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SPEC Kit 331

Changing Role of Senior Administrators

October 2012

Kathleen DeLong

Associate University Librarian for Human Resources and Teaching/Learning
University of Alberta

Julie Garrison

Associate Dean for Research and Instructional Services
Grand Valley State University

Marianne Ryan

Associate University Librarian for Public Services
Northwestern University



ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Series Editor: Lee Anne George

SPEC Kits are published by the

Association of Research Libraries

21 Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20036-1118

P (202) 296-2296 F (202) 872-0884

<http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/spec/>
pubs@arl.org

ISSN 0160 3582

ISBN 1-59407-887-4 / 978-1-59407-887-3 print

ISBN 1-59407-888-2 / 978-1-59407-888-0 online

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In alignment with ARL's strategic focus *Transforming Research Libraries*, designed to articulate, promote, and facilitate new and expanding roles for ARL libraries that enable and enrich the transformations affecting research and research-intensive education, this study has probed the nature of administrative positions that support accomplishing these objectives. The ongoing evolution within these organizations and the roles of those who work in them is mirrored in the administrative structure of the academic library. Two decades ago, it was largely the library director who managed the organization, perhaps with assistance from an associate in public and technical services, or from a single deputy. The metamorphosis of higher education has put new demands on libraries to be agile, engaged, and responsive in diverse ways. Hernon, Powell, and Young (2001) have described the university library director's role as a position in transition over this same period. The library's chief executive now has additional challenges and responsibilities: defining the strategic direction of the organization, articulating its vision, and participating more explicitly in the academic life of the parent institution. As a result, aspects of library management and leadership are being taken on more fully by members of a senior administrative team possessing a skill set that enables them to manage what once was exclusively director-level work.

This survey focused on the professional, administrative, and management positions that report directly to the library director (or in some ARL member libraries the position that serves as the representative to the association), positions that have not been examined by a SPEC survey since 1984. It explored

the responsibilities of these positions, and the skills, qualifications, and competencies necessary for these administrators to successfully lead a transforming 21st century research library. It looked at whether and how position requirements have changed in the past decade, whether the number of direct reports has changed, whether these administrators have assumed new areas of organizational responsibility, and how they acquire the new skills to fulfill those responsibilities. Forty-six of the 126 member libraries responded to the survey between March 12 and April 16 for a response rate of 37%.

Titles and Responsibilities of Senior-Level Positions

The survey asked respondents to identify which senior positions reported directly to the library director in 2007 and in 2012. The positions identified have a variety of titles, including deputy director, associate director, vice provost, and director, manager, or head of a division, department, or branch library. Overall, the number of positions reporting to the director has not changed in the past five years; however, many libraries are changing senior administrative-level responsibilities and the titles of those reporting to the director. All but three of the libraries responding to the survey (95%) have altered senior administrative-level positions or introduced new positions in the past five years. Of those, 25 (58%) have changed half to all of their positions, and 13 (30%) have made only minor changes. There is also a significant elevation in the titles of positions reporting to library directors, moving away from head and assistant titles to associate and director titles, with the number of deputy librarian titles

remaining the same during the 2007 to 2012 study period. Position titles are also being recast anew, using descriptive language such as *digital content*, *collections*, *learning*, *instruction*, and *user services*, rather than the more generic “public services” or “technical services” that were used more frequently as recently as five years ago.

New titles also reflect changes in scope and focus. Positions with responsibility for scholarly communication and publishing have more than doubled during the five-year period studied, and a significant increase in positions with responsibility for digital content and services is apparent. While public and technical services titles seem to be on a downtrend, the survey finds that administrative service roles are being defined more broadly in terms of organizational development and planning, with evidence of a slight increase in positions with direct responsibility for assessment. The majority of positions identified as being redesigned or new since 2007 primarily emphasize the areas of education, user services, scholarly communications, and collections. Positions dealing with collections are now often being paired with other responsibilities such as scholarly communication, user services, or access services. Eight of the 25 new positions identified in the survey have responsibility for scholarly communication, publishing, or copyright.

Seventeen of the responding libraries (44%) have at least one position that took on either supervision of areas or specific functions that were previously under the director’s purview. Over half of these stated that other senior-level positions took on primary supervisory responsibilities for areas that previously reported directly to the library director. Other changes included taking on direct responsibility for functions, such as strategic planning, budget, development, and human resources, previously within the director’s domain.

Future Plans for Administrative-Level Positions

Almost half of the respondents (19, or 45%) indicated that they anticipate redesigning or creating a new senior administrative position in the next three years. Of those institutions, a few could not foretell the primary area of responsibility for the redesigned or newly created role. Three institutions reported it is simply too

early to know; another three are in the midst of reorganizing or awaiting the arrival of a new library director. Those institutions that could declare primary areas of focus for new senior positions most often mentioned strategic planning, followed by public services, collections, and organizational development. Also mentioned were senior positions in the area of facilities, fundraising and development, planning, assessment, and statistics.

Over three quarters of the respondents (33, or 79%) indicated that if a vacancy in a senior administrative position were to occur, it would prompt a redesign of the position before further recruitment was contemplated. Positions are most often redesigned to meet evolving or unmet needs within the organization, such as changes in service delivery or emerging technologies and their impact on access to information and learning. Redesign of positions is also prompted by changes in and the need to re-align with the strategic planning priorities (both in the library and on the campus) and, in some cases, to balance workloads and capitalize on existing knowledge, skills, and abilities. Only one response indicated that senior portfolios are regularly shifted if vacancies occur. Seemingly, lateral shifts in responsibilities of senior administrative positions are uncommon. While some responses indicated that senior staff members work as a team to ensure smooth internal functioning, there is also the sense that positions are highly specialized. Soft skills, such as communication or the ability to work with change are clearly valued in all senior positions; specialized technical skills still seem to be highly associated with some specific senior roles.

Overall, in the event of a vacancy or the creation of a new senior administrative position, the responding libraries expect to recruit from other research libraries (39, or 91%). Internal candidates are viewed favorably by a majority of institutions (29, or 67%). A few libraries indicated that it really depends upon the position as to whether they would go outside of research libraries (12, or 28%) or even outside the library profession (8, or 19%) in order to recruit into a new senior position. While these findings are not unexpected, it seems clear that the pool of potential candidates for senior-level positions is relatively small and that few research libraries expect to invest in candidates

outside the confines of the research library field. These candidates may also tend to be known quantities and could be seen to lower the risk of making a bad or unsuitable hire.

Necessary Skills and Qualifications

Responses to the open-ended survey question about what skills senior library administrators must acquire to manage the 21st century research library emphasized soft skills and personal competencies, particularly strategic planning, change management, vision, and big picture thinking, aligned with keeping up with trends in libraries and higher education. They stressed the importance of leadership (including campus leadership), as opposed to management, although some respondents also spoke to the need for understanding the complexities of budget, funding, and management of human and material resources, including collections. The need to have excellent communication and interpersonal skills is clearly indicated, along with the need for flexibility and adaptability. Collaboration, internal to the institution and with external partners, was also emphasized, and entrepreneurial skills were highlighted. Respondents mentioned more than once that understanding emerging technologies is necessary, with some references to having an understanding of and leadership in scholarly communication, e-publishing, digitization, and digital management and curation. Respondents also stressed the need for senior administrative staff to view the operation of the library as a whole, to work as a team, and to ensure the internal productivity, operational efficiencies, and alignment necessary to accomplish the library's strategic goals and objectives. Overall, these are demanding and complex responsibilities, and the onus seems to be upon the staff in these positions to (as one respondent summarized) "identify opportunities and challenges and to develop strategic solutions and directions" as well as to work collaboratively to promote and safeguard the organizational health of the whole enterprise.

All but one of the respondents reported that senior library administrators acquired the skills necessary for their jobs through participation in professional developmental opportunities, such as the Research Libraries Leadership Fellows (RLLF) Program,

the Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, or the Frye Leadership Institute (though survey respondents were not asked if they had sent staff to an institute or which institute was regarded as most highly desirable.) Reading the professional literature (93%), attending professional conferences (91%), and professional networking (91%) were similarly important. Of the other methods that were described, the most common revolved around practice and on-the-job experience. The importance of mentoring relationships (with other library leaders and campus administrators) was also underscored, as were in-house leadership training opportunities. A few responses also stressed the importance of advanced degrees and graduate coursework. Since research libraries view internal candidates for senior positions favorably, the responses around experiential or on-the-job learning aligned with in-house training opportunities and mentoring are not unexpected and seem to indicate a willingness to develop and promote a strong cadre of internal candidates. Should the demand arise, these candidates are then also available for recruitment into other research libraries.

Necessary Qualities and Attributes

From a list adapted from one designed by Hernon, Powell, and Young (2001) to describe the managerial and leadership attributes of university library directors from the perspective of assistant directors, survey respondents were asked to select specific qualities and attributes that senior library administrators may need to perform effectively in their positions (and that may not be captured in a position description). Overall, there was very high agreement with the qualities and attributes that Hernon, Powell, and Young identified but with a few key differences. *Makes tough decisions* was the most highly rated managerial attribute in this survey as it was in the Hernon, Powell, and Young list, with *Communicates effectively with staff* immediately following in both lists. *Manages fiscal resources/budgets* was also ranked highly in both. Respondents to this survey indicated that *Delegates authority* and *Nurtures the development of new programs and services/refines existing ones as needed* are very important. These qualities and attributes are very much in keeping with the role of senior library administrators who must work through

and with staff to accomplish objectives. *Is results oriented* and *Ensures that planned action is implemented and evaluated* were also associated with the roles and responsibilities of those second in command.

Attributes associated with leadership, such as *Develops a campus visibility for the library*, *Is able to function in a political environment*, *Builds a shared vision for the library*, and *Manages/shapes change* were highly rated in both studies. However, *Changes/shapes the library's culture* appeared near the bottom of the rankings on the Hernon, Powell, and Young list, and was the attribute most highly rated as desirable for senior administrative personnel in this study of qualities and attributes for those who manage 21st century research libraries. The attribute *Is an advocate for the library*, which was highest on the Hernon, Powell, and Young list, was near the middle of attributes for senior library administrators identified in this study. These discrepancies seem to highlight the differences between roles of library directors who have a primarily external focus and those of senior library administrators who work to manage and change organizational culture to support accomplishing the library's internal goals and objectives. However, the high degree of concordance of desirable attributes and qualities for library directors and senior library administrators overall is noteworthy, and seems to validate the perspective that the senior-level roles in research libraries do act as a pipeline to director positions, assuming that the candidate does indeed possess and can demonstrate these characteristics.

A few of the other qualities and attributes that were identified by survey respondents are personal traits focused on setting a tone within the organization. For instance, *Bravery*, *A strong sense of right and wrong*, *High expectations of individuals and teams*, and *The promotion of civility and collegiality within the organization* were all mentioned. These are somewhat analogous to the list of personal characteristics also identified by Hernon, Powell, and Young but not used for this survey's purposes. For example, *Treats people with dignity/respect*, *Is honest*, and *Inspires trust* were all most highly ranked by the Hernon, Powell, and Young respondents. Seemingly, both library directors and senior library administrators are expected to exhibit similar personal characteristics and traits.

Case Studies

The survey asked respondents to select one of the positions that was redesigned or created since 2007 and provide additional information about changes to its responsibilities and scope. The 38 case studies describe a broad range of senior-level positions. The associate university librarian and associate dean level positions are the most frequent. The complete list of levels is below.

Assistant Dean	4
Assistant Director	2
Associate Dean	9
Associate Director	2
Associate University Librarian	11
Associate Vice Provost	1
Deputy Director	1
Director	6
Officer	1
Project Manager	1

The primary areas of emphasis of these positions break down as follows:

Academic Affairs	1
Administrative Services	4
Assessment/Planning	1
Budget/Finance	1
Collections	6
Digital Initiatives	2
Facilities/Branches	2
Information Technology	2
Marketing/Communications	1
Public/User Services	3
Research/Education	4
Scholarly Communication	5

Note, however, that some positions creatively combine multiple areas of oversight, such as administrative services and faculty affairs (Case 24), information technology and finance (Case 26), and public services and facilities (Case 25).

Responses to the question about when the position was created or redesigned indicate that roles were redefined fairly continuously throughout the 2007 to 2012 period. During this period, the critical

mass of position restructuring occurred between 2010 and 2011, which co-incidentally aligns with the Transforming Research Libraries work that was being undertaken by ARL. Library administration reorganization, changes to library operations, and strategic planning were cited as the top three drivers for changing position responsibilities.

	Redesigned	Newly Created
2012	3	—
2011	5	5
2010	8	1
2009	3	3
2008	5	4
2007	—	—
2006	—	1

It appears that there was little change in reporting structure, despite redesign or creation of administrative positions. In 28 of the 38 cases (74%), largely the same units and departments that reported to the original position report to the new one. The number of direct reports to senior administrative positions varies considerably, and it is not clear from the data whether respondents provided the number of direct reports or all reports in a senior portfolio.

A review of the case study data suggests that some trends are emerging in ARL libraries. New positions in traditionally named areas such as public services and technical services seem clearly on the wane, though the dearth of these identifiers could be attributed to the fact that such positions already exist in many of the reporting institutions so are not now being created. The same can be said for information technology, a term used in just four (11%) of the new position titles. Interestingly, however, public services skills and responsibilities are cited as important in five cases (13%) and technical services in eight (21%).

User services is an emphasis in eight new positions (21%). Outreach is a focus of six positions (16%), which include responsibility for communication, public relations, and marketing. Four new positions (11%) have substantial responsibility for teaching and learning; three more (8%) focus on undergraduates. Only one

(3%) mentions distance education. Scholarly communication is a focus of seven positions and digital collections of eight (18% and 21%, respectively). Open access is noted as a responsibility in just three of these cases (8%); e-publishing in just one (3%). Nine positions (24%) include responsibility for strategic planning, policy development, or assessment. Managing data is a component of six positions (16%), though the term “data” is used in a variety of ways. Of those, two positions (5%) include some responsibility for work on grants. Human resources is a focus of five positions (13%), though organizational development, staff development, and staff training are mentioned just once each.

The range of other areas emphasized in senior-level positions seems to suggest that libraries are undergoing much individual transformation and that they are restructuring positions in ways designed to meet local needs and capitalize on in-house talents. For example, a reduction in senior-level administrative positions led to vesting responsibility for all branch libraries in a single branch head (Case 30); a planning and assessment officer was created to centralize operations that had previously been dispersed (Case 38); restructuring to eliminate silos and facilitate succession planning led to increased responsibilities for a senior associate dean position (Case 22). Because case studies by their nature provide specific information that is unique to a particular environment, it is most useful to review the data provided by individual institutions, compiled in the tables on pages 35 through 51.

Conclusion

While it is clear that ARL libraries have been busy rethinking senior administrative positions in the past five years, there is no single trend or direction emerging from the changes reported by survey respondents. Positions are being carefully reviewed as they become vacant or as they are created, and the manner in which the position is filled clearly depends upon the needs and strategic direction of the particular institution. Senior jobs still tend to be highly specialized and there doesn't seem to be evidence of job rotation; administrators continue to be defined by their particular role and seemingly don't move laterally into other senior positions. Organizational structures remain centralized

hierarchies in most organizations. The small growth in the average number of senior positions in ARL organizations may be indicative of growth in the size of the organization or simply reflect new ways of viewing and describing responsibilities within organizations. It may indicate the effect of the economic downturn on library budgets. Senior roles now emphasize soft skills and some, such as facility with change management, are particularly critical; yet these are challenging to identify in recruitment.

It is clear that research libraries view effective leadership of senior-level administrators as essential to the success of the organization. As libraries continue to transform and adapt to fulfill their 21st century mandate, it is important that a well-developed senior administrative team is ready to map strategic priorities, shape the library culture, and manage change. Investment in training and other professional development opportunities is key to the agility of those in senior-level roles.