



*Evidence Summary*

**More Academic Librarians in Arkansas with Faculty Status and Rights but Decreased Benefits and Increased Responsibility**

**A Review of:**

Vix, H. M., & Buckman, K. M. (2011). Academic librarians: Status, privileges, and rights. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 38(1), 20-25. doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2011.11.004

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To provide cross-comparable information on the number of students per librarian, salary, faculty status, contract lengths, and maternity benefits of academic librarians.

**Design** – Online questionnaire.

**Setting** – Four-year private, four-year public, and two-year public academic institutions in Arkansas.

**Subjects** – Academic library deans and directors were surveyed three times over a six-year period.

**Methods** – Three surveys were sent to library deans and directors of four-year private, four-year public, and two-year public academic institutions in Arkansas in 2007, 2009, and 2011. The surveys were created by the College and University Library Division of the Arkansas Library Association, with questions created based on reports from the Association of College and Research Libraries (e.g., Standards and Statements). Committee members tested the survey before distribution. Over the course of the six-year period the questions were modified and were chosen to ensure that respondents could easily answer them (i.e., no questions on topics such as retirements, vacation, which can vary significantly from librarian to librarian). All responses were confidential.

**Main Results** – The 2007 survey had a 78% response rate (n=35/45); the 2009 survey had a 93% response rate (n=42/45); and the 2011 survey had a 90% response rate (n=44/49). While the survey covered a number of topics (shown in supplementary material online), the article focused on five areas of interests and had the following findings. 1) The number of students per librarian is increasing at four-year private and two-year public institutions. While the data shows a decrease in the ratio at four-year public institutions the authors believe this is due to the addition of new institutions in the follow-up surveys, one of which had a very low study-to-librarian ration. 2) Tenured librarians make more than non-tenured librarians. 3) The number of institutions granting faculty status is increasing at a statistically significant rate at four-year private and two-year public institutions, and has remained relatively constant at four-year public institutions. 4) Most libraries have 12-month contracts for librarians, although this has decreased slightly over the survey period. 5) The number of institutions providing paid maternity leave has decreased.

**Conclusion** – This study provides a broad overview of the changing state of academic librarians' rights and benefits in Arkansas over the last six years. Some of the trends demonstrated, such as an increase in the number of students per librarian, are potentially troubling and may have a negative impact on the quality of service provided by individual institutions. Other trends, such as increases in institutions granting faculty status to librarians and decreasing the number of 12-month contracts, may signal that some institutions are beginning to acknowledge the significance and impact of librarian research. Ultimately, this article provides a starting point for other states and provinces to begin collecting similar data in an attempt to understand changing trends in academic libraries.

### **Commentary**

While there are large annual surveys on librarian salaries and a large number of works

related to librarian rank, there are few studies that look at these issues in order to provide context and a broader understanding on a variety of topics related to academic librarian rights, responsibilities, and status.

Although the study methodology is not outlined in great detail, the area that would have benefited from additional clarification is exactly how the academic institutions were identified and why the number of institutions changed over the years. It is also unclear whether all Arkansas institutions that could have been contacted were included.

Furthermore, the issue of faculty status would also be served by more explication. In the literature review, the authors note rightly that with other studies on status, it is hard to make comparisons as institutions have different definitions of what constitutes faculty status and rank. In the summary of results, however, the authors provide no further breakdown of their definition of faculty status. The actual survey asks several detailed questions about the rights of librarians with faculty status (e.g., whether they can participate on the University Senate and whether they can be granted tenure), but the article itself does not include any of these findings in its analysis. It is hoped that the authors will include more detailed information in future publications. Indeed, the survey instrument shows a large amount of data was collected that was not included in the analysis, but which could be used for future study.

That being said, the information provided in this work could be very helpful for comparison purposes with some caveats. Specifically, librarians and administrators must be careful to ensure that they account for other variables that may be at work. For example, when comparing salaries, one question raised in the survey, but not in the article itself, is the issue of merit pay. Whether an institution offers merit pay can have a significant impact on a librarian's total salary, particularly if that librarian has been with the same institution for many years. In addition, if comparing salaries or benefits outlined in this article to other states or provinces, it will be important to take

factors such as standard of living costs and taxation levels into consideration.

While the article is brief and collects only data from Arkansas librarians, the information included is useful in that it contributes one piece to the broader picture of librarian rights and privileges. It is also one of the few articles that looks at several topics at once (e.g., salary, rank, and benefits). It is hoped that this article will serve as an impetus for other state or provincial library associations to follow suit and begin collecting similar information. If that information is already being collected, then it is suggested that the data be shared publicly in some format. In days of ever-dwindling budgets and cutbacks, any evidence that shows the perceived value of librarians through salary and rank is helpful.