Letters

To the Editor:

I write to comment on the study by Bruce Kingma and Gillian McCombs, "The Opportunity Costs of Faculty Status for Academic Librarians" (C&RL 56 [May 1995]: 258–64). In the report's early paragraphs, definition of terms is addressed and a flawed application applied. The researchers are equating faculty status and professional activity. They do not understand fully that with or without faculty status libraries must bear the cost of sending staff to conferences, taking paid leaves, and supporting sabbaticals and professional travel. Faculty status just puts a little incentive into the mix. Where do they see the profession in the future, if indeed they see librarianship as a profession, if practicing librarians do not contribute to literature, attend conferences, and otherwise engage in activities that provide for the health and well-being of the profession?

One could assume that MARC would not have been developed had not professionals stopped cataloging a few hours to talk about, learn about, write about, and travel to meetings to explore the matter of using automation to improve how librarians do their work. This is not research on the value/cost of faculty status, it is a reckless piece that seeks to justify coping with reduced library budgets by taking advantage of a "new model" that will force librarians to be anti-intellectual, production-minded, unaware sweat shop operators urged on by unenlightened campus administrators.

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To the Editor:

I found the article by Bruce Kingma and Gillian McCombs to be quite interesting. Not all librarians appear to be exposed to this basic concept, so this recent contribution is welcome. However, the authors suggest conclusions based on only half the story. Faculty status imposes costs, but its prevalence on many campuses indicates it also provides some value.

Taking Kingma and McCombs's article as the complete picture requires that we accept an argument that faculty status generates expenses, but returns no value. Instead, they imply that librarians ought to give up faculty status in favor of adopting the employee model used by computer center colleagues. This is an inappropriate conclusion since they provide no analysis to test the second premise. It may be worthwhile looking a little closer at librarianship by seeking the benefits returned the campus by the presence of faculty status.

Kingma and McCombs's vignette illustrates the potential impact of faculty status in terms of opportunity cost. However, their illustration presumes that there is more cataloging to be done than there are catalogers available to do it. They do not control budget constraints which limit the flow of new materials into the library. In those libraries that have no backlog, their point fails. No backlog occurs—there is lower opportunity cost—when all the cataloging gets done in less than the time allocated. Which, of course, leaves time for faculty development and scholarship. Alternatively, it could be said that institutions should only allocate enough cataloging labor to just catalog all new items. However, this is making a judgment on the value of faculty status before it has a chance to prove itself. Extending the authors' argument to the teaching faculty suggests that they are wasting time on scholarship, another opportunity cost. Does that imply that there is no merit in return that exceeds those costs?

Additionally, their argument should be reinforced by more complete statistical...
analysis. Certainly statistical techniques offer scientific methodology appropriate to the issue. The writers lack control in their data set for libraries that have collective bargaining organizations. In one article they quote, they ignore statistical analysis showing that faculty status succeeds nearly as well as faculty unions in increasing salary gains an average six percent to ten percent. Collective bargaining across all industries seldom does better than ten percent. With that control absent, a regression analysis on the presence of faculty status will yield misleading results, because there is a negative correlation between the existence of unions and faculty status in ARL libraries. A statistical analysis by another cohort has shown librarianship, strengthened by the rigorous process of faculty status, positively affects the quality of colleges.

What is most troubling about this paper, however, has to do with editorial policy of the journal itself. Two individuals, widely published and highly competent statisticians, privately indicated to me their disappointment in the lack of statistical rigor allowed by the current editorial board of College & Research Libraries. The editors appear to be rejecting research reports out of concern that scientific (statistical) work is too sophisticated for the readership. Rather, they appear satisfied to publish work substantiated by rhetoric, anecdote, and opinion surveys.

C&RL supposedly represents the premiere research forum for academic librarianship. Hopefully, the editors can overcome their timidity regarding methodology, proven valuable in social science research, to admit material they may be uncomfortable with, such as regression analysis. In the meantime, the journal loses credibility by publishing work with incomplete analysis.

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