

Position Classification at Michigan: Another Look

This article summarizes two reevaluations of the process of position classification in the University of Michigan Library since the mid-1960s. Changes in philosophy and practice within the profession as well as in the way in which professionals operate necessitated this reevaluation. The article also discusses the development and preparation of the scheme, the interviews with librarians and administrators, and the evaluation of the data collected for the establishment of a classification level for each professional position in the library.

PROFESSIONAL STAFFS in academic libraries today are structured in a myriad of different patterns. These range from librarians organized as academic faculties, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of other faculties, to the more traditional position classification approach. Factors leading to a particular pattern can often be attributed to local circumstances on both institutional and individual levels.

BACKGROUND

Since the early sixties the University of Michigan Library has used a position management approach in which each professional position has been classified according to its function relative to other positions within the library. This approach to position classification resulted from the work of a classification evaluation committee appointed in 1963 by the director of the library.

The committee developed the Chart for Classification of Academic Positions, which used weighted factors for each professional position, and established five levels of pro-

fessional classification. Then, applying the chart, the committee recommended to the director a classification level for each position. These recommendations were accepted and implemented by the library administration in 1965. A full report on the work of the committee appeared in the May 1966 issue of *College & Research Libraries*.¹

During the next few years the classification evaluation committee continued to evaluate new positions and those in which the duties of the position had changed substantially.

In response to a changing professional environment, the committee on personnel classification was elected by the professional staff in 1970 at the request of the director. This committee was charged with reviewing the initial classification scheme and recommending any necessary changes.²

This committee revised the original list of factors to be used in evaluating professional positions and recommended that the number of grade levels for professional positions be reduced from five to four. It also revised the system of weighted points to be used in evaluating and classifying each position and recommended that the classification evaluation committee be an elected committee with three members each from public services and technical services and with the assistant for personnel and staff development an ex officio member. In 1972

This article was prepared by members of the University of Michigan Library's classification evaluation committee for 1977-78: Ronald Austin, James Cruse, Rose-Grace Faucher, Sara Heitshu, Carol Holbrook, Lynn Marko, and Jean L. Loup, chair.

this elected committee conducted the second review of all professional positions.

An additional recommendation of the committee on personnel classification, implemented in 1972 and still in effect, was a promotional opportunity through which an individual librarian might be promoted one level above the position classification. Such promotion was to be based on outstanding performance and was to be considered not by the classification evaluation committee, whose concern was position classification, but by the executive council, an advisory body to the director.

DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SCHEME

By 1975 significant changes in the duties performed by professional librarians dictated a further review of the classification of professional positions, and the classification evaluation committee was charged with conducting a review of the criteria used to classify positions. Two preliminary documents were prepared, which served as a basis for the subsequent work of the committee.

The first of these was prepared by Ralph Edwards during his tenure as a Council on Library Resources administrative intern in the university library.³ Edwards consulted a personnel management expert in the Graduate School of Business Administration, the library staff, and library administrative officers. His report recommended changes in the content of the chart but retained the weighted point system. He also recommended that the membership of the classification evaluation committee be changed to include four elected members (two from public services and two from technical services), two appointed members (one each from public services and technical services), and the assistant for personnel and staff development, *ex officio*.

The second preliminary document was prepared by Louis Mortimer, of the Library of Congress, who visited the university library as a consultant in 1975.⁴ His report proposed a factor evaluation chart using the following criteria to classify those positions not having management or supervisory responsibility: scope of assignment, level of responsibility, and knowledge required to

perform the duties of the position. Management and supervisory positions were to be classified using these factors and additional criteria applicable to those positions. The system recommended by Mortimer was more flexible than the system of points previously in use and recognized the importance of informed and experienced judgment in classifying professional positions.

After careful review and discussion of the documents prepared by Edwards and Mortimer,⁵ the classification evaluation committee revised the procedure for classification evaluation, incorporating many of their recommendations. Mortimer's factor evaluation chart was selected to provide the framework for the scheme. (See appendix.)

The committee chose two basic factors to govern the evaluation of professional positions: scope of assignment and level of responsibility. Within each of these factors, three degrees of difficulty (A, C, E) were described in order of increasing complexity. Degrees B and D were not defined but would be used when a position fell between two defined degrees, or when a position compared with one degree in some respects and another degree in other respects.

Factor 1, scope of assignment, incorporated the following elements:

1. Difficulty of work performed, including guidance necessary and originality required.
2. Education and experience required to complete the assignment.
3. Extent of participation in development of programs, plans, policies, procedures, plus administrative or staff assignments.

In a fourth element the committee attempted to provide a differing means of evaluation for technical services positions and public services positions. A need for this had become apparent during the application of the earlier chart. In most cases public services positions would be evaluated on the basis of the scope, coverage, and size of the collection, the clientele served, and the range and difficulty of materials in the collection. Technical services positions would be evaluated on the basis of the depth of knowledge of bibliographic tools and methods required.

Factor 2, level of responsibility, contained these elements:

1. Impact of the position beyond the functional unit.

2. Nature and importance of person-to-person contacts.

3. Supervisory and managerial responsibilities.

The elements in factor 2 would be applied selectively to the position under review. For example, positions that contained no managerial or supervisory responsibilities would be evaluated only in terms of impact and person-to-person contacts.

In considering the impact of each professional position, the classification evaluation committee used the following recommendation from the report prepared by Ralph Edwards:

This [element] measures the significance of the work of a librarian in the achievement of the objectives of the Library and the University. This work may have an impact on end results in one or more areas including at least the following:

a.) the quality and completeness of the Library's collections,

b.) the effectiveness of access to the materials in the collections,

c.) knowledge and understanding of the library needs of the Library's clientele—students, staff, faculty, and researchers,

d.) service to the clientele,

e.) the image of the Library in the academic and professional communities and the development of support for the Library,

f.) costs of operation, efficiency, morale, and physical maintenance of buildings, equipment, and collections.⁶

A problem encountered in the use of the earlier chart had been the difficulty in classifying the higher-level nonsupervisory and nonmanagement positions. As discussion progressed the committee recognized that, although a position need not contain a supervisory aspect in order to be classified at the highest level, it would have to have managerial aspects. Ultimately the committee developed definitions for these two terms:

Managerial Responsibility

The primary element in management is responsibility for providing leadership in the operation of a major segment of the library system, or in the operation of the library system as a whole. Managerial responsibility includes substantial and significant input into planning, policy making, and decision making at a level that directly affects

the operation of a major segment of the library system and usually affects the operation of the library system as a whole. Those who have managerial responsibility must make judgments based on significant experience in library work and on a broad knowledge of the library system; these judgments form part of the information which library administrators use in making decisions and formulating policy.

Supervisory Responsibility

The primary element in supervision is responsibility for someone else's work performance. Every staff member "reports to" someone; that is, every staff member is directly accountable to someone for the work which he or she does. The person to whom he or she "reports," to whom he or she is directly accountable, is the supervisor.

A supervisor, in turn, is responsible for the work performance of those whom he or she supervises. If a staff member is held directly accountable for another person's work, then he or she is that person's supervisor.

The following kinds of activities are characteristic of supervisory responsibility:

1. Interview and recommend applicants for vacant positions.

2. Assign work to other staff members, train them in the best way to do it, take responsibility for seeing that they do it, and discipline them if they do not do it.

3. Evaluate other staff members' work performance, including the preparation of written evaluations, and counsel with them to resolve any problems that are encountered.

4. Approve vacation and sick leave requests; review and sign time cards.

Some positions have significant and ongoing training responsibilities, particularly of other professional librarians, but do not have supervisory authority as described in the above paragraph. In such cases, recognition will be made of that responsibility under the "difficulty of work" element.

The chart developed in 1963-65 and revised in 1970-72 employed a weighted point system. Under this system, for example, education might be assigned a maximum of 50 points, and independence of performance a maximum of 250 points. The new scheme was not formally structured in this manner. When the new scheme was applied, however, it became apparent to the members of the committee that not all of the elements in the scheme should have the same influence in determining position classification.

Elements such as "education" and "knowledge of foreign languages" should not

have as much influence as "impact" or "planning and policy making." The committee determined that, in order for a position to be classified at the highest level, it would have to include significant management responsibility, and also be evaluated at high levels in the areas of "impact" and "planning and policy making."

The review of professional library positions conducted in 1972 was based on a written position description prepared by each librarian. In this instance, the written position description was intended as a complete picture of the responsibilities of the position. These written position descriptions varied widely in content, and Mortimer recommended that the classification evaluation committee interview each member of the professional staff in order to obtain a more detailed basis for evaluation.¹

The committee adopted this recommendation and requested each incumbent librarian to prepare a written position description. These written descriptions were to summarize the major responsibilities of the position rather than to treat them exhaustively, as each written description would be supplemented by an audit interview.

Communication between members of the library professional staff and the classification evaluation committee of 1972 was quite limited. The committee at that time worked primarily from written position descriptions and based its recommendations upon a careful review of these written statements. The recommendations of the committee were treated confidentially by the library administration and were not communicated to individual staff members.

The classification evaluation committee in 1977 recommended several changes in these procedures in order to provide for more open communication between the committee and the library staff.

Besides the use of the audit interview, which would provide for direct contact between the committee and each professional staff member, the committee also recommended that each librarian receive a written statement of the committee's recommendation concerning his or her position and the reasons for the recommendation.

The committee also felt the need for a more adequate written record of its deliber-

ations and decisions and adopted Mortimer's recommendation that a decision book be maintained in which the committee's decisions, and the reasons for them, would be recorded. The committee's final recommendations for the structure of a scheme to be used in reviewing positions were presented to the director in August 1976. Before the scheme could be implemented, it had to be reviewed by several levels of library and university administration. When this review had been completed, the scheme was introduced to the staff.

IMPLEMENTATION

The committee held a series of meetings with the staff in December 1976 during which discussion of the new scheme and procedures occurred. Each librarian was then asked to submit a position description to the committee by February 1, 1977, and the audit interviews were scheduled to begin on February 7, 1977.

The interviews were to focus on an analysis and evaluation of the duties of a position and were not to be concerned with an evaluation of the performance of an individual. A set of uniform questions was prepared to provide a common basis for comparison and to elicit responses that would supplement, rather than merely repeat, the information in the written position description. The following questions were asked at every interview:

1. Describe fully the major duties and responsibilities of your position.
2. Relate the educational requirements, professional experience, and special skills noted in your position description to particular aspects of your job.
3. Illustrate the types of problems that you are expected to solve on your own and those that you would refer to a higher authority.
4. Give an illustration of the type of operational (day-to-day) planning, if any, and the type of policy planning, if any, normally associated with your position.
5. Are the duties of the people you supervise primarily of a routine or of a discretionary nature? Give examples. How many positions do you supervise, and at what performance level are these?
6. With what positions within the library or outside the library do you have regular contact? Describe the nature of this contact.

7. Describe those aspects of your position that you feel have not been adequately covered, either on the position description form or in this job audit.

During the initial audit interviews, which the committee conducted as a whole, different approaches to the interview were tested, and the technique was refined until a more or less uniform procedure evolved. Subsequent interviews were conducted by three committee members, a group usually consisting of the assistant for personnel and staff development, one member of the committee representing public services, and one representing technical services.

Supervisors of each unit were also interviewed by the committee and were asked to explain their understanding of the role and function of each position under their supervision and its relationship to other positions in the library. Organization charts were consulted by the committee to help in understanding these relationships. The committee also met several times with the associate directors for public services and for technical services to understand the administration's view of the positions within the library.

A written report, detailing each audit interview with a librarian, supervisor, or member of the library administration, was prepared. This report became part of the permanent records of the committee and was used to supplement the written position description. Upon request, staff members were given an opportunity to review the written record of their audit interviews and to suggest corrections or additions.

During the period when the audit interviews were being conducted, the committee began a preliminary evaluation of each professional position. First, each position was compared with others in the same unit, using the written position description, the information from the audit interview, and the information from the interview with the supervisor. These preliminary evaluations were reviewed with the appropriate associate director, for public services or technical services.

The next step in the classification process was the establishment of eight "benchmark" positions, one public service position and one technical service position at each of the

four grade levels. Each of the benchmark positions was selected because it seemed most nearly to typify library activities and responsibilities at its grade level. Reference to these positions provided a basis for comparison for positions whose classification was difficult to determine.

After the preliminary evaluation of each position, positions at the same classification level throughout the library were examined in relation to each other. The problem of providing equity when comparing positions with very different emphases and responsibilities presented a particularly difficult challenge to the committee.

Two external factors affected the committee's work at this point.

The first involved a series of reorganizations within the library. As a result, several staff members assumed new and significantly different responsibilities, necessitating revised position descriptions and supplementary audit interviews.

The second external factor affecting the work of the committee was its responsibility to act in an advisory capacity to the university personnel office in classifying professional library positions outside the university library system. These positions were primarily in small libraries serving academic departments or research centers. The process of reviewing and classifying these positions, using written position descriptions and audit interviews, provided the committee with additional insight to the classification process.

At this point, although the classification process was basically complete, each position underwent a final review. The results of this final review were discussed with one of the associate directors, for public services or technical services. This discussion provided an opportunity for the committee to elaborate the reasons for its recommendation and for the associate directors to raise questions regarding any of the recommended classifications. As a result of these discussions, several staff members were asked to rewrite their position descriptions, and their positions were reviewed again. The committee then submitted its final recommendations to the director.

The work of the classification evaluation committee extended over a period of more

than eighteen months. During that time the committee dealt with a variety of practical and philosophical problems in preparing a new document upon which to base the classification of professional positions in the university library. The deliberations covered a wide range of topics, including the question of management versus supervision, the factors most significant in determining position classification level, and the methodology of comparing public services and technical services assignments.

The validity of the decisions made by the committee in preparing the document was demonstrated by the successful use of the document as a basis for classifying the 102 professional positions in the library. The audit interviews proved very valuable in supplementing the written position descriptions. Additionally, the open communication between the committee and library supervisors and administrators at each stage of the committee's work proved worthwhile and provided the committee with a number of valuable insights. The resulting comprehensive and balanced picture of the library system aided the committee in making its recommendations.

Past experience at the University of Michigan Library has demonstrated that position classifications do not remain constant. The library and the library profession exist in an environment of continuing change. It is the hope of the present classification evaluation committee that it has provided a document sufficiently flexible to provide for these expected changes for some time in the future.

REFERENCES

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6. Edwards, "The Classification of Professional Positions at The University of Michigan Libraries," p.17.
7. Mortimer, "Comments and Observations on the Classification Program for Professional Positions at The University of Michigan Libraries," p.1.

APPENDIX

CLASSIFICATION FOR PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

PREFACE

Professional librarian positions within the University of Michigan library system are classified into four levels: assistant librarian, associate librarian, senior associate librarian, and librarian. The scheme that follows is the instrument used by the classification evaluation committee to determine at which level each professional position falls. Three levels of difficulty (A, C, E) are described in order of increasing complexity. Degrees B and D are not described but may be used when a position clearly falls between two described degrees, or when a position compares with one degree in some respects and another degree in other respects.

Descriptions of the type of work performed are indicative only of the level of performance required at each grade. In other words, no attempt has been made to describe every library position. Therefore, it should be understood that no penalty accrues to positions that are not specifically described.

The levels describe the skills expected to be brought to the position and the performance at this level after a period of training. Performance beyond the basic requirements of the position is not considered here.

FACTOR 1: SCOPE OF ASSIGNMENT

This factor reflects the breadth, depth, and difficulty of the assignment. Differences in levels are primarily determined by consideration of each of the following:

- either the scope, coverage, size of collection, clientele served, range and difficulty of the materials in the collection, or the depth of knowledge of bibliographic tools and methods required; and

- the difficulty of work performed, including guidance necessary and originality required; and
- education and experience required to complete the assignment; and

- extent of participation in development of programs, plans, policies, procedures, administrative or staff assignments.

Degree A

This level includes assignments of average difficulty relating to one or more library functions with predetermined limitations restricting subject areas dealt with or depth of analysis. Assignments, while performed within established procedures, typically include segments of more difficult work allowing some opportunity for originality. The work seldom involves tasks requiring higher specialized subject or bibliographic competence or experience beyond that gained through the achievement of the A.M.L.S., although some proficiency in foreign languages may be required.

Usually responsibilities do not extend beyond the solution of problems encountered in day-to-day assignments. However, though limited, the work does require analytical ability and imaginative interpretation.

General participation in planning and development is expected.

Degree B

For positions that clearly fall between degrees A and C or that compare in some respects with degree A and in other respects with degree C.

Degree C

This level exceeds degree A in breadth and/or depth of assignment and regularly encompasses work of more than average or normal difficulty. The assignment allows for frequent originality within the limits of the objectives established for the functional unit and often requires language proficiency (reading knowledge of two languages or working knowledge of three languages) and/or graduate work in a requisite subject or professional field in addition to two or more years of requisite experience.

A major aspect of the work at this level includes the solution of problems involving varied

and complex procedures, the simultaneous approach to several problems, and/or handling problems passed on from below. Performance requires substantially higher levels of analytical ability and resourcefulness than degree A, and there is a significant investigative factor in the assignment.

Work involves staff assignments or special projects within and occasionally beyond the functional unit and may require participation in formulating policies, developing program plans, recommending new or revised methods or techniques.

Degree D

For positions that clearly fall between degrees C and E or that compare in some respects with degree C and in other respects with degree E.

Degree E

Responsibility at this level substantially exceeds that of degree C. Within library policy, work is performed with independence to set goals and to choose methods of accomplishment. Performance demands originality, initiative, and resourcefulness and requires four or more years of increasingly responsible requisite experience and/or a second master's degree in a requisite subject or specialization in library science beyond the A.M.L.S. The significant factors at this level are those of final authority for the operations of the functional unit and/or specialized activity and significant contribution, on a continuing basis, to policy planning and development beyond the functional unit.

FACTOR 2: LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

This factor reflects the level of responsibility at which the position operates. It includes consideration of the following criteria:

- impact of the position beyond the functional unit; and/or

- nature and importance of person-to-person contacts; and/or

- supervisory and managerial responsibilities.

Degree A

Although influence is limited to short-range decisions and planning within the functional unit, the work may involve interpretive or advisory capacities or facilitating services for use by others in taking action. Errors may be costly, but there are usually enough checks in the system that errors are detected before they can adversely affect the operation or the people involved.

The level of formal external contact is normally limited to members of the library staff or clientele for the purpose of obtaining or providing such information as is necessary for the completion of the assignment.

Supervisory responsibilities may be included in the duties of a position at this level.

Degree B

For positions that clearly fall between degrees A and C or that compare in some respects with degree A and in other respects with degree C.

Degree C

There is moderate responsibility for decisions and final recommendations. Because work is not frequently checked, errors are not readily apparent and can result in significant costs or disruption of service. Impact is primarily on the unit but extends to related library units.

Contacts at this level are significant to the functional unit; they may be far-ranging and will often require judgment and/or complex investigation in providing, obtaining, or exchanging information.

At this level those who have supervisory content in their positions will also have managerial responsibilities.

Degree D

For positions that clearly fall between degrees C and E or that compare in some respects with degree C and in other respects with degree E.

Degree E

There is substantial responsibility for decisions and final recommendations, which tend to commit library operations on a long-range basis. The effect of such decisions and recommendations may extend to any part of the library.

Contacts require diplomacy, effectiveness, and competence to encourage an exchange of information regarding new developments and techniques or cooperation on programs of mutual interest. The incumbent speaks for the policies, programs, and objectives of the library in establishing and maintaining continuing consultative relationships with professional peers both inside and outside the library.

Managerial responsibilities will be part of the duties of a position at this level, such as, but not limited to, collaborating with heads of other units to decide on or coordinate changes and deciding on resources to be committed to various programs and projects.

Supervisory content, if any, will include making final decisions (within the constraints of university policy) on personnel problems presented by subordinates.

Note 1

The following are examples of performance level of assignments at degree C. Degrees A and E should be based upon their relationship to applicable examples. The following examples are illustrative but not all-inclusive.

— Selects or recommends acquisition of materials, including current and/or retrospective mate-

rial collected on an international basis and both primary and secondary source material.

— Performs descriptive cataloging, classifying, and assigning of subject headings. This demands knowledge and discriminating use of a variety of reference sources and tools; extensive and critical searching for sources of information; and the exercise of experienced judgment in determining the cataloging principles that apply, and the extent of subject analysis and the fineness of classification that are necessary to reflect subject interests and emphasis of the parent agency or information service.

— Functions as supervisor with duties that include setting priorities and/or preparing schedules for completion of specific tasks, evaluating performance of subordinates, participation in interviews with candidates and making suggestions for appointment, training, hearing and resolving complaints, although serious complaints may be referred to a higher level.

Note 2

It is apparent that the nature of the tasks in many divisions of technical services makes the organization of those divisions more naturally hierarchical than many of those in public services, where in materials selection, reference, and other tasks it may seem that there is little difference between librarians' duties. In order to differentiate between these positions the following categories of libraries (in which the work is performed) can be applied to the expected level of performance to determine the degree. (See figure 1 for elements to employ when libraries do not fit the description provided below.)

Degree A: Work is performed in a library that is distinguished by small size and/or limited scope (usually no more than two or three main subject areas) and materials that are generally accessible via standard general bibliographic tools. The collection will contain primarily English-language publications with some unusual serial or government publications. Most of the reference work is providing help in locating specifically cited materials or in assisting patrons who are unfamiliar with library techniques. If work includes materials selection, the items selected are typically English-language materials chosen from standard sources.

Degree C: Work is performed in a library that could be one of two types:

- A. Medium in size and specialized in coverage (usually no more than two or three main subject areas), with a clientele that is familiar with basic library techniques. It is a working collection containing materials in several languages, some complex series, and nonstandard government documents. Reference questions may require the librarian to

Libraries that do not fit into the descriptions provided in Note 2 may be described by combining appropriate elements from the chart below. Elements of the description may be drawn from more than one degree.

Level of Difficulty	Size/Scope	Level of Bibliographic Control	Reference	Selection
Degree A	Small size and/or limited scope (i.e., 2-3 main subject areas).	Easily accessible via standard bibliographic tools. Mainly English language.	Help in locating specifically cited sources. Assisting patrons who may be unfamiliar with basic library techniques.	Mostly English language, selected from standard sources. A few unusual materials (i.e., serials, government documents).
Degree C A.	Medium size and specialized in coverage (i.e., 2-3 main subject areas).	Materials in several languages. Some complex series and nonstandard government documents.	Requires searching the literature; interpreting materials. Subject knowledge required.	Significant number foreign-language materials. Comprehensive for 1 or 2 subjects. Working collection.
Degree C B.	Large size and broad, but not comprehensive in subject coverage.	Mostly English-language materials. Some unusual serials and government documents.	Limited by scope of collection, but large volume of questions and/or clientele that may be unfamiliar with basic library techniques.	Standard sources. Working collection.
Degree E	Large size. Devoted to several subjects.	Much of collection not covered by standard bibliographic tools.	Ranges from routine to difficult. Large volume. Determined by broad scope, variety of languages, and depth of collection.	Ranges from routine to specialized, including retrospective materials. In some subject areas, attempts to achieve a comprehensive research collection.

Fig. 1
Chart of Library Elements

search the literature and to use subject knowledge in interpreting materials located. Selection of materials will include a significant proportion of foreign-language materials and may include the attempt at comprehensiveness in one subject area.

- B. Large in size and broad but not comprehensive in subject coverage. It is a working collection composed primarily of English-language publications, with some unusual government publications or serials. Reference may be limited by the scope of the collection, although this may be offset by the volume of questions or lack of familiarity of the majority of the clientele with library techniques. Most selection will be from standard sources and problems will lie in selectivity.

Degree E: Work is performed within a library that is devoted to at least several subject areas

and that presents unusually difficult access problems because of the large size of the collection and/or the amount of materials not covered by standard bibliographic tools. Selection of materials ranges from the routine to the specialized (including retrospective materials) and includes responsibilities for developing portions of the collection. In some subject areas, selection problems lie in attempts to achieve a comprehensive research collection.

Note 3

In the evaluation of the supervisory content of a position, the following factors should be taken into consideration: grade level of work supervised; kind and degree of supervision; scope and variety of work supervised; additional responsibilities (i.e., number of employees supervised, shift work, or dispersion of employees in more than one location).