T is for Temporary

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Temporary librarians are employed in a variety of positions in academic libraries, yet the roles of these professionals are rarely discussed. Few statistics are available on their number or use, and professional literature about them is nonexistent. Time limitations influence the work environment for librarians employed in these positions. Four potential problem areas—orientation, supervision, acceptance and integration, and utilization—are discussed. Solutions are suggested, and further research is proposed.

dministrators of academic libraries use temporary professionals to replace permanent staff on sabbatical or maternity leave, to work on long-term projects, and to fill positions not available on permanent status due to budgetary constraints. Specific parameters define these positions. For example, employment is generally for six months to one year or for a specific time-bound project such as a retrospective conversion of the card catalog. Maximum job performance is expected quickly. Moreover, the duties and responsibilities of these positions necessitate the librarian's immediate integration into the library structure, staff, and culture. Lastly, temporary librarians are both restricted from and ineligible for certain assignments that may be available to tenure-track or career librarians.

The hiring of temporary professionals is a management option that offers distinct advantages to the employer. The salaries for these professionals are often lower than those of new permanent librarians. Temporary appointments are not tenure-track or career positions, and therefore these professionals do not receive some of the benefits that accrue to other librarians. Temporary staff also provide flexibility in times of budget or enrollment declines. Finally, as new personnel they contribute fresh ideas.

Temporary librarians, despite their use, constitute an unrecognized segment of the professional library work force. Consequently, issues pertaining to this group have not been investigated. One primary issue is the fact that the time constraints affecting temporary appointments produce distinct needs for these librarians. Problems arise if time's influence is not recognized and counteracted by management. The following discussion notes the absence of information on temporary professionals and examines potential problems resulting from unmet needs in the areas of orientation, supervision, acceptance and integration, and utilization. Measures to prevent these problems are presented.

The use of temporary librarians is a topic that has not been addressed in the professional literature. No relevant citations were retrieved through online searches of LISA, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts Online, and Psycinfo or through a manual search of *Library Literature* from 1921 to the present. During these searches, however, two articles were discovered on temporary university faculty. In the first article, Eugene Jabker and Ronald Halinski reported the results of their 1978 study of temporary faculty at Illinois State University. The second article was a more recent discussion of the status and condition of temporary faculty.[1] Both articles were in

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agreement: the use of temporary faculty may result in long-range curriculum development problems and other immediate difficulties such as office assignments. While specifics differ, the substance of these articles corroborate several points that are made in the following discussion.

Indexes and databases in other disciplines were searched to ascertain the use, if any, of temporary professionals.[2] No articles were found on temporary professionals in the social science, medical, or engineering fields. Citations in the *Business Periodicals Index, Work-Related Abstracts, Personnel Literature, ABI/INFORM,* and Management Contents focused primarily on the demand for temporary, short-term clerical workers in the corporate sector and thriving temporary agencies. In a 1983 article from *Supervisory Management* on the management of short-term temporary employees, the authors confirm some of the points highlighted in this paper.[3] Several of the business articles and a new book, *Temporary Employment* by Demaris C. Smith, mentions the increasing demand for temporary employees in the "technical, professional, industrial and health-care fields."[4] A recent *U.S. News and World Report* article reported that 19.5 percent of the temporary-worker demand is for technical and professional personnel.[5] In a personal interview, Laura McGuire Mackail of the National Association of Temporary Services commented that temporary services is one of the fastest growing industries in the United States.[6]

The total number of working temporary librarians, past or present, is unknown. Library statistical sources such as *ACRL University Library Statistics, ARL Statistics, California Library Statistics,* and the King Research study titled *Library Human Resources: A Study of Supply and Demand* provide no category for this classification.[7] Furthermore, Sandy Raeside of the ALA Office for Library Personnel Resources reported that she knew of no study giving this information; personnel at ACRL headquarters concurred.[8] According to an October 1, 1985, *Library Journal* article on the placements and salaries of 1984 graduates of ALA-accredited library schools,

257 persons were placed in temporary professional positions. The total number of temporary placements was 242 in 1983 and 228 in 1982.[9] Since statistics are limited, it is not known, for example, whether temporary librarians are a growing factor in the library work force. The thirty-fourth annual placement and salary report does lend credibility to the suspicion that the numbers are increasing. If so, as in the recent trend to hire more temporary teaching faculty, this fact could have significant repercussions for libraries.[10]

Five years of job advertisements (1980–85) in *College & Research Libraries News* were reviewed in order to gain an idea of the number of librarians employed in temporary positions. Approximately 2 percent were for temporary appointments. Local or regional job lines, newspapers, and other job notices also announce the existence of temporary positions. None of the temporary positions announced in 1984 through the local media in the northern California area were found advertised in *C&RL News.* The computed 2 percent statistic from the *C&RL News* job advertisements is, therefore, lower than the actual number of available temporary positions.

The establishment of firms such as Advanced Information Management (AIM) in Mountain View, California, also testifies to the demand for temporary librarians. Established two years ago, Advanced Information Management supplies a variety of qualified information personnel to local employers for short- or long-term contracts. At present, academic libraries make few requests for AIM's services. On the other hand, special and public libraries are regular customers. Anne Porter Roth, director of placement for AIM, suspects that requests from academic libraries will increase in the years ahead.[11]

Very little is known about the number of temporary librarians employed by type of library or by length of appointment. As mentioned earlier, longer appointments are common in academic libraries and generally require the temporary professional to become at least partially integrated into the institution. It is to these individuals and their situation that the

following discussion is addressed.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Problems can occur for all new employees with respect to *orientation, supervision, acceptance and integration,* and *utilization.* The temporary nature of the assignment, however, increases the likelihood that problems will occur for temporary professionals in these areas.

Orientation

As part of the orientation for any new employee, libraries provide access to their policies and procedures manuals, annual reports, and organization charts. Tours of the library facilities are also a standard segment of the orientation. Because temporary professionals are needed on the job as quickly as possible, the orientation is both abridged and accelerated. For example, specific details about other library departments, services, and policies may be omitted, overlooked, or touched on briefly by those giving the orientation. A large amount of material, however, is still presented rapidly. Temporary librarians will not absorb new details and facts evenly. General principles of learning and memory retention predict that memory loss is to be expected.[12] Temporary professionals do not have the luxury of learning slowly, because the library does not have the luxury of providing a more extensive orientation.

Supervision

Adequate supervision and feedback, necessary for all librarians, are critical for temporary librarians, given the abbreviated nature of the orientation and the expectation of immediate, full performance in the assigned position. Close supervision is required during the first few weeks of employment to help the temporary librarian quickly learn the philosophy and idiosyncracies of the department and to gauge and modify his or her performance on the job. Therefore, insufficient supervision may compound difficulties arising from an abbreviated orientation.

Acceptance and Integration

Acceptance and integration into the existing library staff and culture are important components of the temporary librarian's successful performance. Though similar, these distinct processes impact on one another; acceptance may be viewed as a precondition for integration. Moreover, for acceptance and integration to occur, temporary librarians must be seen as making a contribution to the workplace equal to that of their permanent colleagues. The following can contribute to the reluctance by permanent staff to fully accept and integrate temporary librarians.

First, library administrators may be hesitant to assign temporary professionals to specific job responsibilities such as collection development or participation on campus projects. Administrators may believe that the short tenure of the temporary librarian is not conducive to the development of the necessary relationships between the librarian and the faculty. Second, the staff, though clear about the stated responsibilities of the temporary position, may be uncertain how to translate these responsibilities into day-to-day job assignments. For example, bibliographic instruction may be a listed duty in the job advertisement, but questions arise about the quantity, grade-level, and subject areas assigned to the temporary librarian as well as his or her readiness to conduct the sessions. Third, the staff may be uninformed about the background, qualifications and experience of the temporary professional. This factor could inhibit professional interactions between the temporary professional and his or her colleagues.

Three additional issues affect the personal interactions between the temporary librarian and the permanent staff. First, permanent staff may unintentionally create a second-class status for the temporary employee by applying the label "temporary." Second, the permanent staff and the temporary professionals may both maintain a certain distance knowing that the position is limited by definition and any new friendships may be short-lived. Lastly, the temporary librarian may hesitate to join local professional organiza-

tions or to become involved in activities requiring significant time and/or financial commitment.

Utilization

Administrators seek maximum performance from all employees, yet two supervisorial oversights contribute to the underutilization of those employees with temporary appointments. Although librarians are recruited through advertisements listing the major job responsibilities, most permanent positions have detailed job descriptions that elaborate those duties cited in the job advertisement. Temporary positions, however, may not have written job descriptions, or the existing job description, written for a permanent employee, may not accurately reflect the job responsibilities assigned to his or her temporary substitute. By not planning beyond the immediate, primary job responsibilities, library administrators may fail to specify and structure secondary or supplemental duties. Defining the temporary professional's role too narrowly can waste staff hours, energy, enthusiasm, and experience.

Any new employee cannot immediately perform all assigned job responsibilities; rather the employee learns in stages until proficiency is achieved in all work assignments. The new temporary librarian's energies are focused on the primary work assignment; therefore, he or she gains competence in it quickly. Administrators may not appreciate this special circumstance and incorrectly estimate the amount of time a temporary librarian needs to learn the job. When coupled with the temporary librarian's restriction from certain types of responsibilities and an incomplete or nonexistent job description, a problem of unstructured time may be created. The temporary librarian, though engaged in useful enterprises, may not be serving the most important needs of the employing library. These special circumstances increase the likelihood that underutilization will occur.

SUGGESTIONS

These suggestions are offered to stimu-

late thinking among temporary professionals and those who work with this segment of the library work force. These ideas were developed during discussions between the authors and in consultation with two additional temporary librarians employed at the Clark Library, San Jose State University. The suitability of these proposals may vary depending on the individual institution and its unique circumstances. As with the previous discussion, the solutions will be divided into the four major categories. However, these proposals may be applicable to more than one issue.

Orientation

Only a small percentage of the information presented during an orientation is retained by any new employee. The new permanent employee has ample time and opportunity to reinforce the new information. The new temporary employee, due to time pressures, must be able to learn, use, and dispense this information quickly. Existing procedures can be used as a foundation for the development of an orientation program tailored to meet the unique needs of the temporary librarian.

One aid to compensate for the memory's limitation is to provide a package of quick reference materials. A package developed for a new temporary reference librarian could include a map of the reference and index collections, a brief summary of frequently used procedures with page references to the department manual and other appropriate sources, answers to commonly asked directional questions, and a detailed map of the campus and the surrounding neighborhood. Assigning the responsibility for the orientation to one staff member is a second means for counteracting the brevity of the presentation. Inevitably, temporary librarians will have questions, and the staff member coordinating the orientation will expect to receive these inquiries and serve as a resource person.

Supervision

As stated earlier, close supervision is important to a new temporary librarian,

yet it need not occupy an inordinate amount of a supervisor's time. Daily scheduled sessions of five to fifteen minutes would provide a mechanism for questions and constructive feedback. The need for such sessions would decrease in frequency and length as the temporary librarian gained experience. As an added benefit, these supervisory meetings would aid in the preparation of future formal evaluations.

Acceptance and Integration

The acceptance and integration of any new staff member evolves over time; this naturally occurring process, however, must be fostered in order to fit the time demands of the position. The temporary librarian's resume could be circulated to all staff, an article could be written for the library's newsletter, or a small welcoming party could be held. Also, it is important for the temporary librarian to know about his/her new colleagues and the library's history. This information expedites entry into the informal library network. All department staff could exchange relevant personal and professional histories at either a special staff meeting or the first scheduled meeting after the new librarian's arrival.

A mentor system could aid the acceptance and integration process for temporary librarians. A mentor eases the temporary librarian's entrance into the library network by serving as a liaison between the temporary librarian and the permanent staff. Questions about staff interactions, office politics, or library policies and procedures as well as interpretations of colleagues' personalities and styles could be discussed in an informal setting. A mentor could also improve the visibility of the new temporary professional and assist him/her in establishing contacts with appropriate persons.[13]

The acceptance and integration of the temporary librarian can also be assisted by administrative policies and decisions. Release time and travel funds for continuing education could be made available for temporary librarians. Also, they could participate in appropriate in-house training programs. These actions would help the temporary librarian become a contributing colleague and a participant in the library profession.

Utilization

Administrative planning is the key element in productive utilization of all employees. According to Sheila Creth, the effective use of human resources by managers is important to maintain or improve library efficiency and effectiveness.[14] Because the temporary librarian is employed for a short period of time, planning is especially important. Having a detailed and unique job description and a special projects "wish list" reduces the possibility of underutilization. Otherwise, the temporary professional's time will be spent on low-priority tasks instead of high-priority projects.

Receiving a detailed job description upon arrival permits the temporary professional to gauge the work load and to proceed toward attaining the proficiency needed for each individual assignment. Since the primary work assignment is highlighted during interviews, the job description provides a way for specifying important, often unknown, secondary duties.

Part of the secondary duties section of a job description could be a "wish list" of worthwhile projects compiled by the library. Selection of the specific project would be based on the temporary librarian's skills, interests, and background and the priorities of the library. Staff and money shortages in recent years have eaten away the "extra" time in a week expended on creating new services, bibliographies, or handouts; weeding sections of the collection; or cataloging and classifying special collections. The temporary librarian could use unscheduled time to complete these neglected but substantial and valuable tasks and leave behind a permanent and visible contribution to the library.

An important tool to set the direction for the library and its employees is the use of goals and objectives. The new professional, especially a temporary professional, needs to have a clear idea how to focus his/her energies. The establishment

of personal goals and objectives within the first quarter of the employment period assures all parties that the temporary librarian's time and efforts will be gainfully spent.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Temporary positions are beneficial to the employer. Such appointments are equally advantageous to the employee. First, it *is* employment; with today's tight job market, *any* job is better than none at all. Second, the experience gained in a temporary position can serve as a springboard to obtaining permanent positions for re-entry librarians and recent library school graduates. Third, temporary positions offer the opportunity to explore different types of work and different types of institutions.

Although the potential for problems exists, temporary appointments are valuable for both libraries and librarians. With increased knowledge, forethought, and planning, librarians and administrators working together can combat or avoid problems addressed in this discussion.

Documentation on the role and demographic characteristics of temporary librarians need to be collected. Therefore, the authors are preparing a research study to gather data about the number, use, characteristics, and unique needs of temporary librarians in academic libraries. By using this information, administrators will gain more efficient and productive temporary librarians, and the work experience of temporary librarians will be enhanced.

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