

# Labor Unions or Professional Organizations: Which Have Our First Loyalty?

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*More than 500 librarians in public universities in California were surveyed regarding their membership in a union and/or their membership in professional organizations. Information was requested regarding the reasons for choosing to join or not join, the benefits expected from membership, and the strength of allegiance expressed toward the organizations. These factors were matched against demographic data volunteered by respondents. In general, California academic librarians were found to be relatively more loyal to unions than to professional societies, and the motivations given for joining one or the other, though different, often were complementary.*



For more than seven years librarians in California's state-supported universities have been represented by unions.

These librarians also have long-standing relationships with a broad range of professional organizations: national, state, and regional librarian associations directed toward the advancement of librarianship in all its permutations. What experiences or expectations have prompted these California librarians to decide to become union members? How have they determined which professional organizations deserve their involvement and support? How loyal are the librarians of the California State University and the University of California to their elected bargaining agents? What do they think about the union's effectiveness and per-

formance? Do these librarians perceive the role of professional organizations to be totally unrelated to the union's objectives, or do they see some areas in which goals are complementary or identical? How loyal do library unionists consider themselves to the mission of their union as compared with that of their professional groups? What are the demographic characteristics of librarians who join unions? Do they show any differences from the characteristics of librarians joining other kinds of organizations which serve their profession?

These issues are important for both kinds of organizations as they seek to attract and maintain membership, support, and involvement. They are questions that matter to librarians as well as they decide how to allocate their time,

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energy, and dues dollars. In spring 1990 the authors surveyed over 500 librarians in California's public universities; responses to this survey are the basis for the following report.

### CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS AND UNIONS

In 1979 the California legislature passed the Higher Education Employer/Employer Relations Act (HEERA), giving teaching faculty, librarians, and other public higher education employees the right to organize and to engage in collective bargaining. The Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) was charged with identifying "units" of employees based upon commonalities in the duties and responsibilities connected with job classifications. In California's two public university systems, the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC), PERB defined librarians' eligibility for representation and the composition of their employee units very differently.

PERB ruled that librarians at the University of California's nine campuses met the criteria to be placed in a separate bargaining unit. Of 600 UC librarians, about 140, primarily department heads, were excluded from the bargaining unit. In 1983, UC librarians elected the University Council-American Federation of Teachers (UC-AFT)-University Federation of Librarians (UFL) to represent them as their bargaining agent. The UC-AFT represents all UC academic appointees. At present, only librarians and non-Senate instructors have negotiated contracts with UC.

On the twenty campuses of the CSU System, PERB determined that relatively few librarians could be excluded from the unit as managers; only library directors/deans and associate or assistant dean/director positions were so identified. Furthermore, librarians, along with coaches, part-time faculty, and graduate teaching assistants were placed in the same bargaining unit as full-time teaching faculty. These constituencies elected the California Faculty Association (CFA) to represent their unit in 1983. An affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA), American Association of University

Professors (AAUP), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the AFL-CIO, CFA is the largest union for higher education faculty in the United States, representing more than 20,000 individuals, more than 8,000 of them currently holding union membership.

### THE SURVEY

In spring 1990, the authors distributed a questionnaire to 716 UC and CSU librarians asking for their views on unions and professional organizations. Surveys went to all who were then eligible for union membership, not only those who had decided to join the union. Management employees were not included because they could not be expected to have had direct experience with both types of organization. Response to the questionnaire was very good: 516 surveys (72%) were returned. Predictably, a larger proportion of union members responded than non-members, but both groups are represented in substantial numbers. Survey responses provided answers, not only to questions about librarians' motivation and level of commitment vis-à-vis organizations but also revealed that human factors can be as important as economic ones when a librarian decides whether to maintain or sever a relationship with a society, association, or union.

The survey sample is a relatively diverse one, representing the full range of librarian assignments. UC and CSU libraries, where the respondents work, vary in size from small to very large. They are located in a variety of geographic settings, from rural areas such as Arcata and Turlock to urban centers such as San Diego and Los Angeles. Each campus also has particular strengths and programs for which it enjoys a distinguished reputation. The number and the heterogeneity of the survey respondents suggests that findings may be typical of sentiments held by librarians at other state-supported academic libraries.

### DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

The demographic profile which emerges from the responses to the questionnaire

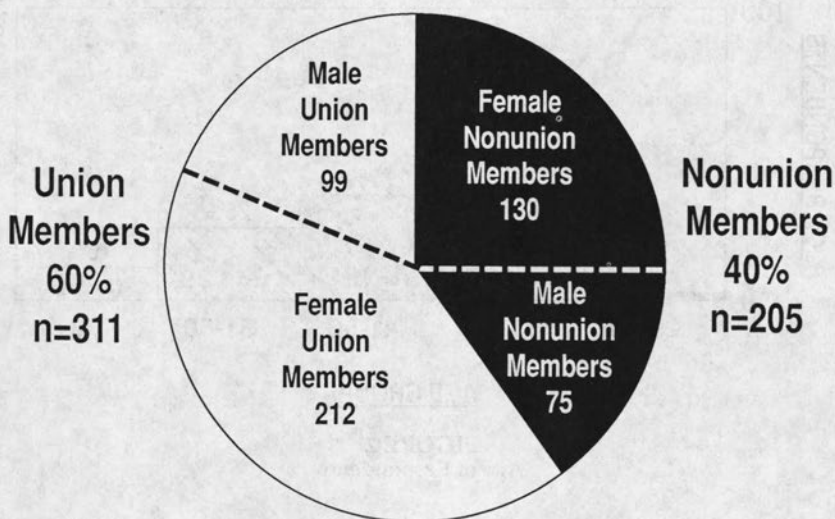


FIGURE 1  
Union versus Nonunion Members  
(N = 516)

reflects many characteristics of the library profession nationwide. About one-third of the respondents were male, two-thirds female, and this ratio is maintained whether one looks at union members or nonmembers, professional association members or nonmembers: gender does not seem to influence the decision to join a librarian organization (see figure 1).

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**Any kind of organization must maintain communication with, indeed constantly "sell" itself to, its members, keeping them always conscious of the rewards of membership.**

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The graying of the profession, as an increasing number of librarians reach retirement age and fewer new graduates are being generated to replace them, has been described in the 1990-91 *Bowker Annual* and other places. Survey respondents give ample evidence of these trends. Only 5 responding librarians listed their age as under 30, while over a third were in the 41-50 age group, and another third in the

51 and above category. Librarians returning questionnaires reported long periods of employment at their current campus and in their current university system. Fully 31% had worked at the same campus for over 20 years. A majority (82%) had earned tenure or career status (the U.C. equivalent). The typical respondent, then, is female, over 40, and has worked at the same campus long enough to have achieved career status or tenure. She also is more likely than not to be a union member. These are characteristics which establish a context for the opinions elicited by the questionnaire. (see figures 2 and 3).

#### THE MOTIVATION FOR UNION MEMBERSHIP

Judging from their responses, California academic librarians join labor unions for a variety of reasons. Some of them are predictable: librarians see the union as effective in improving their salary, benefits, or status, for example, or in defending librarians involved in grievances with management. One stated that, to her, the best reason for joining an organization is simply that it will lead to a raise and enable her to better support three small

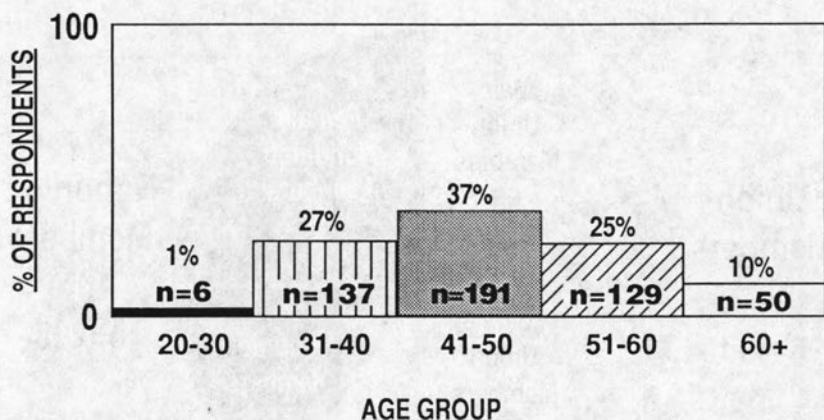


FIGURE 2  
Age of Respondents

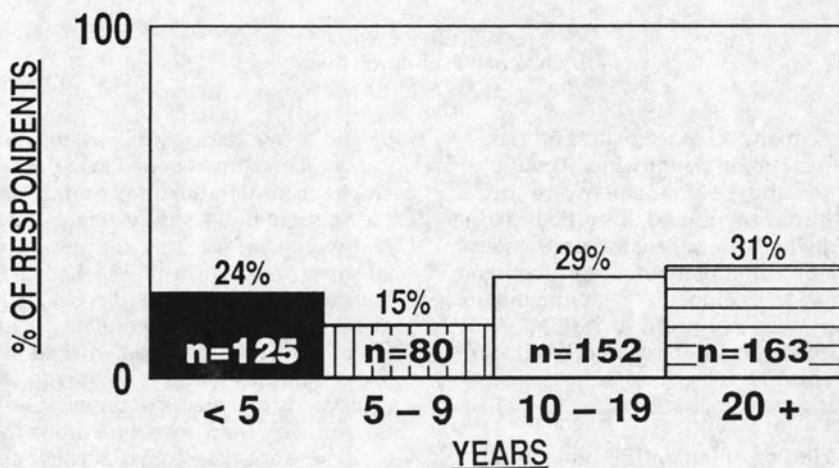


FIGURE 3  
Years Working at CSU or UC Campus

children. Others specifically mentioned union-sponsored life, disability, auto, and homeowners' insurance and the need to maintain membership to continue coverage. Another large group of respondents, however, chose reasons other than the ones suggested in the questionnaire for their decision to affiliate. Many of these said that "solidarity with all organized labor" was what motivated them. "I believe in unions" was a recurrent theme,

signaling a philosophical predisposition toward organizing for strength and mutual support. One librarian reported that his or her "whole family have been strong union activists," and that he or she will always belong to the union.

Beyond this strong showing for membership as a matter of principle, librarians reported that the union's success in winning them access to sabbaticals and the option to be hired on a ten-month

TABLE 1  
REASONS FOR MAINTAINING UNION MEMBERSHIP

Category	Very Important or Somewhat Important (%)	Unimportant or No Answer (%)
Salary concerns	95	5
Insurance, benefits	41	59
Grievance handling	89	11
Social/collegial opportunities	34	66

TABLE 2  
REASONS FOR NOT JOINING THE UNION

Reason	Percent of Union Nonmembers Who Cited (%)
Unprofessional to be a union member	39
Union membership too costly	37
Union positions not supportable	22
Fear of reprisal by management	5

basis prompted them to join their union. Another said that she or he appreciated the union's responsiveness: "returning calls promptly, following up on questions, and maintaining effective contacts with constituents." Still another said the union "represents professional ideals and provides a forum for discussion of problems."

Other reasons stated by respondents for maintaining union membership include:

- It is the only effective means of dialogue on working conditions with University management.
- I feel they need my support.
- [The union] represents professional ideals effectively.
- [The union] provided a forum for discussion of problems (and ensuing action).
- Union provides safeguard against further erosion of employee wages, benefits, and rights.
- CFA does a great job for librarians!
- As long as we have a union, I think it's important to be a member.
- Union advances image and status of librarians.
- I am personally committed to effective and honest unions.

Since it represents me, I think I should support it (see table 1).

More interesting, perhaps, are the reasons given for not joining CFA or AFI. Thirty-nine percent of the nonmembers said that they consider unions unprofessional; almost as large a group (37%) complained that dues were a prohibiting factor. About a fifth of the nonmembers said they disagreed with positions espoused by the union (too inflammatory and "hell-raising"). Some were vehement: "I loathe the union . . . [but] at our campus there is extreme campus pressure to join." Eleven respondents, all but one without career status or tenure, said they were afraid of administrative reprisals should they join.

A surprising number of librarians responded that they were unaware there was a union or that no one ever had approached them to join. This suggests that, at least on some campuses, the union's efforts at self-promotion and recruitment have been less than effective. Those who did acknowledge awareness of the union but had not joined said, in some cases, that the union was "irrelevant," or that they could not abide the union's leaders. In one case the union president was referred to as "a foul-mouthed slob." Both philosophical and

TABLE 3  
REASONS FOR JOINING PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Reason	Very Important or Somewhat Important (%)	Unimportant or No Answer (%)
Important for retention, tenure, and promotion	81	19
Opportunities for speaking, publishing	74	26
Opportunity to network with others in the profession	98	2
Ability to influence the goals of the profession	84	16
Current awareness through journals which accompany membership	84	16

personal factors, then, have come into play when librarians withhold their support (table 2). Other reasons given for not joining a union include:

- [I] do not trust labor unions!
- [I] have had ideological problems in the past with unions I was in—their calling strikes when I didn't feel one was justified.... Don't trust unions anymore.
- Fear loss of autonomy.
- System has worked for me so far. The institution is OK.
- Don't see a qualitative difference in working environment between pre- and postunion periods.
- Not convinced the union will represent my interests.
- [It] seems irrelevant.
- I feel I can represent my own best interests.
- Do not feel these organizations are effective for librarians.
- No union interest in cultural diversity for employment and retention.

#### MOTIVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

Like librarians belonging to CFA and AFT, California university librarians belonging to professional associations show remarkable consistency in their characteristics. Overall, there is a ratio of about one-fourth male, to three-fourths female, and one-fourth without career status or tenure, to three-fourths with career status or tenure. These ratios apply regardless of whether one looks at membership in ALA, California Academic and Research Librarians (CARL),

ACRL, or the Librarians Association of the University of California (LAUC). Of the more than two dozen organizations cited by respondents, these were the ones that emerged as having substantial membership among librarians in the CSU and UC systems; indeed all UC librarians are members of LAUC (see figure 4).

Again, these librarians were asked to characterize their motivation for association membership, and again some answers could be anticipated, others were unforeseen (see table 3). Large numbers of respondents said that professional organization membership and participation provided them with the chance to network, to meet and maintain contact with colleagues, and to exchange information and ideas with them. Other significant numbers of librarians said that membership was an important factor in reappointment and promotion consideration or that it gave them a voice in influencing the goals of the profession. Eighty-four percent of the respondents said that the professional journals included in their membership were a somewhat or very important reason for maintaining it because the journals keep them abreast of developments in their field. Other reasons cited for joining a professional organization include:

- Opportunity to develop standards, influence national libraries and utilities.
- I consider it a professional obligation to participate in the association.
- Supporting one's professional association, at least by paying dues, seems the right thing to do.

TABLE 4  
ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES

Activity	Union Role	Professional Organization Role
Influencing salary and benefits	primary	secondary
Defining working conditions	primary	—
Defending librarian grievances	primary	—
Promoting, defending, influencing the aims of the profession	secondary	primary
Disseminating information through journals and newsletters	primary	primary
Sponsoring meetings, workshops, seminars on professional issues; providing opportunities for continuing education	secondary	primary
Providing opportunities for librarians to speak and write on professional matters and to be reviewed by their peers	—	primary

- Philosophical: support for organizations and profession.
- Membership gives me an excuse to travel to meetings (a seemingly frivolous but important reason!).
- Good newsletters.
- Keep colleagues happy.
- [It is] an outlet for creativity and activity not possible in work organization.
- Participation on professional committees is important for promotion.

Librarians volunteering reasons for professional organization membership stated that they consider it "a matter of principle" or "a professional obligation." Others said that association activities "break up the routine of work" or provide an "excuse" to travel to meetings. Continuing education opportunities also were cited, as well as speaking and publishing opportunities available through associations.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES: INDEPENDENT OR COMPLEMENTARY?

Survey findings showed that most librarians look to their union to represent their interests in improving the level of compensation and to defend them in

case of a dispute with management. These are traditional union functions, and it is not surprising to find them frequently cited. One could argue that these factors advance professional objectives in addition to individual self-interest. High pay enables the academy to attract and retain the best librarians. Students and instructional faculty are better served when talented and highly qualified librarians have been recruited.

As shown in table 4, however, more and more unions are establishing this linkage between labor objectives and professional objectives themselves, showing a relationship between the things that are good for the union and that will benefit the university's mission. The California Faculty Association, for example, has launched a "quality education" campaign for its next contract; ten bargaining goals, each allied closely with the quality of instruction, are identified: "enhancing teaching and learning," and "keeping faculty vital and current" are two examples. Only in this broader context of common interests shared by the profession, by university management, by students, and by the legislature and

community, are the union's objectives delineated.

Librarian unions seek institutional support for librarian professional development, for travel, conference participation, and continuing education. On some campuses the union has joined the academic senate to sponsor faculty forums which discuss professional issues such as the tension between work load demands and the scholarly expectations associated with retention and promotion. These surely are things that complement the interests of librarian professional organizations. Without travel and work load concessions, for example, many librarians would find it difficult or impossible to participate in professional groups to the extent they would like. CSU librarians are eligible through their union contract for a fee-waiver program which permits them to enroll in course work without payment of fees and to qualify for assigned time for this purpose. These are situations in which professional goals are being served, though primarily through the efforts of the union.

Professional organizations for librarians also cross the line in involving themselves in issues and concerns—wages and working conditions—traditionally regarded as being in the union's purview. Although the ALA has not adopted recommendations for minimum salaries for librarians, a salary guide regularly is included in job notices in *C&RL News* listing minimum starting salaries recommended by state librarian associations. AAUP standards for retention, tenure, and promotion of instructional faculty and librarians are accepted widely in the academic community, and a significant portion of a librarian union's grievance representation cases can stem from an employer's failure to adhere to due process as defined in these standards included in the collective bargaining contract.

Librarians responding to the survey questionnaire, however, tended to view the objectives of their employee organizations and their professional societies as mutually exclusive. One wrote, "I don't see a conflict between a union and professional organization. . . . ALA can-

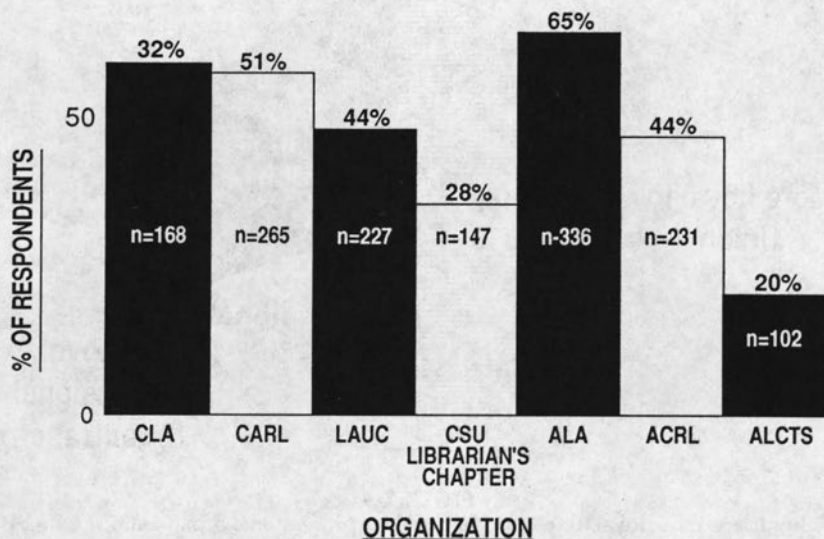
not negotiate my salary with the CSU. I'm not disloyal to one for belonging to the other." Another said, "Unions are there to protect my rights when I perceive that they are being infringed upon; professional organizations, including LAUC, provide opportunities for professional growth. The latter are useless basically as far as protecting individuals from being unfairly treated. Both have their places."

### A TEST OF LOYALTY

The survey asked respondents holding memberships in both kinds of organizations to consider a scenario in which they might be forced, through financial hardship, to abandon one of their memberships, either a professional organization or the union. The responses have implications for union and association leadership. Librarians showed a fair amount of loyalty to the union; only 22% said that they would leave the union in such a situation, while 48% of the respondents would drop one of their professional memberships. Another 30% were unsure (see figure 5).

Several factors may have influenced these responses. First, if librarians expect their unions to work for better salaries and if they see this as something the union has been effective at, union support and membership might be perceived as a particularly important priority when times are bad. Also, dues in professional organizations usually require an annual recommitment on the part of librarians; the membership will lapse if it is not renewed and the dues paid. Union dues commonly are paid through payroll deduction and continue until there is an initiative by the librarian to cancel this deduction. When the opportunity is provided to renew in a professional organization, one has a recurring chance to reassess both the organization's performance and one's own commitment to provide financial support. This is not an opportunity unions give their members. Thus, in answering the survey question, respondents may have considered the relative ease with which they could disaffiliate from a professional organization.





CLA-California Library Association  
 CARL-California Academic and Research Librarians  
 LAUC-Library Association of the University of California  
 CSU LIBRARIAN'S CHAPTER-California State University Library Chapter  
 ALA-American Library Association  
 ACRL-Association of College and Research Libraries  
 ALCTS-Association for Library Collections and Technical Services

**FIGURE 4**  
 Professional Organizations Most Popular with California Librarians

On the other hand, union dues are not low; librarians may believe that they can benefit more from multiple and relatively inexpensive professional memberships than they can from devoting an equivalent amount only to the union. A final inducement held by the union to promote membership maintenance is insurance. Librarians enrolled in union-sponsored insurance plans would lose coverage if they should disaffiliate, and they would need to seek out other, probably more costly, substitute plans. However one may speculate on the reasons why librarians might exhibit or withhold their loyalty from a union or a professional group, it is clear from the survey responses that any kind of organization must maintain communication with, indeed

constantly "sell" itself to, its members, keeping them always conscious of the rewards of membership and responding to their current needs and interests.

#### CONCLUSION

California academic librarians have become active, involved, contributing members of higher education unions and of professional organizations. The authors have drawn upon the responses of a significant number of these librarians to identify the factors that motivate them to render this support or to withhold it. Some of these factors, such as looking to a union to improve and maintain salary and benefits, are predictable; others, such as seeing network-

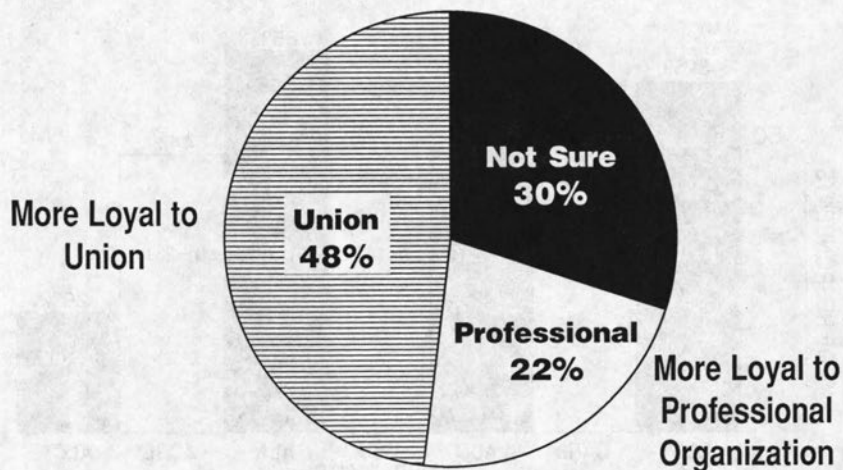


FIGURE 5

Are librarians more loyal to their unions or their professional organization? (N = 516)

ing as the most important reward of professional association membership, are unexpected. Also noteworthy is the extent to which the interests of employee organizations and professional societies and associations may overlap. The definition of what constitutes a librarian's conditions of employment seems to be expanding, and unions are discovering mutual interests and complementary, sometimes even collaborative, relationships are being formed between these bodies. Perhaps this is one

more reason why surveyed librarians who are union members are relatively more loyal to their union than to their professional societies. California academic librarians look to their memberships to serve a variety of needs and interests; survey responses reveal what these objectives are, give an indication of their relative importance, and suggest the areas in which organizations have been successful in serving their constituencies.

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