations," by D. Biblarz, M. Capron, L. Kennedy, D. Weinerth, J. Ross, chairperson. April 1974. Unpublished.
3. University of California, *Academic Personnel Manual*, Section 82-17b (3). 7-1-72.
4. Librarians' Association of the University of California, *By-laws* (November 1972).
5. Patricia B. Knapp, "The Library as a Complex Organization: Implications for Library Education," in *Toward a Theory of Librarianship*, ed. Conrad Rawski (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1973), p.473.
6. "UFT and/or ALA," *Library Journal* 99: 1503 (June 1, 1974).