

# THE CHALLENGES AND FRUSTRATIONS OF LIBRARIANS IN THREE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN GHANA

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## **Abstract**

*Universities in the world have a common goal of promoting teaching, learning research and knowledge dissemination. This common goal puts the staff of the university into different categories, basically academic (teaching and non-teaching), administrative and support staff. The categorization is often based on function. This paper, through a survey, analyses the category to which professional librarians in three Ghanaian public universities belong and the challenges concerning status, scholarship, general line of progression and frustrations they are faced with in the university set-up. Their parallel role as partners with faculty and researchers in promoting teaching, learning, research and knowledge dissemination in Ghanaian universities is also analysed. The paper concludes that much as the determination of status remains the prerogative of individual institutions, fairness should be the guiding principle so that designated non-academic professionals should not be assessed by the standards of academics while they do not enjoy the status of academics.*

KEYWORDS: PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS, STATUS, PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, GHANA, CHALLENGES

## **Introduction**

The struggle of professional librarians to be accorded full academic status is a long-standing one. While the status of the librarian in the university is varied just as it is in the advanced world, the Ghanaian situation is not clear-cut on the conditions that go with it.

A school of thought contends that the librarian, a "non-chalk-holder", does not impart knowledge through instruction or directly by way of teaching and should therefore, be delineated or decoupled from the academic staff. Yet the academic librarian is neither categorized among the administrators nor support staff of the universities in Ghana. Another school of thought categorizes the

librarian among the academic staff, based on his functions. The latter argues that the librarian, by virtue of his training and the nature of his work, is supposed to impart knowledge via the published record (print and electronic), conduct research and publish the findings of his research. In every university /institution this is the function of the academics.

While some universities in Ghana associate themselves with the first, others do so with the latter.

Antwi (1993) in a similar study on status of librarians in Ghanaian universities indicated that there was no consensus yet on the status that best befits librarians in the university system. He found that librarians in the premier university, University of Ghana, were inconsistent in their option for either academic or professional status in the early 1990s. At one time they opted for academic status and at another, professional status. Those at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), however, have been very consistent in their fight for academic status. This cannot be said of librarians in the University of Cape Coast.

The situation puts two professionals with the same training and academic qualifications in different status in different universities. The outcome of this is low self-esteem, low morale as a result of differences in conditions of service and naturally, a corresponding low output on the part of the librarians concerned.

This paper puts these thoughts in the "balance" and "weighs" them against the existing situation in the world of learning and suggests a way forward for the Ghanaian situation.

### **The status of professional librarians in other parts of the world**

The National Standards developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) of the United States of America provide a framework for development of institutional performance expectation. Criteria for promotion and tenure according to the standards vary from one institution to another depending on individual type and mission, and the particular status accorded librarians.

The standards (2001), also approved by the American Library Association (ALA), provide guidelines for promotion/appraisal among other things like tenure, sabbatical leave, research and development funds, academic freedom, compensation, college and university governance, library governance and professional responsibilities. On promotion, the standards stipulate that librarians should be promoted in rank based on their academic proficiency and professional effectiveness (performance, service, and scholarship) consistent with stated campus standards. The peer review system should be an integral part of procedures for promotion.

The guidelines approved by ACRL and ALA (2002) are also explicit on the promotion and salary increases for professional librarians without faculty status. In this, librarians without faculty status are to be promoted through ranks on the basis of their professional efficiency and effectiveness. Procedures for promotion and salary increases should include a peer review, and that librarians should have ranks equivalent to those of the faculty.

In some universities like University of Southern California, status documents create two professional tracks. The first track of professionals are those with full academic status who are assessed and promoted based on their professional commitment, community service and research publications. The second track constitutes professionals who are assessed and promoted with emphasis placed on excellence in librarianship. In the latter, research and publication are relevant but not a primary criterion (Pings, 1985).

Librarians at Memphis State University have held faculty status since 1970 and the requirements for promotion and tenure are the same as those for teaching faculty. Studies conducted by Ivey (1994) revealed that even when librarians have faculty status, teaching faculty do not consider them their academic equals. They see them more as professionals.

In Africa, Lungu (1995) stated that professional librarians at the Coperbelt University, Zambia, for example had achieved academic status but only after a long struggle with university authorities.

In Nigeria for instance, many Federal universities run two parallel tracks for librarians. The University Librarian is the topmost position for the track with full academic status while the other non-academic track ends with the Chief Librarian. With this arrangement, a potential employee has the option to determine which track he would belong, the one with full academic status or the non-academic one that has a line of progression similar to that of the Administrators (Personal communication from colleague Librarians: 2005).

However, most state universities, for example, the Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt, accord their professional librarians full academic status. Professional librarians of these universities have a line of progression similar to their counterparts in the teaching faculty. They also enjoy all the benefits that go with academic status.

The criteria for promotion of academic staff of James Cook University (2003) could be a model for all academic staff in the world of learning. At James Cook University, promotion is on the basis of merit. Ability and achievement are principal factors, and with regards to the following:

1. Formal qualification or progress towards such qualification;
2. Achievement in research and/or scholarship and/or professional consultancy activities;

3. Experience and achievement in teaching or curriculum development;
4. Contribution to university planning and/or governance; and
5. Service to the university, to the profession and/or academic discipline and/or relevant contributions to the wider community.

### **Methodology**

The paper compared academic librarians with faculty and the other categories of staff in the three major Ghanaian public universities according to their functions and ranking. They were University of Ghana (UG), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and University of Cape Coast (UCC). Three other public universities were not covered. This was because one of the three, University of Education, Winneba, was until recently affiliated to UCC and has the same practice with the latter. The second one, University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa was until 2004 College of KUNST and had the same practice with the latter. The other, University for Development Studies also has a common practice with UG.

Questionnaires were also distributed to all professional librarians of the universities involved in the study for their views. These numbered 39 and formed the target population for the study. Exclusive interviews with the University Librarians of these institutions were also conducted. This is because the University Librarians play a major role on the Appointments and Promotions Board in determining the progression of librarians.

### **The nature of university education**

Universities have a common significance; they are largely information resource-based and heavily dependent on the central organ – the library. Teaching/learning in the university is not only restricted to the classroom situation in this era of information explosion. It exists in various other situations especially in the library. There, is however, a very big difference in the perception of teaching staff, administrators and policy makers on what constitutes academic work in Ghana. While some regrettably limit themselves to what happens in the classroom as being academic, the rest of the world has a much bigger view because of the nature of university education today. Research, another function of the university, is not a solitary process. Valuable resources include professors, instructors, librarians and a lot of others.

### **The role of the professional librarian**

The report of the University Grants Commission, UK, of 1921, revealed that the character and efficiency of a university might be gauged by the treatment of its central organ – the library. This report further suggested the fullest provision for library maintenance as the primary and most vital need in the equipment of the university. As an information resource, it occupies the central and primary place because it serves all the functions of the university – teaching, learning

and research – the creation of new knowledge and the transmission to posterity of the teaching and culture of the present and the past (Higham, 1980).

In the university set-up, the academic librarian has a fundamental duty of manning this central organ. He has a responsibility of organising the universe of bibliographic resources available to the university and making them maximally accessible to the user population. This user population includes faculty, researchers and students. He has additional responsibility of conducting research and publishing the outcome of the findings not only to support teaching and learning but also to enhance the image of the university by adding to the existing knowledge.

Academic librarians are also adept at navigating the increasingly complex interactive electronic library. This is because libraries are no longer just repositories of printed material accessed by card catalogue. Access to online databases as well as the immense resources on the Internet, provides researchers with an unimaginable wealth of information. Unlike the old catalogue, electronic access takes time and skills. All these make today's library fluid and dynamic; changing constantly. The academic librarian thus interacts with people of diverse disciplines and the library virtually becomes an extension of the classroom.

The broad subject areas undertaken in the university also demand a corresponding broad-based knowledge on the part of the librarian to select, acquire and organize materials to meet the users' needs. Here the multi-disciplinary nature of the librarian comes into focus. The ability of the academic librarian to understand and discuss queries with his clientele promotes efficiency. It therefore demands that the librarian be sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to interact intelligibly with faculty in order to provide their information needs.

### **The university lecturer**

The university lecturer is basically a teacher and a researcher. Among his fundamental duties are preparing lecture notes and teaching the various courses assigned him, depending on his area of speciality. He is expected to assess his students by way of examining and grading them. Additionally, the university teacher is expected to conduct research and publish the findings or outcome of his research. This is to help him do effective teaching and to create new knowledge. Publication of research work enhances the image of the university and above all, identifies the author, in this case the lecturer, with the world of academia.

Research and its subsequent publication are so important to the university that they are major factors in the assessment and promotion of the university lecturer.

### **The research fellow**

Research fellows constitute another category of academic staff of the university. The primary duty of the research fellow is to conduct research, though he teaches when necessary. This category of staff support teaching with their research findings and so enhances the image of the university in the world of learning.

Thus, in the Ghanaian situation, the research fellow, like the lecturer, is assessed and promoted based substantially on the quality and number of his refereed publications. For this reason, the academic publishes and "survives" or he does not and "perishes"; that is "publish or perish".

### **Non-academic staff**

These include the professional administrators, technical and service maintenance employees. For the purpose of this study only those in the senior membership grades are discussed.

Requirements for appraisal/promotion of this category of staff are naturally different from those of the academic staff just as their functions differ. For this category of staff, assessment is based mostly on performance. They are, however expected to produce documentary evidence of their work. Thus reports, articles etc. that are not necessarily research based are accepted as publications that merit promotion. As a result they do not "perish" even if they do not publish in refereed journals.

### **The complementary roles of the librarian and the faculty in imparting knowledge**

A sophisticated system of information retrieval is of no use unless it affords access to the right documents. In the same way an elegant library building becomes a white elephant unless it houses materials appropriate for its users. This demands that librarians and faculty put their heads together in the selection of materials for use in the library. It enjoins librarians and faculty to collaborate effectively for stocking the library with appropriate material that will support academic work in the university.

The academic librarian and faculty, therefore, play complementary roles in the entire process of imparting knowledge. The librarian enhances the effectiveness of faculty through Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Document Delivery Services (DDS) and Curriculum Consulting Services (CCS). He researches into effective use and improvement of library services just to promote the realisation of the general university objective.

### **The scholarship component of academic librarianship: a challenge**

Much of the debate on the status of academic librarians has centered on the scholarly component that requires publications from academic librarians. Black and Leysen (1994) observed that librarians often have difficulty meeting

scholarship expectations because of the structure of their work environment and the way in which the institution and librarians perceive scholarship. Parallels are frequently drawn with teaching faculty who experience a schedule that is seen as more conducive to participation in a three-tiered faculty structure. Scholarship is however, beneficial to the practice of librarianship. The research component can strengthen reference, cataloguing and collection development. It sharpens skills and broadens prospects for the daily services provided. It is therefore necessary to provide an environment that promotes performance and at the same time encourages scholarship.

### **The Librarian and the evaluation criteria for faculty**

In the teaching faculty the three-tiered structure used in evaluation or assessment requires performance in teaching, scholarship, and service. The library faculty is recognizable by a similar three-tiered structure where 'professional practice' replaces teaching. In this case evaluation or assessment will require performance in 'professional practice', scholarship, and service to the community or humanity.

Librarians participate in the educational mission of the institution by providing information and services, which enhance advancement of learning and research. This is done through direct work with users or indirectly through acquiring, organising, interpreting, and/or administering library resources or programmes. Through this the librarian fulfils a unique teaching function by bringing the quest for knowledge together with available information resources.

Librarians are also active in collegiate citizenship; namely, they are involved in library and university governance structures through committee service and community outreach. They also disseminate the results of their work through publications, lectures, exhibits and participation in appropriate technical, professional and scholarly societies reflecting their research reputation. Contribution to the practice of librarianship, scholarly work and institutional and professional service each form a vital and dynamic part of the composite picture of the librarian within the academic context.

This argument justifies the advocacy that the unique role of academic librarians in the educational process should be recognised through academic or faculty status that promotes the concept that librarians, like their counterparts in the teaching faculty, are significant contributors to the academic enterprise.

### **Perspectives of librarians on status**

Copies of self-constructed questionnaire were distributed to 39 professional librarians in University of Ghana, KNUST and UCC libraries in the middle of 2005. This was to solicit their views on issues concerning academic status, line of progression on the job and the image of librarians in the university system in Ghana.

### The findings of the study

There were 37 respondents made up of 15 from University of Ghana, 15 from KNUST and 7 from UCC. These represented a response rate of 95%. Tables 1 to 3 depict the responses of respondents.

**Table 1: Distribution of Response Rate by universities surveyed.**

University	No. Distributed	No Completed and returned	No. Not returned responded	Percentage	Percentage Non responded
UG	16	15	1	94	6
KNUST	15	15	0	100	0
UCC	8	7	1	87.5	12.5
Total	39	37	2	95	5

**Table 2: Educational background of Respondents**

Qualifications	University	%	KNUST	%	UCC	%
Graduate Diploma	1	6.7	4	26.7	1	14.3
MA	5	33.3	8	53.3	4	57.1
MPhil	7	46.7	2	13.3	2	28.6
Others (MPA, MLS, MInfSc, FLA, etc.)	2	13.3	1	6.7	0	0

**Table 3: Responses from the Survey**

Responses	University of Ghana N = 15		KNUST N = 15		UCC N = 7	
		%		%		%
Respondents are academic	10	66.7	15	100	0	0
Librarians are regarded by teaching faculty as academic	3	20	10	66.7	1	14.2
Being non-academic is a disincentive	6	40	15	100	3	42.8
Publication is a prerequisite for promotion	15	100	15	100	7	100
Librarians with option for academic status	15	100	15	100	7	100



The findings of the study revealed disparity in the status of professional librarians in the three Ghanaian public universities. It is observed that professional librarians in University of Ghana who hold research degrees in librarianship or related disciplines such as Information Science are categorised as academic. Professional librarians, who hold additional Masters Degree in different disciplines such as Management are not accorded full academic status. Thus only 10 out of the 15 respondents representing 66.7% of respondents from University of Ghana are academic. Though 10 respondents enjoy academic status, only three, representing 30 percent indicated that teaching faculty regards librarians as their academic counterparts.

The situation is different at the University of Cape Coast. All the seven respondents from the University of Cape Coast indicated they do not have academic status. They however indicated that the University of Cape Coast recognizes only the University Librarian and his Deputy as academic and this renders all other professional librarians, non-academic, irrespective of their academic and professional qualifications. Surprisingly, only three respondents, representing 42.8% indicated that being non-academic is a disincentive.

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has a practice that is completely different from the others. In this institution, the professional librarian with a postgraduate qualification; a Postgraduate Diploma or Masters Degree in Library Studies or related discipline like Information Science is classified academic and is recognized as such. This notwithstanding, only 10 out of the 15 respondents, representing 66.7% indicated that librarians are regarded by the teaching faculty as their academic counterparts. Though librarians at KNUST are all academic, they shared the view with some of their colleagues in the other public universities that being non-academic is a disincentive.

Two things, however, were common to the professional librarians in all the three Ghanaian universities. The first is that they are expected to conduct research and publish as additional responsibility, and that they are assessed and promoted based substantially on their refereed publications just as their counterparts in the teaching faculty. The second is that, given the option to choose, most professional librarians in the three Ghanaian public universities would opt for academic status.

### **Interview with University Librarians**

An interview with Professor Alemna, the University Librarian of Balme Library, University of Ghana, revealed that status is optional for professional librarians in the university but he was quick to add that professional librarians who opt for academic status must have research degree.

On promotion and general line of progression, the professor indicated that professional librarians with academic status, like their counterparts in the teaching faculty, are expected to publish research-based articles in peer reviewed journals as a prerequisite for promotion, and that though non-academic professional librarians are also expected to publish as prerequisite for promotion, they need not necessarily publish in refereed journals.

When the researcher wanted to know the difference between non-academic library professionals and other non-academic professionals like the administrators, accountants, etc., on line of progression, the professor said while guidelines for the other non-academic professionals are clear, that of non-academic professional librarians are not clear on scholarship or publication. He emphasized that this is a disincentive.

A similar interview with Mrs. Helena Asamoah-Hassan, the University Librarian of KNUST, revealed that professional librarians at KNUST have academic status and that the basic requirement is a postgraduate qualification in librarianship. On how status was granted by the University, she said the then Librarian made a case by submitting a memorandum to the Academic Board for consideration. She was, however, not definite on when academic status was granted to professional librarians. Mrs. Asamoah-Hassan indicated that academic librarians enjoy all the benefits that go with their status as their counterparts in the teaching faculty.

On her view on other institutions where two tracks (academic and non-academic) are run; the University Librarian, who doubles as the President of the Ghana Library Association, intimated that running two tracks causes problems for library professionals with the same training and academic qualification. It lowers morale and brings a general despondency in attitude towards work, thereby affecting output negatively. The Acting University Librarian of UCC, was however, not available for interview.

## **Discussion**

The University of Ghana has two tracks of professional librarians as pertains in the University of Southern California - academic and non-academic. The University of Cape Coast has a similar ranking but varied in the sense that only the University Librarian and his Deputy enjoy full academic status. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology runs a more progressive system by granting academic status to all their professional librarians. What however, is quite worrying and unfair about the situation at the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast is that professional librarians belonging to the two tracks are treated almost the same way in terms of promotion. They are assessed and promoted with much emphasis on research and publications.

This situation is a disincentive for the affected professionals in these institutions because they are somewhat assessed by standards for the promotion of academics and yet do not enjoy that status.

### **Conclusion**

It has been observed that the training and scholarly nature of the work of library professionals are similar to those of faculty, that is, lecturers and research fellows in the universities in Ghana who indisputably are classified as academics. From the survey, it has also been shown that two sets of professional librarians are recognised in Ghanaian universities - those that are classified academic and the other, non-academic.

Again, it is clear from what exists in some institutions in the developed countries, such as the United States that running two tracks is not a major problem. This is because the essential educational nature of the librarian's duties has been recognised increasingly by administration, faculties, professional societies, and accreditation agencies. However, whether academic or full faculty status shall be granted to professional librarians is a matter of individual determination by each institution.

The major problem with the Ghanaian situation, however, is that there is no guideline explicit on the progression of non-academic professional librarians. Though they do not enjoy academic status, they are expected to publish as prerequisite for promotion. This indeed is a frustration to the affected professionals and it is advised that this should be discontinued.

Fairness should also be seen at play in the universities on matters concerning status. This will motivate professional librarians to contribute their quota to the promotion of university education in Ghana. It will not be a favour to the affected professionals. Rather the authorities, and for that matter the universities, will be seen to be abreast with the world's intellectual community.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the status of professional librarians in Ghanaian public universities be unified. Where the University Statutes accommodate two tracks, it is suggested that a distinct line be drawn between the academic professional and the non-academic professional. In this case, it should be stated clearly where the non-academic professionals belong and to assess them more on performance than academic publications.

It is also suggested that assessment and promotion of the non-academic professional be parallel to that of the second track or any other stipulated one and not that of academic staff.

Finally to achieve more recognition in the university, academic librarians need to increase their visibility. One way of doing this is to publish more extensively in library and other professional journals. Other ways are to be more active in curricula development and teaching courses in academic disciplines. Academic librarians must strive to participate in university committees with their teaching-faculty colleagues. Contact through this will give academic librarians the platform to better define their academic roles. They must also extend public service to the university community with presentations and lectures. These together will not only market their skills but also promote teaching and research in the university.

In order to provide an environment that promotes successful performance and encourages scholarship, schedules need to be wholly defined and appropriately between professional and support staff. By properly designating work routines and assignments, librarians will be able to establish the appropriate context for their work. Since scholarship is a useful part of faculty responsibility, schedules must of necessity include opportunity to perform scholarly work.

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