The Scholarship of Canadian Research University Librarians

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Abstract
This paper reports the results of a national survey of Canadian research university librarians conducted by the author in 2006. The study deals with the motivation of librarians to engage in scholarly activities, the perceived importance of scholarship as a criterion for promotion and tenure, levels of participation in scholarship, and librarians’ assessment of various types of support for scholarship provided by Canadian research universities. The study concluded that 13% of the sample population could be considered active scholars, and suggests that there may be a correlation between level of scholarship and gender.

Introduction
In a survey of 690 U.S. universities, Mitchell and Reichel determined that the vast majority of research, doctoral, and masters-level institutions either required or encouraged some degree of scholarship by tenure track librarians. While there have been numerous studies of the scholarship of university librarians in the United States, little is known of the nature and extent of the scholarly activities of Canadian university librarians.

Librarianship has traditionally been a practice-oriented profession. Most university librarians have significant year-round schedules of assigned duties that present challenges to the engagement in sustained, meaningful scholarship. The requirement for formal scholarship by Canadian research university librarians is relatively recent, and there are no commonly agreed upon norms for the appropriate balance between scholarship and professional practice. However, the establishment of such norms clearly has implications for librarians’ workloads and appropriate librarian staffing levels.

What motivates practicing Canadian research university librarians to engage in scholarly activities? In what forms of scholarship do they participate? What are the expectations for scholarly work by librarians in Canadian research universities? What degree of institutional support do Canadian research universities provide for librarians?

This study attempts to document the scholarly activities of Canadian research university librarians. The study also investigates the perceived importance of scholarship in the criteria for promotion and tenure for librarians at Canadian research universities. It seeks information on the level of support for librarians to engage in scholarly pursuits, including time for scholarship, and funding for research and travel.
The Scholarship of Canadian Research University Librarians

Literature Review
Most of the literature on the scholarship of librarians is based on the U.S. experience. Joswick studied journal articles published by 1,294 Illinois college and university librarians between 1995 and 1999\textsuperscript{3}. Weller, Hurd, and Wiberly studied the contribution to peer-reviewed literature by practicing academic librarians in the U.S.\textsuperscript{4} Gregory A. Crawford examined the nature of articles in C&RL and JAL for 1996 and 1997\textsuperscript{5}. Xue-Ming Bao analyzed the content of 682 refereed articles in C&RL and JAL from 1990-1999 in relation to the 1992 ACRL Research Agenda\textsuperscript{6}. Barbara L. Floyd and John C. Phillips studied the question of whether pressures felt by librarians to publish within the constraints imposed by their institutions are affecting the quality of the library literature\textsuperscript{7}. W. Bede Mitchell and Mary Reichel investigated the influence of scholarly requirements on librarians' ability to earn tenure\textsuperscript{8}. Bruce Kingma and Gillian McCombs have looked at the opportunity cost of faculty status for librarians\textsuperscript{9}. Jeanne M. Brown analyzed data on academic librarians' allocation of time for research contained in four studies conducted during the 1980's and 1990's\textsuperscript{10}.

All of the studies mentioned above are based on U.S. data. However, there is reason to believe that the Canadian experience may differ from the American model, and to date there have been no comparable studies of the scholarship of Canadian research librarians.

Methodology
The scholarship survey was distributed to all identifiable university librarians employed by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL)\textsuperscript{11} during the spring and fall of 2006. The 39 question Web-based survey was available in English and French versions, and potential respondents were invited to respond in their language of preference. In 2004/2005 there were 1,284 librarians employed at the 27 CARL universities\textsuperscript{12}. The survey population for the study consisted of the 1,052 CARL university librarians for whom functional email addresses could be retrieved\textsuperscript{13}. The survey attracted a total of 520 returns for a response rate of 49\%\textsuperscript{14}. Four hundred and forty-one responses (85\%) were in English; the remainder (15\%) were in French. Fifty-three of the survey returns were found to be seriously incomplete, and were removed from the sample. Another 44 respondents completed 26 of the 39 questions. An independent samples t-test of statistical variance found no significant difference between these 44 cases and the fully completed returns when compared with respect to age, gender, years of professional experience, and educational qualifications. Given this result, and the fact that these respondents had completed two-thirds of the survey questions, these cases were retained in the sample.

The adjusted sample upon which the following analysis is based consisted of 467 cases. This represents 44\% of the survey population of 1,052 and 36\% of the total population of CARL university librarians. A sample this size is considered to be statistically accurate within plus or minus 3 percent 95 percent of the time.

Limitations of the Study
There are 44 publicly funded universities in Canada. Due to limits of time and resources this study was confined to librarians from the 27 CARL universities. Although an initial attempt was made to expand the scope of the survey to include all university librarians in Canada, the response rate from the non-CARL libraries was so small as to be unusable.
The exclusion of the “primarily undergraduate” universities from the study is not to suggest that librarians at those universities do not participate in scholarly activities. In fact there are well-known examples of librarians at these institutions who make significant contributions to the profession as writers and conference presenters. It is hoped that another researcher may be interested in conducting a comparative survey of the scholarship of the primarily undergraduate university librarians.

The survey data is based on a “self-selected sample”. Librarians who responded to the survey were likely to be those who were interested in the subject. As such there is some possibility of over-representation in the sample by librarians who are active in scholarship.

The survey sample was over-represented by librarians in the early stages of their careers. Thirty-six percent of the initial sample was comprised of librarians with less than 7 years of professional experience, although this group makes up only 21% of the overall CARL librarian population. This distortion is evident in tables and charts showing the demographic characteristics of the sample, but does not significantly impact the substance of this paper. The strong response to the survey from new librarians is gratifying, and indicates their degree of interest in issues related to scholarship, tenure and professional status.

The gender profile of the sample matches the overall CARL librarian population almost perfectly, and there was a good distribution of responses by university, province and language group. Additional returns were solicited from librarians at the French-speaking universities of Quebec, who were substantially under-represented in the initial results. Despite the stated limitations the author believes that readers can have some confidence in the conclusions of this report.

The Librarian Population
The CARL university libraries vary considerably in size. The number of librarians per university ranges from 19 for the University of Regina to 169 for the University of Toronto, with a median of 41.

Definition of Scholarship
The definition of scholarship employed in the survey was developed at Oregon State University and described by Weiser in 1996. Building on the work of Ernest Boyer, OSU defined scholarship in broad terms as any form of creative intellectual or artistic work, validated by peers and communicated. The communication of scholarly work may take place in a variety of forms, including published books and articles, public lectures and conference presentations, poster sessions, curated exhibits, artistic performances, etc. In order not to limit results, Survey participants were encouraged to report all evidence of scholarly activity, whether or not it had been formally peer-reviewed.

Survey Participants
Ninety-nine percent of survey respondents possessed an MLIS degree or its historical antecedent. However, in the participant sample there was a small number of individuals without an MLIS or equivalent, but who had other advanced degrees, who were performing work of, or similar to, a librarian, who were eligible for tenure, and whose
responses to the survey questions were consistent with others in the sample. These respondents were considered to be “equivalent to a librarian” and are included in the survey results.

The Motivation for Scholarship
What motivates librarians to engage in scholarship activities? Survey participants were asked to rank a list of potential outcomes of scholarship in order of importance to them. Figure 1 shows the results of that ranking.

![Figure 1: Potential Outcomes of Scholarship](image)

Interestingly, the top ranking motivators were related to professional development and improvement of library services rather than increased income or job security. Despite the fact that scholarship activity is often a requirement for tenure and promotion in universities, it appears that librarians’ primary purpose for engaging in scholarship is to learn and grow as professionals. Another altruistic motivation was expressed by one participant in the following statement:

“None of the options given for the outcomes of scholarship reflected why I engage in it. I do it to contribute to the world of knowledge. At my stage of career there are no financial or reputational things to be gained. My research is in an academic discipline and not in librarianship so my contributions to the profession are minimal.”
The Requirement for Scholarship
Figure 2 shows that more than half (51%) of survey respondents indicated that scholarship is either required or encouraged at their university. Scholarship is naturally expected during sabbatical and study leaves, where available, but for 35% of participants scholarship was also expected as an integral part of their professional responsibilities on an ongoing basis.

Figure 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship is:</th>
<th>Percentage of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Necessary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouraged</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=463

In written comments several participants expressed frustration that although there is an expectation for scholarly work in order to secure tenure and promotion, their burden of assigned duties leaves little time or energy for this purpose. Furthermore, as Table 1 demonstrates, most universities have not provided their librarians with either formal or informal guidelines concerning an appropriate time commitment to scholarship.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q18: Does your university have an accepted guideline for the percentage of time librarians should devote to scholarship?</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the survey participants who indicated that their university did provide a scholarship time commitment guideline, only 61% indicated that this guideline was a formal policy or standard, and only 62% indicated that the guideline applied to all librarians.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of responses to the question on recommended scholarship time commitment. While the most common response was 10-14%, answers ranged from less than 5% to over 40%.

![Figure 3](image)

**Tenure and Promotion**
Evidence of scholarship is often a requirement for tenure and promotion of university librarians. Eighty-one percent of survey participants indicated that they were eligible for tenure, or its equivalent, at their institution. However, when asked to rank the relative importance of scholarship against other factors required for tenure and promotion, survey participants ranked scholarship lower than professional practice, and contributions to the library, and slightly lower than contributions to the profession and the university (Figure 4).

The four French-speaking universities of Quebec represent an interesting case study. Currently, librarians at these universities do not experience the same level of academic benefits and obligations as research university librarians elsewhere in Canada. At these four universities librarians are not eligible for tenure or sabbatical leave, and the expectations for scholarship are lower. The francophone librarians of Quebec spend approximately 5% more of their time on professional responsibilities and 5% less time on scholarship than the survey sample as a whole.
Survey participants were asked to rank eighteen forms of scholarly expression on a scale of 1 to 5 in terms of their perceived importance towards achieving tenure and promotion. Figure 5 shows the results of that question in ranked order. In general, participants ranked formal publications higher than conference presentations, and conference presentations higher than poster presentations or informal activities such as blogs, websites and unpublished reports. For example, on the 1 to 5 scale the rating of 4.06 for “Articles in Peer-Reviewed Journals” implies that that peer-reviewed articles are considered a more important form of scholarship than “Published Book Reviews” with a rating of only 2.83. International presentations were seen as more important than national or provincial and regional presentations.

Other types of scholarly activity mentioned included bibliography, software development, translation of professional books, teaching, digital project development, and working towards advanced degrees. Some participants listed serving on the executive of national committees, and workshop and conference planning as contributions to scholarship. While these activities may indeed promote the scholarship of others, they are normally considered to be contributions to the profession rather than scholarship.
Support for Scholarship

Seventy-five percent of survey participants reported that librarians at their university were eligible for sabbatical leave. Seventy-three percent were eligible for study leave, and 31% for annual research leave. Figure 6 shows the results of questions concerning librarians’ eligibility for funding to support scholarship. Whereas more than 70% of librarians receive an annual professional allowance which may be used to support scholarly activities, only half of survey participants indicated that they were eligible for specially designated research funding. A disturbingly high percentage of participants answered “Don’t Know” to these questions.
When asked to rate the level of various types of support for scholarship, only 22% of participants rated research funding as Good to Excellent. Only 28% rated provision of time for scholarship as part of regular ongoing duties as Good to Excellent. By comparison more than half of participants were satisfied with the conditions for sabbatical leave and 44% were content with arrangements for study leave (Figure 7).
Participation in Leaves
Leaves of absence can be an important factor in promoting research productivity. However, less than a quarter of the librarians surveyed had participated in any particular type of leave. For example, only 21% of the overall sample had taken a sabbatical leave. However, since not all universities provide all types of leave, it is probably more instructive to look at percentage participation by those librarians who are eligible for leave. Figure 8 shows participation in leaves for the purpose of completing scholarship with the “Not Applicable” responses removed.

Figure 8  Participation in Leaves for the Purpose of Completing Scholarship  (Overall Sample Minus N/A Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Leave</th>
<th>Percentage of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sabbatical Leave</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Leave</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Research Leave</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other types of leave</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 shows the distribution of leaves for those survey participants who had taken them. Not surprisingly, in most cases the most common response is one leave taken. The exception occurs for Annual Research Leave. Some librarians are clearly taking advantage of this benefit where it is available. Seventeen survey participants reported taking more than 5 annual research leaves.
Considering the low overall participation rate in leaves of absence, it is not surprising that librarians reported that most of their scholarly activity is completed during regular ongoing assigned duties. Figures 10 and 11 compare the percentage of scholarship completed during leaves versus the percentage of scholarship completed during regular ongoing duties. One third of survey participants who had taken leaves reported that no more than 10% of their scholarly activities were completed during leaves. On the other hand, over a quarter of survey participants indicated that over 90% of their scholarly activity is completed during regular ongoing duties. Interestingly, an almost equal percentage indicated that 10% or less of their scholarly activity is completed without leaves of absence.
Figure 10  
Scholarship Completed During Leaves  
(Overall Sample Minus N/A Responses)  

N=188  Percentage of Scholarship  

Figure 11  
Scholarship Completed During Regular Ongoing Assigned Duties  
(Overall Sample Minus N/A Responses)  

N=326  Percentage of Scholarship
Participation in Scholarly Activities

Figure 12 shows the participation rate by survey respondents in eighteen forms of scholarly communication in ranked order. The most common form of scholarship, practiced by more than two thirds of survey participants, was provincial and regional conference presentations.

The average number of scholarly contributions for all participants was 10.9, with a standard deviation of 9.3, indicating a high degree of variance.

Level of Scholarship can be considered to be a combination of the number of scholarly contributions and the importance of those contributions. Figure 13 shows the “Level of Scholarship” distribution of individual participants in the survey. The chart shows the distribution of cases into 4 levels of scholarship based on the weighted total scores for scholarship contributions in eighteen categories. The levels of scholarship (Low, Below Average, Above Average, High) are based on the mean and standard deviation in the data. The weighted score for any individual was calculated based on the total scholarship contributions in each category multiplied by the importance factor for that category shown in Figure 5. The chart suggests that 13% of the survey participants are active scholars, 29% are above average, 46% are below average, and 11% exhibit low scholarly output.
Figure 14 shows a cross-tabulation between level of scholarship and gender. The data suggest a positive correlation between gender and scholarship. Male librarians are more likely to be represented in the Above Average and High categories of scholarship and female librarians are more likely to be represented in the Below Average and Low categories. A Chi-square test of statistical significance indicated this result to be significant at the 99% level. The survey does not suggest any reason for this result, although there was also a statistically significant difference between male and female librarians in terms of hours per week devoted to scholarship. Male librarians were more likely to be in the Medium and High categories in terms of time devoted to scholarship, while female librarians were more likely to be in the Low category.

The explanation for these gender differences may be societal in nature. There is no reason to think that female librarians are any less interested in scholarship, or any less capable of producing scholarly work than their male counterparts. Many survey participants commented that much of the time they devote to scholarship is “after hours” during their “own personal time”. It is common knowledge that working women with families often bear a disproportionate share of child-care, elder-care, and other domestic responsibilities. The gender difference in scholarly output may be due to the fact that some female librarians have many other important commitments competing for their personal time.
Survey participants were asked to indicate the subject areas of their scholarship from a pre-defined list. Multiple responses were possible. Figure 15 shows the results in ranked order.
Judging from the large percentage of “Other” responses the list of options was not extensive enough. A common criticism of the list was that it was too focused on librarians and the library profession, and did not include an option to indicate research interests in disciplines beyond the field of librarianship. Participants listed a diverse array of other academic interests including:

- Academic integrity and plagiarism
- Access to information and protection of privacy
- Arabic script paleography and calligraphy
- Architectural history
- Asian history
- Avant-garde film
- Canadian intellectual history
- Canadian music history
- Children’s literature
- Consortia
- Cultural perceptions of librarians, libraries, print culture and the Internet
- Distance Education
- Diversity issues
- Educational Administration
- Educational theory and practice
- Evidence-based librarianship
- Information-seeking behavior
- International law and international legal bibliography
- International librarianship
- Jewish biblical interpretation
- Knowledge management
- Languages and translation
- Law and religion
- Library assessment
- Library history
- Literacy, teaching and learning
- Liturgical objects related to art history
- Marketing
- Musicology
- Naval history
- Nineteenth Century British literature
- Philosophy and history of medicine
- Print culture studies
- Rare books
Summary and Discussion
More than half the participants in a survey of Canadian research university librarians are either required or encouraged by their universities to participate in scholarly activities. However, librarians claim that their engagement in scholarship is motivated primarily by a desire for professional growth and self-improvement rather than reasons related to increased income or job security.

Librarians who are eligible for tenure and promotion indicated that scholarship is less important for attaining these benefits than accomplishments in the areas of professional practice and contributions to the library. Librarians ranked formal publications to be most important expressions of scholarship for obtaining tenure and promotion, followed by conference presentations, followed by poster presentations. A number of alternative forms of scholarship were reported.

Support for scholarship is extremely variable. Considering the overall sample, the majority of librarians were satisfied with leave benefits, but few were satisfied with specific funding for research and time available for scholarship during the course of their regular work.

Less than a quarter of survey participants had participated in any form of leave of absence for the completion of scholarship, although three quarters indicated that librarians at their universities were eligible to take such leaves. Why should there be such a large discrepancy? Part of the explanation may be that 36% of the survey sample was comprised of librarians with less than 7 years of professional experience. At most universities sabbatical leave is restricted to librarians with tenure, and only after 6 or 7 years of service. Nevertheless the large gap between eligibility and participation in sabbatical leave is a concern. What are the impediments to greater participation in sabbatical leave? Are there financial obstacles? Are there other factors discouraging librarians from applying for leave? Are there age or gender differences related to sabbatical participation? Further research needs to be conducted to answer these questions.

The data suggest that librarians generate most of their scholarly activity without the benefit of leaves of absence.

Librarians pursue a rich array of scholarly interests that extend well beyond the everyday issues of professional practice. Thirteen percent of the survey sample could be considered active scholars and 11% exhibited a low level of scholarly output.

The data suggest that male librarians are more active scholars than their female colleagues. However, given that much of librarians’ scholarly activity is pursued on “personal time”, the gender difference may be due to the fact that some female librarians, more so than men, have many other important commitments competing for their personal time. Many survey participants complained about the lack of time to
pursue scholarly activities. The solution to reducing the gender gap in scholarly activity may be to ensure that all librarians have adequate time for scholarship during the course of their regular work week.

Notes

1 This is the third of three papers related to the Scholarship Survey. Preprints of the previous papers, the English and French versions of the survey instrument, plus charts and tables produced from the survey data are located at: http://library2.usask.ca/~fox/scholarship/


11 The membership of CARL consists of the 27 largest university libraries in Canada plus the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI), Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and the Library of Parliament. This article will consider only librarians at the university members of CARL, which include the universities of: Alberta, British Columbia, Calgary, Carleton, Concordia, Dalhousie, Guelph, Laval, Manitoba, McGill, McMaster, Memorial, Montréal, New Brunswick, Ottawa, Québec à Montréal, Queen’s, Regina, Saskatchewan, Sherbrooke, Simon Fraser, Toronto, Victoria, Waterloo, Western Ontario, Windsor, and York.


13 Email addresses for the Scholarship Survey were collected from listings on university public websites. In several cases these listings were checked and verified by Directors or librarians at the various institutions.

14 Percentages used in this paper have been rounded to the nearest whole number to simplify the presentation of data.
CARL Statistics, Section D: Salaries: 2005-2006. Table VI – Average and median salary per year of professional experience – Librarian positions only, 60-61.


Several of these individuals were archivists. In the CARL universities archivists often report to the Director of Libraries, and are governed by the same collective agreements and conditions for promotion and tenure as librarians.