Librarians of the World Unite?
Possibilities and realities from Florida, USA

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the perspectives of academic librarians in Florida’s public universities concerning library work and advocacy for workplace rights by professional organisations and the statewide faculty union. An online survey was used to gather responses to closed and open-ended questions from 58 librarians. These data are presented alongside discussions addressing professionalism in library work, the history of US library professional organisations and workplace issues, and Florida’s faculty union. The results suggest that, in terms of broader organisation around workplace issues, academic librarians in Florida are stuck between managerial expectations of professional practice and a faculty union slow to understand the significance of librarianship.

Introduction
This article addresses the possibilities for the broader organisation of library workers by focusing specifically on academic librarians employed at Florida’s eleven public universities represented by Florida’s statewide faculty union. We surveyed librarians about their views on library professional organisations, workplace conditions at their universities, and their attitudes to and activities in the faculty union on their respective campuses. The online survey was sent via email to 363 academic librarians throughout Florida in December 2009, with 83 responding and 58 completing the entire survey. The results are examined in greater length below in the context of a discussion and overview that encompasses two themes. The first of these themes uses the commodification of information as a backdrop to the historical relationship between librarians, their professional organisations and why such organisations have never organised library workers around workplace issues. The second theme concerns academic librarians’ orientations to the faculty union within the context of the struggle of academic knowledge workers in Florida. Though not exhibiting socio-economic dynamics identical to those that face knowledge workers elsewhere in the world, Florida’s accelerated privatisation of higher education since 2000 makes the state an intriguing microcosm for considering the impact of market forces on public institutions.
We chose to write about the relationship between librarians and labour not only because one of the authors is a librarian (both authors are closely involved in our university’s faculty union chapter), but also because librarians occupy a longstanding yet unusual position among knowledge workers. This is especially the case at Florida’s universities, where librarians work a 40-hour week, have a ranking and promotional process paralleling the professoriate (with ‘assistant’, ‘associate’, ‘full’, or ‘university librarian’ job titles), yet are often misunderstood and otherwise not regarded as fully fledged ‘citizens’ by their teaching faculty peers. The librarian profession is also predominantly female, and, even though we cannot delve into the gendered dimension of librarianship here at any length, because of space constraints, this has serious implications for library work and librarians’ professional identity and workplace status.

Examining the extent and nature of academic librarian participation in and regard for Florida’s state-wide faculty union, the United Faculty of Florida (UFF), offers a unique way to consider the prospects for a broader national or international movement of library workers. Since the early 1940s, Florida has been an ‘open shop’ state, which means that bargaining unit members may opt to be ‘free riders’, declining to pay union dues yet deriving partial benefits of UFF representation, particularly in terms of bargaining. (In 2008, UFF adopted a policy whereby it will not assist free riders with the paperwork necessary to file grievances with employers.) In this context, anti-union sentiment and professionalisation among libraries demands closer consideration. For example, what is the relationship between the degree of involvement in UFF and librarians’ understanding of their profession and role in their given institution? In addition, the recent history of Florida’s State University System (SUS) includes the accelerated privatisation and streamlining of higher education under a Republican-dominated state government that included Florida Governor Jeb Bush, son of President George H. W. Bush and brother of President George W. Bush. This privatisation process included an attempt to bust the UFF and exemplifies a broader wave of privatisation of public services in the USA and throughout the world. Finally, unlike other regions of the USA, the southeastern states as a whole are a notable exception in terms of ‘the union advantage’ for library workers. According to salary data gathered by the American Library Association Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) in 2006, library workers’ salaries throughout the USA were 21% higher than those of their non-unionised counterparts except in the southeast, where union presence is less than 2% and salaries of unionised library workers are accordingly almost 10% less than those of non-unionised workers. This was the case especially for library technical assistants and clerks. However, according to the data, academic librarians in the southeast still earn over 20% more than non-unionised associate librarians (Grady & Almeida, 2008), suggesting again the probable effectiveness of faculty unions in terms of salaries. The combination of these factors and a reactionary, anti-labour political environment where public higher education is increasingly under pressure to shape its functioning and governance toward a corporate model, provides the socio-political and institutional backdrop for our analysis and discussion of the survey results.
Controlling librarian labour in the academy

Academic librarians typically possess a Master’s degree in ‘Library Science’ and sometimes have additional graduate degrees in their area of specialisation. There is an expectation in librarianship of versatility; academic librarians are at once ‘university employees, teachers, professionals, clerical staff, support staff, professors, administrators’, and also ‘public servants’ (Graham, 2004). Librarians may specialise in a variety of practices, such as reference librarian, serials librarian, cataloguer, or bibliographer, yet they are also a combination of information specialists, scholars and educators who are expected to collaborate with the faculties and students at their institutions in the knowledge production process (Coker, vanDuinkerken & Bales, 2010).

Academic librarians’ multi-faceted role is tied to the problem of organising as knowledge workers in a national or international context, yet it is likewise intertwined with their individual and collective understanding of their professional position in the vastly bureaucratised public university, and with how this understanding is used by the management of such institutions to control librarians’ labour. Similar to teaching faculty, librarians possess greater autonomy over their activities because their work cannot be easily routinised or measured vis-à-vis other workers. Thus managerial control and the ability to elicit workers’ allegiance manifests itself in other ways, such as long-term, semi-annual or annual evaluations, proper conduct and adherence to institutional policies, and the ideology of ‘professionalism’ (Edwards, 1979:54, 88-89). In the modern university, identification with management prerogatives and objectives is further reinforced through periodic budget crises and less obvious initiatives, such as intercollegiate athletics and the broader commodification of the university, otherwise known as ‘school spirit’.

Faculty assemblies and senates are among the common forums where the management’s preferred understanding of labour-management relations is internalised. As Marc Bousquet (2008:101) notes, contemporary management methods employed by university administrators closely resemble those developed around 1980 by Japanese auto manufacturer Toyota, where ‘teams of area responsibility, which included managers and labourers work[ed] together in what was meant to be a quite earnest spirit of cooperation’. If Toyota practice sounds a bit like the idea of shared governance, Bousquet points out, it should: in treating its workers like intellectuals and its unions like ‘partners in governance’, Toyota’s goal was to encourage its workers to have a primary identification with the institution that employed them, rather than with other workers, much the way that intellectuals and professionals develop primary loyalties to their firm or their campus. (Bousquet, 2008:101)

For librarians there has also been a greater emphasis on professionalism because of the combined increase in the commodification of information and reliance on information technology (IT). By commodification we mean that information as a public good is eroded as commercial market forces become more and more involved in the transactions between the library and its patrons, a process that has accelerated since the 1970s with IT (Webster & Robins, 1986:329-330). This has prompted librarians to develop new roles as information ‘technicians’, ‘specialists’ and ‘consultants’, roles that de-emphasise the
library and library work while highlighting the technical. ‘Through this process,’ Harris (1992:134) explains, ‘librarianship’s status as a low-status, female-intensive occupation can be escaped by those who practice the “new” higher status positions.’ In taking on such roles, librarians ‘have uncritically accepted the ideals of professionalisation and have embraced the principles of objectivity and truth’ (Iverson 2008:26).

In the workplace, professionalisation provides an illusion of autonomy that works against the possibility of librarians recognising themselves as part of a specific class of knowledge workers whose labour is controlled and directed by management. In a work environment that encourages efforts to become more ‘professional’, librarians neglect to acknowledge their status as workers, who, like other workers, such as ‘para-professionals’ or ‘part-timers’, possess only limited institutional power vis-à-vis management. Indeed, 72% (42) of the librarians surveyed by us saw themselves as ‘professionals’ rather than ‘library workers’, while only 17% (10) identified themselves as both professional and worker. And like the Toyota method that endures in university ‘shared governance’, academic librarians ‘are encouraged to believe [they] are involved in a collegial activity with united interests,’ Estabrook (1982;126) observes. ‘Our membership in a professional association which allows the reference librarian to be chair of a committee of which her director is a member reinforces this belief’.

The role professionalism and institutional identification play in terms of worker identity is also closely intertwined with professional associations, and the foremost national professional association to which a large majority of US librarians belong is the American Library Association (ALA). Academic librarians’ primary professional organisation, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), is a subsidiary of ALA. Since ALA plays such a prominent role for library workers at the national level, we provide a more detailed discussion of the organisation and its ties to US labour, and offer some reasons for why ALA is not capable of organising library workplaces. These provide a context for considering the survey respondents’ views on some of the problems with ALA. Finally, we turn to a brief history of the relationship between Florida’s higher education institutions and the UFF’s struggle for existence, particularly since 2000. We then turn to an examination of librarians’ perspectives on UFF.

The American Library Association: advocacy of the profession versus workplace concerns

An unmistakable obstacle to librarians being able to organise as knowledge workers on a national or international level is the lack of a national or international body to coordinate and direct such activity. Many academic librarians throughout the USA and Canada nevertheless have the opportunity to join their statewide faculty union (unionlibrarian.org, 2002). Otherwise, librarians have the ALA, which is hindered from forthrightly organising and representing public or academic library workers by the fact that its ranks include both librarians and library administrators. Further, it was never intended to advocate for the rights of workers against management. Founded in 1876, during the reform era, the ALA’s mission involved ‘promoting the library interests of the country, and … increasing reciprocity of intelligence and goodwill among
librarians’ (Wiegand, 1986:3). Thus its emphasis on professionalism and library institutions precludes any clear-cut advocacy on behalf of library workers. ACRL, ALA’s branch for academic librarians and administrators, has made efforts to distance itself from issues involving academic librarians’ workplace rights by deferring to management on employment-related issues. Since the early 1990s, ‘ALA has taken a number of actions’, John Buschman (2003:135) observes, which ‘in their totality, point toward the corporate model of speaking for the profession’, that is also characteristic of ACRL.

ALA’s move toward a corporate model stands in contrast with its ostensibly progressive political agenda, evident in the Library Bill of Rights. Adopted in 1939, this document ‘affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas’, and emphasises equal service and access to information for all (ala.org). Along these lines librarians have historically demonstrated a high regard for the labour community.

The phrase ‘workingman’s university’ is found in early library statements – for example, in Mount Holly, Pennsylvania. By the end of the nineteenth century, some libraries in industrial communities made a genuine contribution toward furthering the education of industrial workers. (Meyers, 2002:37)

This degree of commitment, especially from public libraries, reached its height in the 1950s and endured through the late 1960s when libraries turned more towards serving other groups and needs (Meyers, 2002). The AFL-CIO-ALA Joint Committee on Library Services to Labour Groups includes AFL-CIO appointees among its 18 members, serves as ‘a primary link between the two national organisations’ and acts to address how libraries can serve the labour community in their given geographic areas (Meyers, 1999:52-53).

Aside from the ALA’s outreach to the US labour movement, in the late 1960s the increased unionisation of librarians pushed the organisation to acknowledge the significance of workplace concerns. ‘The question is not whether ALA should endeavour to improve the personal situation of its members but how’ the organisation’s Panel of Democratisation proclaimed. In 1971 ALA created a Staff Committee on Mediation, Arbitration, and Inquiry essentially to perform the functions of a fully-fledged union, aiding members in ‘disputes over employment practices, tenure, due process, status, ethics, and intellectual freedom’ (Schlachter, 1973:188-189). At around the same time, however, ALA’s leadership moved in the opposite direction, rejecting a mildly-worded resolution of its Library Administration Division in support of encouraging library workers and administrators to adopt appropriate procedures for unionisation and collective bargaining. By 1980, ALA had adopted an official ‘freedom of choice’ position on collective bargaining to appease both advocates and opponents of librarian unions within its ranks: ‘The Association affirms the right of eligible employees to organise and bargain collectively with their employees, or to refrain from organising and bargaining, without fear of reprisal’ (Todd, 1985:290-291). Since then, ALA and its divisions have generally steered clear of directly advocating for librarians’ workplace rights. In the case of academic librarians, the ACRL’s ‘Guideline on Collective Bargaining’, adopted in 1993 and reaffirmed in 2008, mandates:

*that academic librarians shall be included on the same basis as their faculty colleagues in units for collective bargaining. Such units shall be guided by standards and guidelines of ACRL pertaining to faculty and academic status. (de la Peña McCook, 2009:62)*

Getting the message: communications workers and global value chains
It should be noted that there are clear practical reasons why the ALA did not pursue fully-fledged or even quasi-union status. Foremost among these are the legality of collective bargaining for public employees in certain states and the uneven degree of support the ALA would be able to provide to its members throughout the USA in terms of workplace rights. Furthermore, if the ALA became a professional rather than an educational organisation, a route taken by the American Association of University Professors and the National Education Association in the 1970s, it would forfeit a significant portion of its revenue by losing its tax-exempt status, in addition to losing a large portion of dues-paying members who are administrators (Todd, 1985:291-297; Schlachter, 1973:189).

To navigate the line between its worker and management constituencies, the ALA's approach toward workplace issues centres on boosterish calls for 'professional development', in which librarians' enthusiasm and devotion to their work are presented as compensating for unsatisfactory working conditions and limited compensation or opportunity for advancement. Here, the professional means for success or failure is personalised and foregrounded while the collective action of librarians is almost wholly removed. 'Lagging salaries emerged as the toughest test of a librarian's commitment', writes the author of a recent article presenting the findings of a 'job satisfaction survey' in ALA's flagship publication. Librarians' success (or failure) in their undertakings accordingly depends on personal 'attributes', such as 'interpersonal skill', 'tech ability', 'intellectual depth', 'sense of humour', 'leadership ability', and so on. Likewise, the 'biggest on-the-job challenges' include 'keeping up with technological change', working under 'budgetary constraints', and 'redefining librarians role/image' [sic] (Albanese, 2008:37-38).

The prospect of a national organisation to enforce and protect librarians' workplace rights re-emerged in the late 1970s with the founding of the progressive National Librarians Association (NLA), but the organisation was overshadowed (and some would argue, undermined) by ALA, and, without ALA's concerted support, the NLA failed to gain a national foothold. The Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) is in important ways a successor to NLA and a strong proponent of library unionisation, but PLG does not presently possess the institutional wherewithal to become a national or international organisational force for library workers. The ALA's Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA), founded in 2001, publishes a monthly newsletter, Library Worklife: HRE News, and addresses matters of library worker certification and pay equity, collecting, for example, annual salary data on public and academic librarians. However ALA-APA's management-oriented focus on 'human resources' and ALA affiliation hinder its capacity as an independent worker-related organisation.

We now turn to librarians' views on and involvement in ALA, ACRL, and other professional librarians' associations by taking a closer look at the responses to our survey. We then turn to an overview of the faculty union and respondents' perspectives on the UFF.
Librarian professional associations and workplace advocacy

A total of 94% of respondents (46) to our survey were members of ALA, 65% (32) also maintained membership of ACRL, and 51% (25) were members of the Florida Library Association (FLA). Conversely, only 4% (2) were members of ALA’s Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), a division of ALA devoted to progressive political issues. Even though large majorities were members of ALA and ACRL, they expressed discontent or uncertainty with the ALA’s capacity to represent librarians’ workplace concerns, yet also recognised the clear practical barriers to such activities.

For example, librarians were split on whether ALA was an effective advocate for the library profession at the workplace, with 33% (19) responding that the organisation was ‘very effective’ or ‘effective’, 37% (21) that it was ‘ineffective’ or ‘very ineffective’, and 31% (18) that it was ‘neutral’. Of those taking the survey, 60% offered responses to our related question, ‘What do you believe are some of the foremost problems with the ALA in terms of representing the issues and concerns librarians face in the workplace?’.

Of these, a large number noted that ALA’s size, breadth, and attention to public libraries hindered its capacities in this regard.

It's too big, and we're too diverse a population to generalise.

Workplace issues are local, and as ALA does not have a system of active local representation, workplace issues are not specifically addressed.

Organisation is too large and is a PR machine for all types of libraries, with emphasis on public libraries.

Organisation is too large and too political.

ALA is such a broad organisation that it cannot effectively advocate for every single type of librarian under its umbrella.

ALA is too big and too bureaucratic. The organisation cannot even manage itself.

Several responses took issue with how ALA was run, pointing to various job-related workplace concerns, such as credentials and librarian identity, that they believed the organisation should be addressing but was not. Some also noted a management-oriented leadership removed from ALA’s librarian constituency.

It bothers me that I’ve worked hard to amass credentials as a librarian, namely MLS and a second master’s degree, but ALA doesn’t advocate this as the standard as a librarian. There are too many people coming on board, especially in digital initiatives, who have very little notion of library services beyond their own assignment.

Many of the managerial/administrative librarians who hold leadership positions within ALA have lost touch with the needs of rank & file librarians … There is an amazingly stark contrast between academic librarians at institutions where they have faculty status and those who are at institutions where they are staff.

There remains a lack of understanding among faculty and administration of what librarians actually do to make information resources available in increasingly seamless ways. The easier we make it to find information, the less they value our work. While many faculty staff are underpaid, librarians have the lowest salaries of faculty at my university.
Too conservative to engage in any discussions of unions, librarians or library techs low salaries, library management, and working conditions of library staff. A totally worthless organisation that forces you to join in order to be involved with other segments like ACRL.

A smaller number of survey respondents pointed to ALA’s impotence in terms of workplace advocacy, noting, for example, that it is ‘exclusively concerned with the institutions, not the library employees’, or that it ‘has no real power over the university in terms of influencing its decisions regarding librarians’.

Librarians’ frustration or uncertainty with ALA’s workplace advocacy was not entirely balanced by their regard for UFF. The partial indifference, as we shall see, is reminiscent of the divisions within and between craft unions, where membership is based around shared skill sets and a certain *esprit de corps* based on those skills. Since librarians are not teaching faculty, many have developed a sense that they are in effect excluded from the faculty union. With this in mind we now turn to an overview of Florida’s state-wide faculty union and the social and institutional context of higher education in the state to consider more closely the relationship between academic librarians and UFF.

**UFF, library workers and the fight to survive decentralisation of the state university system**

The United Faculty of Florida (UFF), an affiliate of the Florida Education Association (FEA), the NEA, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), represents faculty and higher education professionals employed by the state’s eleven public universities, eleven junior colleges, and three private universities. Four additional UFF chapters solely represent graduate teaching assistants at four of the state universities. Article II Section 1 of the UFF Constitution asserts that the primary objective of the Union is ‘to bring faculty, professional employees and staff of Florida’s colleges and universities into a relationship of mutual assistance and cooperation in order to obtain for them the rights and privileges to which they are entitled’ (unitedfacultyofflorida.org).

While librarians also have faculty status at Florida’s public universities and are included in the bargaining units on each campus where UFF is active, they do not have tenure. In addition, their work routines are distinguished from teaching faculty in that they are typically on twelve-month contracts with an expectation of being on campus forty hours per week; professors generally work on a nine month contract and are required to be present on campus only to hold office hours, attend meetings, and teach. In fact, one frustration expressed by librarians in our survey was that there is a high expectation for librarians to publish research and develop professionally in other areas but they are not afforded the time professors are for such activities. This is perceived as a key divide by some librarians, who see themselves as second-class citizens compared with teaching faculty. Indeed, for some librarians this clear distinction appears to accentuate the distance they feel from teaching faculty and the idea that UFF’s main focus is tenured and tenure-track faculty. We return to this in greater detail below.

The UFF’s resolve to retain its capacity as a state-wide union was vigorously tested in the early 2000s. The Board of Regents (BOR) that oversaw the SUS resisted several
powerful legislators’ wishes to build law schools at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and Florida International University and a medical school at Florida State University. Infuriated at the BOR’s recalcitrance, Governor Bush and a coalition of state legislators moved to abolish the BOR and ‘decentralise’ the SUS, whereupon each institution was placed under the governance of a separate Board of Trustees (BOT).

According to Fiorito and Gallagher (2006:40):

This decentralisation to school level BOTs jibed with the Republican Party’s call for privatisation and running government ‘like a business’. It also held potential, analogous to Thatcher’s attacks on the British miners’ union, to undermine a stronghold of Democratic Party support, Florida educator unions. Although creating BOTs did not constitute privatisation per se, it was a significant step. Governor Jeb Bush backed these efforts and packed the eleven new BOTs with pro-business Republican donors.

The changes in governance were used as a basis for ending the bargaining that, since the UFF’s founding in 1975, had taken place between UFF and the BOR. The SUS’s eleven state university BOTs argued unanimously that they were no longer bound by the state-wide agreements. The UFF in turn mobilised and collected thousands of authorisation cards from large majorities of faculty to recertify itself as the bargaining agent under individual BOTs. At eight universities, faculty support for recertification of UFF was 65% or more and the BOTs at these institutions voluntarily recognised UFF. The University of West Florida and Florida State University held out for elections in which UFF went on to win 90% or more of the ballots at each institution. The University of Florida’s BOT refused to recognise UFF until 2005, when an appellate court decided in the union’s favour (Fiorito & Gallagher, 2006:40-41). This effort toward privatisation resembles similar trends in other areas of knowledge work in the larger economy.

The extent of the union’s resolve and success to resist the decentralisation and exhibit a collective will toward independent representation is directly tied to the continued existence of the institution of tenure for teaching faculty.

Echoing craft union divisions: librarian involvement in UFF

The move to weaken UFF through decentralisation in fact re-energised UFF’s ranks, with recertification contributing to marked membership growth throughout the state. In the longer term and on a national scale, however, the tenured and tenure track faculty that have some leverage in protecting their ‘craft’ of teaching and research, and have considerable compensation and job security, are becoming displaced by part-time and non-tenure-track faculty. Over 50% of faculty members fill part-time appointments in US higher education and 68% of all faculty positions are non-tenure-track (aaup.org, 2009). These circumstances, in addition to what is known from the historical record, suggest that faculty unions such as the UFF would be well served by uniting with and better representing those in the same industry with shared interests, particularly non-tenure-track knowledge workers such as librarians and part-time instructors. Mosco & McKercher (2008:50-51) explain that to some degree ‘professors’ unions are craft unions, organised around the mastery of sets of skills and technologies, and around control over information. As such, they are somewhat reminiscent of the older
communications sector craft unions like the International Typographical Union (ITU). Although the ITU through its 'closed shop' may have exercised greater control over its craft, faculty unions 'are characterised by internal democracy, exclusivity, and a limited conception of citizen engagement' (Mosco & McKercher, 2008:51). As noted above, the fact that librarianship remains a gendered profession is probably also a factor in such exclusion. This sense of exclusivity and de facto member exclusion was a foremost concern encountered in our survey.

Broadly speaking, a majority of the surveyed librarians were supportive of unions in general and recognised the importance of UFF in relation to their own employment situations. For example, 74% of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the statement, ‘Labour unions are a positive and important element of the US socio-economic fabric’. When asked, ‘How much influence do you think UFF has on the overall library workplace conditions at your institution?’ a majority (67%) responded ‘great influence’, or ‘some influence’. A similar majority (72%) believed that UFF has a positive influence on ‘the salary and benefits in-unit librarians receive’ at their institutions; only 21% said UFF had ‘no influence’, and 7% were ‘undecided’. A majority, 65%, ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘somewhat agreed’ with the statement, ‘Overall, unionisation of librarians provides librarians with better working conditions’, and 75% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘somewhat agreed’ that ‘unionisation of librarians provides librarians with better salaries and benefits.’ A smaller majority (60%) affirmed that ‘without UFF, workplace conditions for librarians at my institution would be worse’. Only one respondent answered that workplace conditions would be ‘better’ without UFF, and 28% said they would be ‘the same’. Thus our survey reflects a generally positive regard for UFF’s importance and efficacy as a workplace advocate.

At the same time, librarians remain disengaged from the immediate undertakings of their union chapter. While a striking 74% of respondents who took the entire survey identified themselves as dues-paying members of UFF, only 7% attend their campus chapter’s meetings regularly, while 30% attend such meetings on a less frequent basis. Only 12% serve as an officer or committee chair in their chapter on a regular or intermittent basis, 13% have served on a UFF committee and 4% occasionally attend state-wide union meetings. A sense of detachment from UFF may be related to a broader workplace concern reminiscent of the infighting between craft unions over jurisdictions: the notion that ‘the concerns of teaching faculty overshadow those of librarians in UFF’, to which a large majority taking our survey ‘strongly agree’ (48%) or ‘somewhat agree’ (29%). Further, of the 60% who offered responses to the question, ‘What do you believe are some of the foremost problems with the UFF in terms of representing the issues and concerns librarians face in the workplace?’ many suggested that librarians believe that UFF members are more concerned with issues involving teaching faculty and don’t understand, or are dismissive of, the activities or concerns of academic librarianship.

[UFF] membership is predominantly non-librarian; many of its non-librarian members resent our inclusion and do not understand our work; most librarians will not speak up.
Librarians are often not considered as highly as faculty, as we are not ‘researchers’ and not tenured. Many of the issues we face are not issues seen by other faculty (i.e. the expectation that we will spend 40 hours per week in our office environment), which makes it difficult for the Union to relate to our situation.

The leadership of the local chapter … do[es]n’t understand that we hold academic ranks and they have no interest in learning the facts.

Teaching faculty don’t view library faculty as peers. [Teaching faculty in UFF are] more likely to press for their own concerns. Less likely to care about the issues library faculty face.

Librarians who are non-tenure-seeking fall into a different category than tenure earning faculty. Although our UFF chapter is sensitive to ‘non-teaching faculty’ they have difficulty with how to deal with librarians & counsellors.

The biggest problem is educating teaching faculty that librarians do more than read books all day and stamp date due cards. We seem to be invisible until the faculty ‘needs us’ to cover their classes or do bibliographic instruction while they attend conferences.

A handful of responses to this question, however, indicate a deeper understanding of UFF that in some cases is based on active involvement with union activities. In this respect, librarians are in all probability quite similar to their teaching faculty counterparts, only a minority of whom actually engage in union activities.

I have been very active in our campus chapter: grievance team, bargaining team, executive committee, UFF state senator. I believe I am highly respected for my knowledge of our contract, grievance processes, and representation of all faculty rights, i.e. teaching and non-teaching faculty. Some library faculty have talents and skills valuable to UFF and through demonstrating them can represent library faculty well.

Not enough of the librarian[s] (and faculty for that matter) are dues paying members. They take the benefits the union creates but badmouth the concept of unions.

I do believe that UFF does try to consider the library faculty and take into consideration the differences in their job assignments and expectations from teaching faculty.

UFF does a good job representing librarians. Since the majority of the faculty are teaching faculty we sometimes get lost in this mix, but I’m not aware of any serious problems.

It is important to consider that, although librarians have limited involvement with UFF, this is also the case with ‘teaching faculty’, a majority of whom apparently appreciate UFF yet remain free riders. For example, while during the recertification campaign of the early 2000s, faculty largely supported UFF as its workplace representative, yet dues-paying membership averages only around 30% across the SUS, and active participation in union affairs is significantly less.

Along these lines, several responses to the above question point to UFF’s difficult position versus administrators and local BOTs following the SUS’s decentralisation.

We have been without a contract for over 6 years, and the administration has been chipping away at the union, trying to reduce its bargaining power.
Perhaps the reluctance of the new Board of Trustees and ‘independent’ university administrators in their unwillingness to deal with the union or drag negotiations out for so long in order to forestall any progress. Our administration … hands out the good jobs to its friends, usually before anyone knows [the positions] are open. Library meetings and other administrative functions are also a closed shop. Our [faculty assembly] is a joke that rubber stamps the administration’s nuttiest ideas. [UFF] seems to have no real influence or power. No raise in the last four years while out of unit faculty have received all kinds of raises.

Indeed, over half the respondents (54%) disagreed that their university administrations ‘manage the institution in a professional and equitable manner, with the opportunity for ample faculty and staff input with regard to university policies and governance’; 34% agreed and 12% were neutral. Likewise, 52% disagreed with the statement, ‘The administration at your institution has a high regard for UFF’, while 24% agreed and 24% were neutral.

Along these lines, over half (59%) provided responses to the question, ‘In your estimation, what things would need to change for librarians at your university to be more highly valued and/or receive improved salaries and working conditions?’ Many librarians expressed frustration with administrators for being indifferent to library work, for overall library funding decisions, or for not promoting the library to various constituencies.

The Library Dean would have to leave first, as the anti-academic librarian attitude begins with him/her, strange as it sounds.

Stronger representation/advocacy by our library administrators because we've mostly given up on UFF.

Administration would need to take seriously the understaffing in the library. We work more and more with less and less. Administration, both within and without the library, need to accept that much of library work is very complex.

Better library voice from administration. Those in admin[istration] library positions have a big role to play in advocating and marketing. Not seeing it happen.

I think it starts with the administration and open dialogue. Librarians need to speak up more and demand better service for themselves and for their patrons.

The current administration views librarians with much less regard than the teaching faculty. A significant number of librarians responded to the question by noting that tenured positions would be necessary for librarians to achieve greater stature and recognition.

If librarians must research, create, publish or teach beyond the contract, then they need the protections of tenure.

I hesitate to say that granting of tenure or tenure-earning might enhance our roles but it could. While we have faculty rank, it is not the same as ‘teaching’ faculty rank.

Perhaps not just promotion but tenure, and more shared governance, which does not seem to happen too often at this institution.

Many librarians have University rank based on criteria that did not require research or publications. As these librarians retire and if we hire librarians that participate in scholarly communication and research, then we might have a chance at gaining a little more respect from our faculty 'peers' involved with teaching and research.
The overall responses to this question suggest that a majority of the librarians look to administrators for a voice and leadership on workplace concerns, or for the granting of tenure, suggesting that the influence of the academy’s socialisation process is combined with the librarian’s sense of professionalism. On the other hand, very few responses proposed organisation among librarians themselves or through the UFF.

*We need to bring these inequities to light. If we don’t discuss and debate these issues, they will remain unchanged.*

*More direct contact between librarians, faculty, and administrators.*

*Librarians and the UFF just need to stay with each other.*

**Between professional organisations and the faculty union**

The possibilities for – and obstacles to – a national mobilisation of academic librarians around workplace issues and concerns may not be fully illustrated by the example of librarians in Florida’s SUS, but there are some important similarities between the plight of library workers in Florida and those in other locales. Like librarians elsewhere in the USA, a majority of Florida’s librarians belong to bodies such as ALA and ACRL that are structurally and philosophically incapable of organising workers or advocating for workplace rights. On the contrary, such organisations actually diminish the likelihood of a library workers’ movement through their quasi-managerial orientation and embrace of professional ideology.

At the same time librarians in almost every state in the USA are employed in institutions and represented by faculty unions where they are in many instances perceived as ‘second class citizens’ alongside teaching faculty. While our study has not considered the perspectives of administrators or professors to confirm such views, librarians’ perceptions that their administrative and faculty peers misunderstand or fail to appreciate their work and status were pervasive in our survey, and this belief seems likely to preclude greater involvement in their union, thus perpetuating UFF’s tendency to prioritise the issues and concerns of teaching faculty over those of librarians.

Because of space constraints, we have chosen to concentrate here on the influence of professional organisations and professionalism as central factors influencing library workers’ organisation. However, gender and the feminisation of library work are also important elements in librarians’ perceived exclusion from UFF that cannot go without mention. Intertwined with IT and commodification, gender plays an important part in how librarianship is culturally defined and perceived. As Harris (2008) puts it, ‘women’s work is regarded to be not technical and, therefore, occupations that are performed largely by women are not perceived to involve any significant level of technical skill.’ This observation may go a long way towards explaining librarians’ beliefs about the limited understanding of library work among their peers.

*When faced with … evidence of highly technical so-called women’s work, such as that performed by librarians in academic libraries, the work and the workers who carry it out are essentially disappeared in the minds of onlookers, as though invisible hands have created something that others take for granted.* (Harris, 2008: 168)

At present, the only viable way for academic librarians to join forces to address workplace issues state-wide and nationally is through the local organisation that is not
compromised by a managerial or corporate ethos: the faculty union. As one survey respondent put it:

*ALA is too far removed. UFF is a local and state organisation and is made up of officers and administrators who are close to Florida agencies, politics, legislative officers, etc. UFF know who to talk to to get things done; ALA does not.*

With this in mind, there is cause for some optimism about greater librarian involvement in UFF in coming years. The SUS’s decentralisation necessitated a revitalisation of individual chapters, particularly around bargaining and membership-building activities. In some other USA states, librarians have had a significant impact on their faculty unions. Several respondents’ remarks suggest that the UFF’s ability to accommodate and represent librarians’ issues and concerns is commensurate with the extent of librarians’ union activity.

Our survey suggests that librarians are, overall, favourable toward unions, and a high percentage of respondents are dues-paying members. Initiatives by librarians already involved in UFF, conducted in coordination with UFF leadership, might include development of a roundtable within the union focusing on workplace issues specific to library workers. Such action would increase the understanding of librarian-specific concerns among faculty staff, while building a distinct voice for librarians, independent of the ways that their concerns are currently articulated by professional organisations and expose their hollowness. A council of representatives from such roundtables, possibly organised by the Progressive Librarians Guild, could go a long way toward creating a national movement of library workers who can articulate an independent vision of academic librarianship distinct from, yet united in important ways, with those of teaching faculty.

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