

# Faculty–Librarian Relationships in the Information Literacy Context: A Content Analysis of Librarians' Expressed Attitudes and Experiences

# Les relations des bibliothécaires universitaires dans le contexte des connaissances informationnelles : une analyse du contenu du comportement et des expériences

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**Abstract:** Cyberspace offers a glimpse of librarians' unscripted ideas on how best to work with faculty in designing and implementing information literacy opportunities. Information literacy listservs, in particular, provide librarians opportunities to discuss teaching styles, technology, classroom management, and other topics, in the context of their relationships with teaching faculty. Common points of discussion include positive working interactions, complaints about faculty attitudes, or frustrations with faculty members' course assignments — and all have implications for the success of information literacy programs. By examining librarians' expressed attitudes and experiences, librarians, library students and LIS faculty may gain an understanding of those issues that facilitate (or hinder) positive working relationships, and offer potential solutions to individuals engaged in information literacy education.

This paper investigates the discourse of librarians discussing their relationships with teaching faculty in postings to the Bibliographic Instruction / Information Literacy Instruction Listserv (BI-L/ILI-L) over the past seven years. The authors' unique standpoint as both trained librarians and full-time library school faculty, informs the

analysis by balancing an empathetic perspective of librarians' expressed views, with an "insider" look at the lived-experience of teaching faculty. By isolating postings that reflect librarian-faculty relationships, the paper explores: a) the ways that librarians frame their relationships with faculty; and b) librarians' perceptions of faculty members' attitudes towards librarians, information literacy and pedagogy. These themes are examined in light of Social Positioning Theory, in order to explore the impact of librarians' social constructions of themselves and teaching faculty on information literacy instruction. The paper concludes with suggestions that may ameliorate the felt gap between librarians and faculty, in order to benefit those individuals both groups must reach—students.

**Résumé :** Le cyberspace offre un aperçu (spontank) des idées des bibliothécaires sur la manière d'établir de bonnes relations avec les enseignants et qui aura pour conséquence de faciliter et d'augmenter les connaissances informationnelles. Les listes de discussions touchant les connaissances informationnelles, plus particulièrement, donnent aux bibliothécaires la possibilité d'examiner les méthodes d'enseignement, les technologies, l'organisation des classes et d'autres sujets, dans le contexte de leurs relations avec le corps professoral. Des points communs de discussion incluent les interactions de travail positives, les doléances au sujet de l'attitude des professeurs ou les frustrations envers les assignations de cours des professeurs. Tout cela a une influence sur le succès des programmes d'enseignement des connaissances informationnelles. Grâce à l'examen du comportement et des expériences des bibliothécaires, il sera possible aux enseignants des sciences de l'information, aux étudiants-bibliothécaires, de même qu'aux bibliothécaires eux-mêmes de comprendre ces différents problèmes, ce qui facilitera (ou entravera) des relations de travail positives et offrira des solutions potentielles aux individus engagés dans l'enseignement des compétences informationnelles.

En utilisant la méthode d'analyse de contenu, cet article étudie le discours des bibliothécaires examinant leurs relations avec les membres du corps enseignant lors de leurs participations à la liste de discussion *Bibliographic Instruction / Information Literacy Instruction (BI/ILI-L)* au cours des sept dernières années. Grâce aux perspectives uniques des auteurs (à la fois bibliothécaires expérimentés et professeurs de bibliothéconomie à temps plein), l'analyse équilibrera une perspective empathique des points de vue exprimés par les bibliothécaires, avec une vision « interne » des expériences personnelles du corps professoral. En isolant les interventions de discussion qui reflètent la relation bibliothécaire-professeur, cet article explorera : a) la manière dont les bibliothécaires façonnent leurs relations avec le corps professoral, et b) la perception des bibliothécaires du comportement du corps enseignant vis-à-vis des bibliothécaires, des connaissances informationnelles et de la pédagogie, avec un intérêt particulier pour le contexte numérique. Ces thèmes seront examinés en regard de la Théorie de Positionnement Social, de façon à étudier l'impact du comportement social des bibliothécaires et du corps professoral au sujet de l'enseignement des connais-

sances informationnelles. Cet article conclura avec des suggestions proposées pour aider les bibliothécaires à aller au-delà des expériences insatisfaisantes avec le corps enseignant et pour aider à établir des relations favorables pour les individus ciblés par chacun des deux groupes, soit les étudiants.

Cet article aborde les thèmes du congrès soit l'accès, la culture informationnelle et l'apprentissage. L'objectif de l'enseignement des connaissances informationnelles est d'augmenter les compétences informationnelles des étudiants afin que ceux-ci développent les capacités nécessaires pour accéder de façon efficace à l'information. Présentement, cet accès à l'information est compromis dans plusieurs universités en raison des relations complexes et provocatrices des deux principaux mentors du développement de ces compétences (c'est-à-dire les professeurs et les bibliothécaires). Cet article analyse cette relation dans le but de découvrir des aboutissements positifs pour tous.

## 1. Introduction

Information literacy (IL) skills are vital to students' successes in the digital age. At postsecondary institutions, librarians and teaching faculty are increasingly joining forces to offer students support in locating information and to provide helpful strategies for completing academic work. However, at many institutions, forging these relationships is difficult, and often strained by misperceptions about these individuals' different — but complementary — work roles. Difficulties arise, too, from misinterpretations by librarians and by faculty of each other's motivations. In order for their working relationships to prove fruitful for enhancing students' information literacy skills, librarians and faculty members must closely examine their beliefs about each another and develop strategies to find common ground in the instructional environment. By applying content analysis to items posted on the Bibliographic Instruction / Information Literacy Instruction Listserv (BI-L/ILI-L), the perceptions of librarians engaged in instructional activities concerning their relationships with university and college faculty members may be explored.

## 2. Literature review

The library and information studies (LIS) literature has a long history in exploring trends in bibliographic instruction and (more recently) information literacy (IL) education. Librarians and LIS scholars have examined both the professional and theoretical issues involved in guiding individuals in the use of information resources, the design of successful library research projects, and the development of information strategies

for lifelong learning. Approaches in the literature cross a number of contexts—from public to academic libraries, as well as corporate and other special information centres—and take as their focus the full range of activities that comprise information literacy instruction (e.g., library tours; database searching sessions; critical evaluations of web resources). Many professional and scholarly articles also explore the importance of having key outsiders "buy-in" to the importance of information literacy instruction as one core component to the success of these endeavours; these central figures include the corporate executive who may (or may not) choose to fund employee training programs, and faculty members on campus who may (or may not) advocate for information literacy instruction for their students (*cf.* Julien 2000; Julien and Boon 2002). Before examining librarians' expressed attitudes concerning their relationships with faculty, it is important to first understand the practical and theoretical contexts as outlined in the published venues in LIS.

The LIS literature of the past few decades explores IL from a number of different starting points. The professional literature offers a number of "how-to" items concerning effective instructional strategies for different populations (e.g., seniors in public libraries; young children in school libraries; graduate students in academic settings). Many of these have been written with the specific goal of sharing IL successes in order to guide others in the development of new programs, in the assessment and revision of existing sessions, in the use of technology, or in the management of other incidental instructional components (e.g., Bodi 1990; Drueke 1992; Warmkessel and Carothers 1993). Many articles that address the academic context, in particular, regularly identify the support of teaching faculty as a vital component of successful IL initiatives. The following sections will examine this issue in more detail in order to provide a brief glimpse of the trends surrounding faculty-librarian relationships as explored in the published literature.

### *2.1. Two solitudes: Faculty and librarians' roles and information literacy*

One of the most prevalent themes discussed in the IL literature is that of the experiential separation between faculty members and academic librarians. Although both groups are engaged, at one level, in pursuing a shared goal—namely, the education of undergraduate and graduate students—there are many points of difference that affect the faculty-librarian relationship. Many articles point to reference librarians' professional goals (i.e., aiding and teaching users—and students, particularly—in the

effective use of information resources) as being at odds with faculty members' tripartite academic work (i.e., research, teaching, service). In these discussions, librarians are placed in a supporting role on campus, as individuals whose primary purpose is to offer support for learning activities, particularly, undergraduate students' information needs (e.g., Farber 1999; Feinberg and King 1988; Hanson 1993).

At the same time, faculty members are constructed as sitting **outside**—yet inextricably connected to—the daily activities of the academic library. Here, faculty are discussed primarily in their roles as teachers who set the curricula for their students (and by extension, influence librarians' work in supporting students' information needs). Hardesty (1999), for example, identifies faculty as "the most important group, outside of librarians, who need to understand and appreciate the educational role of the academic library" (243). However, he notes that a major point of conflict is a faculty culture that privileges research, content, and specialization, while undervaluing teaching, process, and undergraduate students (244). Hardesty marks faculty members' resistance to building library instruction into their classes as a natural reaction to living under constant time constraints, spending "most of their day doing something for which they have little formal training—teaching" (244), and having a limited exposure to librarians' skills and expertise due to inadequate library support during their own undergraduate or graduate study. While Hardesty (1999) makes clear in his examination of faculty culture that faculty members' actions (or inactions) concerning librarians and library instruction arise more out of ignorance than malevolence (244), other authors are less forgiving, and construct faculty members' inattention to IL as a competition that **must** be tamed, turf that must be claimed, or as a battle that must be won (e.g., Chiste et al. 2000; Snaveley and Cooper 1997).

Feldman and Sciammarella's (2000) work extends the perceived notion that faculty members lack knowledge of the library itself, with implications for their involvement in IL initiatives. Their survey found, for example, that 92 % of librarians felt faculty were unaware of the nature of librarianship and 94 % thought faculty were unfamiliar with current library tools. The same study, however, found that 90 % of faculty members believed themselves to be well-versed with the reference, circulating and periodical sources available in the library to support their classes (492–93). Other studies of faculty members' attitudes toward the library (and IL, in particular) point to similar trends, and also provide additional context concerning faculty members' perceptions (e.g., Cannon 1994;

Gonzales 2001; Leckie and Fullerton 1999). In an opinion piece entitled "What I want in a librarian: One new faculty member's perspective," Srahl (1997) puts a very personal face on the issue, noting that faculty members want: proactive involvement from librarians—tempered with an acute sense of when to back off; clear communication about the limitations of librarian support for research activities; to be asked for input on library collection development; and, information on new and useful resources within the library. In a companion piece to this work (entitled "What I Want in a Faculty Member: A Reference Librarian's Perspective"), Larson (1998) compiles her own list of wants and needs: faculty recognition that librarians are in the same business of serving students' needs; clear communication with librarians about what is going on in a course; a basic familiarity with the literature and research tools in the faculty member's field; and, involvement of librarians in the design of course assignments, so that they match available library resources. These two works show, in a very personal fashion, the complex issues and emotions surrounding faculty-librarian working relationships.

## *2.2. Faculty-librarian collaboration —Making it work*

Studies and discussion pieces in LIS also explore a number of strategies for fulfilling librarians' "want lists" in forging relationships with faculty and in building successful IL programs. Leckie (1996), for example, uncovers faculty members' assumptions about the undergraduate research process, and calls for librarians to "make a more concerted effort to resituate firmly some of the responsibility for teaching library-based research skills with faculty" (207). More commonly, however, authors make calls to arms for librarians to forge stronger, more effective working relationships with faculty. Faculty-librarian collaboration is one of the most prevalent solutions offered in the LIS literature, to the problem of faculty members' disengagement from the IL imperative. Carlson and Miller (1984), for example, note that involving faculty members in library instruction not only allows librarians to be active participants in the library (beyond simple caretakers of the collection), but "the nature of the courses themselves may change, with more emphasis placed on independent library investigation as an integral part of the course" (484). Much of the current literature advocates this integrated model of faculty-librarian working relationships, and points to the development of formal IL courses and programs within established academic curricula as ideal ways to meet students' needs with full faculty support (e.g., Eliot 1989; Stein and Lamb 1998).



Many authors point to faculty members' potential as useful partners who can help librarians achieve their instructional goals (e.g., Blandy 1989; Bodi 1992; Spitzer 1989). Cardwell (2001) notes that librarians must understand that the library's reach on campus extends far beyond the collection itself, and that librarians are there to "support students in their learning and support faculty in their teaching and research. As a result, communicating and cooperating with teaching faculty members are as essential [for librarians] as understanding on-line resources or any other often-consulted reference tool" (254). This idea, of the faculty member as an important "reference tool" for learning about and gaining access to students, is also espoused by Dorner et al., (2001), who describe a successful collaboration between nursing faculty members and librarians charged with serving the needs of students registered in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs. Sugarman and Demetacopoulos (2001) point to an initial collaboration with faculty and graduate students in history, to develop web-based research guides, that led to increased interest in collaboration by other faculty members, as well as an increase in general awareness of library resources (154–55). Zhang (2001) extends the benefits of collaboration beyond those gained by faculty and students, to librarians themselves, noting that team-teaching can improve librarians' teaching techniques and reduce instructional librarians' feelings of isolation as teachers (146).

### 2.3. Relationship-building: *Librarians* as advocates for collaboration

While there are numerous benefits to be gained from collaborative partnerships, many authors also point to the pitfalls of poor relationships—particularly in light of existing problems that must be overcome in order to build effective IL programs. And, as many authors note, the onus is frequently on the librarian to create collaborative partnerships (e.g., Bruce 2001; Chiste et al. 2000). Some authors see this role as one of faculty development, of teaching faculty about the importance of building the library into courses or assignments, and seeing beyond the library's collections to what librarians can offer students. Cardwell (2001), for example, notes that faculty members often create "problematic" assignments when partnerships with librarians are limited or non-existent; where faculty members fail to take the institution's resources into account when designing assignments, students are left to flounder as they attempt to complete assigned work (258). By forging relationships with faculty—by connecting with them at the reference desk, or conducting one-on-one consultations regarding IL strategies appropriate to

their classroom needs—many authors point to the benefits that can be made in the development of IL programs, and in serving students' needs (e.g., Carlson and Miller 1984; Hardesty 1999; Iannuzzi 1998; Ren 2000; Winner 1998).

### 3. Social positioning theory—An overview

In addition to exploring the IL literature as a context to the study reported here, it is also important to examine the concept of social discourse and its effect on individuals' notions of themselves and others. Davies and Harré (1990), Shorter (1989), and Burr (1995) examine social discourse in light of poststructural notions of identity construction. They note that as persons are composed of multiple selves through which they define their identities, and as these selves are the product of social interactions with many possible constructions, then "surrounding any one object, event, person, etc., there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, [and] a different way of representing it to the world" (16). These discourses are manifest in books, conversations, images, and other texts, and they construct our world by setting out what it means to be a caregiver, a worker, and so on. We position ourselves socially by taking up or discarding particular components of these social positions. — — — — —

Social positioning theory provides a framework for understanding the ways that individuals locate themselves (and others) discursively, across a range of social contexts (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and van Langenhove 1999; van Langenhove and Harré 1999). Here, individuals use an array of storylines to construct images of themselves that reflect their perceived place in society, and consequently, images of others that support these personal perceptions (see Given 2002, for a complete description of the tenets of social positioning theory). In many cases, these constructions reflect deliberate attempts to construct a personal identity (e.g., a librarian states: "I'm not a teacher, by any means"<sup>w</sup>—in order to make clear that he/she does not have professional pedagogical training); in other cases, individuals' discursive constructions are tacit and even unintentional (e.g., a faculty member states: "I didn't realize librarians *had* masters degrees"<sup>w</sup>—thereby unintentionally slighting professional librarians). In library and information studies this theory has recently been employed to examine the implications for socially constructed "student" identities on mature undergraduates' information behaviours



(Given 2000; Given 2002), and the impact of discursive constructions of "patients" and "physicians" on information-seeking (McKenzie and Carey 2000).

Social positioning theory allows researchers to highlight perceptions (or **misperceptions**) that inform discursive social exchanges, and is particularly useful for exploring social interactions as they occur in newsgroups such as **BI-L/ILI-L**. In this study, discursive constructions of "librarians" and "faculty" are examined in order to better understand the information expressed on the **BI-L/ILI-L** listserv concerning librarian-faculty relationships. This approach mirrors other recent attempts in LIS to examine a range of informational contexts and experiences in light of social constructionism (e.g., Chelton 1997; Given 2000; Tuominen and Savolainen 1996).

#### 4. Methods

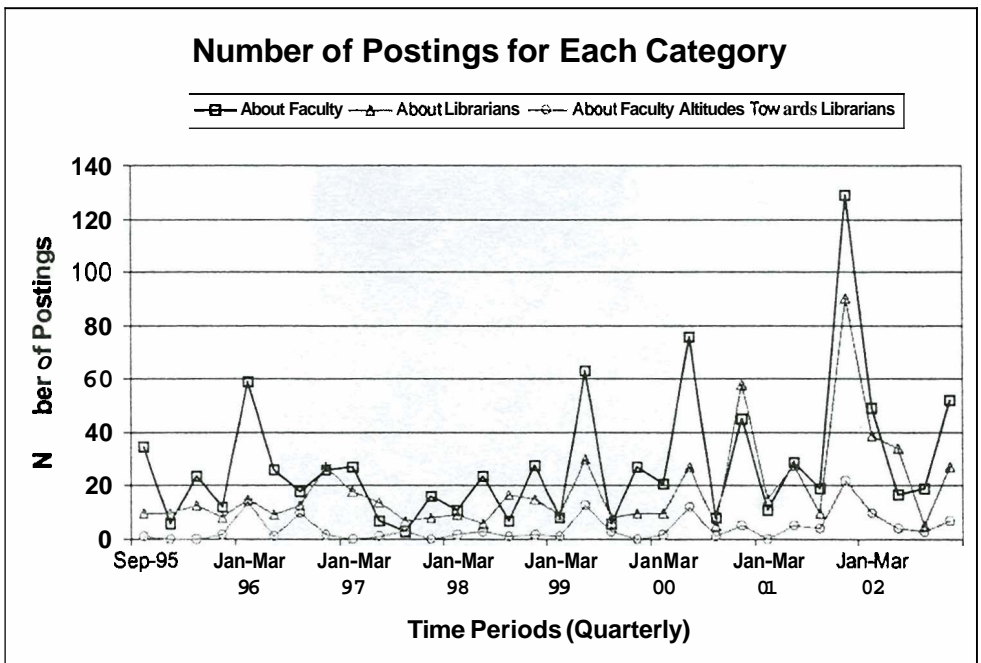
Cardwell (2001) advises librarians to "Subscribe to BI-L [ILI-L], or search its archives ... an active listserv, **BI-L[ILI-L]** hosts informative discussions, on all types of instruction issues. You will learn about programs, successful and unsuccessful, that have been implemented at other institutions. It is also a place for posting questions and joining in on current discussions" (262). It is the prominence of this listserv among IL professionals that prompted it to be selected as the primary source of data for this study. With guidance from the moderator, the archives of the listserv were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method, for postings that related to librarians' relationships with university and college-level faculty members. The seven-year period from September 1995 to December 2002 was included in the analysis. During that time, in May 2002, the listserv changed its name to **ILI-L** (reflecting the "information literacy" terminology), and a new moderator took the helm. All the postings to the listserv for the period in question were read, those that related to librarian-faculty relationships were separated out, and then these were inductively coded for apparent themes. To ensure trustworthiness, the qualitative analyses were conducted by two research assistants, and the authors. In addition, the number of postings relating to each major theme were summed to identify broad trends in posting patterns. In the sections that follow, the term "librarian" will be used to refer to posters of messages on the listserv; these posters **self-identified** as having active roles in the development of IL programs and/or the

implementation of instructional activities within their libraries.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1. Quantitative analyses

Prior to completing qualitative analyses of the postings to BI-L/ILI-L, some quantitative analysis was done to assess the relative interest in particular themes over the seven-year period. Postings marked as relevant to the faculty-librarian relationship theme were totalled by yearly quarter (i.e., January to March, April to June, July to September, October to December). Postings relating to perceptions of faculty (including their personalities, competencies, and roles) were by far the most prevalent, with an average of **28.4** postings per quarter. Postings about librarians themselves were the next most prevalent, with 18.9 postings per quarter. Finally, postings that focused on librarians' beliefs about faculty's perceptions of librarians averaged **4.2** per quarter. These trends held for every quarterly period. Figure 1 shows these trends, and demonstrates that postings were greater in number between October to December in all years, possibly reflecting peak periods of instructional activity for librarians subscribed to the list.



## 5.2. *Perceptions of appropriate roles for faculty members*

Listserv posters expressed a range of expectations for teaching faculty, from grading library instruction assignments, to dealing with plagiarism, to actively promoting information literacy initiatives. Some librarians believed that faculty should take on a large, if not primary, role in information literacy instruction for students. Posters suggested that faculty should know library resources, should understand the structure and services of the library, and should be familiar with library jargon. Other librarians expressed in great detail exactly what faculty should be teaching students in terms of information literacy skills and knowledge. At the same time, there was also disagreement about who constitutes the primary audience for the library—faculty members or students themselves. Several posters demonstrated a degree of empathy towards faculty and recognized that librarians might, in fact, learn from the faculty members' wealth of teaching experiences; one poster, for example, noted: "... we don't get a full sense of what course instructors are up against—the depths of confusion, the short cuts students take, the dynamics of a class as a community. Teaching a course helps us figure those things out and it can really help those students that take it." However, many librarians expressed feelings of competition with faculty members for students' attention: "The students are not the property of the traditional, course instructors." Within the library, librarians believe that they should be in control; for instance, posters seem to agree that library spaces (such as classrooms) should be controlled by the library, not by individual faculty or by academic units.

These trends are interesting to examine in light of social positioning theory. On the listserv, the librarians chose not to position themselves as the sole proprietors of the library, or as experts with a closed and privileged knowledge-base concerning the library and its resources. Rather, the librarians positioned themselves as equals to their faculty counterparts on campus—as teachers in their own right—but with clear expectations that faculty members will actively share in librarians' own knowledge domains. Although positioning themselves as equals presents many opportunities for shared knowledge, and strategies for working together to enhance students' information literacy skills, this approach is derailed by some librarians' dismissal of faculty members as library clients. By focusing their attention on the students, alone, as the sole focus for instructional librarians' time—and by placing boundaries of control on the library space—these librarians may be inadvertently further **distanc-**

ing those faculty members whom they would very much like to connect with as equals. By eliminating the discourse of power and control, and promoting a discourse of equivalence (i.e., where librarians and faculty can learn from and guide each other), librarians may make more strides in connecting with faculty and their students.

### *5.3. Perceptions of relationships with faculty members*

This oppositional theme—of a disjoint between librarians and faculty members' goals—is also evident in the larger number of postings that focused on communication difficulties between the two groups. Posters described a variety of efforts to work with faculty, including developing workshops, and *liaising* with specific departments. However, as one poster noted, "integration and collaboration [with faculty] are slow, painstaking, and include the slippery terrain of being 'polite.'" Some concern was expressed about how faculty conduct themselves during classroom instructional sessions (e.g., marking papers or reading while librarians were speaking; going away to conferences when instructional sessions are scheduled), articulating a theme of "faculty as delinquent children." For example, one poster stated: "the next year she pulled the same thing," as though faculty are trying to "get away" with some sort of bad behaviour when they are absent from or complete other work during instructional sessions. Interestingly, some posters have similarly defensive attitudes towards students: "I try to overcome some of these feelings by referring (but not deferring) to the professor during the session ... so that [the students] understand that both myself AND the professor are a united front." It is clear that many librarians feel they do not get the respect they deserve.

Again, these attitudes are not universal, and some comments indicated that librarians at some institutions have experienced consideration from faculty, who typically give them plenty of notice for instructional sessions. However, such positive experiences were few in number across the seven-year period under study.

### *5.4. Beliefs about faculty members' personalities, attitudes, and competencies*

One other significant theme on the listserv focused on posters' understandings of faculty members' personalities. Overall, the image constructed was negative. Teaching faculty were represented as possessive

and "precious" (about their class time, course credits, and "their" students), as territorial, and as inflexible (i.e., not accepting of any course that is not created or taught by themselves). There were some allowances made for younger faculty, who were characterized as being eager to make a good impression and happy for help with instruction. However, this enthusiasm was also interpreted by one poster as "laziness," since any class taught by a librarian is one less class that a faculty member needs to prepare themselves. Another poster suggested that faculty do not have any emotional investment in their work. One said, "I paraphrase Dorothy Parker when summing up many faculty attitudes about the library ... 'They run the gamut of emotion, from A to B.'" These examples provide evidence of librarians' self-positioning as dedicated, caring individuals, who continually strive to meet students' needs. By placing themselves in opposition to faculty members' uncaring, questionable attitudes towards IL, these librarians are also deliberately positioning faculty with an overtone of moral reproach—and consequently, positioning librarians as of a higher moral order with respect to students' education. Such deliberate, moral positioning was very common in postings concerning faculty members' personal attitudes and behaviours. Teaching faculty were variously described as having, high opinions of themselves, as being rude, "touchy," rarely cooperative, recalcitrant about change, and out of touch with their students' skill levels. In response to one librarian's tale of a faculty member who presented himself as arrogant, one sarcastic poster noted: "arrogance?? In a college professor?? I am shocked, shocked!!" This exchange not only positioned faculty as arrogant individuals, but also positioned the librarians on the list as comrades—having a shared experience as unwitting participants in faculty members' egocentric escapades, that they could discuss, or even laugh about, in the community provided by **BI-L/ILI-L**.

Several posters suggested that teaching faculty are more interested in their own research than the research needs of their students. Some described teaching faculty as being in a "rut" and or needing "renewal" in their approach to classroom activities. One comment stated that some teaching faculty will never change their attitudes to realize that information literacy instruction is vital to students' success. As one poster noted: "most humans cannot admit their ignorance but, on average, full professors are quite good at not doing it." Another noted that faculty assume they know what is available in the library, and fail to find out the "facts." Faculty "fixate" on a single resource, and "disregard" other potential resources, according to one entry. They "lack vision" by not understand-

ing that library instruction may require more than one 50-minute session, according to one poster. Another poster suggested that it is an "offense" when new teaching faculty call a librarian for instruction "at the last minute." In all of these exchanges (and others), there was a common perception that teaching faculty do not understand librarians' need for preparation time, although faculty should "know better," in the words of one poster.

This paternalistic tone was common in the postings analyzed, and provides further evidence of librarians' moral, deliberate positioning of faculty as disengaged, and even obstructionist. Phrases such as "of course" or ones that express a need to "get through" to faculty, construct these individuals as foolish, disobedient children. In this vein, several posters described teaching faculty as "silly" and "sneaky" (e.g., by trying to use instruction bookings to obtain classroom space). Faculty were frequently characterized as being irresponsible and having bad manners, by dropping off students for library instruction, or by "constantly interrupting, making comments, or correcting the librarian [during the instructional session]." Various posters suggested that librarians should expect "trouble" from teaching faculty, that some faculty have "inappropriate" or "bad" attitudes, that librarians should expect their requests to be ignored (or "blown off"), and that some faculty need to be "frightened" into "compliance" (by pointing out that familiar library resources are changing or being eliminated). Listserv subscribers were warned not to let themselves be "pushed around" by faculty, so as not to drain librarians' "emotional survival bank." Some posters noted that teaching faculty need to be "tricked" into paying attention to the library, by being cajoled with food and a low-pressure environment.

A sub-set of librarians' comments focused on their perceptions of faculty members' incompetence in the library. Posters stated that faculty are ignorant, often willfully so, and that faculty make misguided assumptions about the library. Teaching faculty, for example, were frequently characterized as likely to be stunned by the changes to library resources, and that all teaching faculty require a refresher course in research skills and concepts. One common criticism was that faculty do not take the time to find out what on-line services their library provides, and it was evident that many posters believe that faculty are supposed to learn the protocols of on-line databases on their own. Nevertheless, one poster noted: "We taught some 50 new faculty and were amazed to discover how poorly they understood what appeared to us to be the fundamental



difference between paid and free databases." Another said, "it is no wonder the students are confused given the professor's likely confusion." Faculty are seldom credited with the intelligence required to learn new information literacy skills; one entry complained, "I've used many analogies, but profs and students still have problems with the concept." Another poster stated that "some of the misinformation I've overheard professors telling their classes about library resources has curled my hair!" Faculty also were berated for not understanding the difference between the "internet" and web-based academic resources, as well as for crafting inappropriate or generally "poor" assignments for their students.

While the vast majority of postings were quite negative in their assessments of faculty members' attitudes, some posters were much more generous in their judgments. One described most teaching faculty as "reasonable" and "usually understanding" in terms of IL initiatives. One poster noted that teaching faculty may have some useful knowledge, and another stated that they do have some expertise regarding students' choices of resources, at least in terms of class **content**. As one person noted: "... eminent scholars know the literature of their fields as well as or better than we .[librarian] **handmaids/handmaidens** do. It seems arrogant to suppose otherwise." Another recognized that new teaching faculty are under tremendous time constraints, and one wrote that a part-time faculty member's rudeness could be partly explained because **s/he** was "what **Marx** would call a wage-slave." Several posters stated that teaching faculty are usually grateful for instruction, and that those that "get it" are "astute." An additional entry suggested that it is OK to have faculty schedule library instruction during conference absences, although this practice clearly outrages most librarians. One noted that faculty decision-making structures create barriers to meaningful cooperation because of all the discussion required, and the need to reach consensus. Another suggested that faculty ought to be treated with "care" as any colleague deserves. These postings, while in the minority, are very important in understanding the discursive culture of the **BI-L/ILI-L list-serv**. Here, faculty members are counter-positioned in ways **that** allude to a deeper complexity to faculty members' lives than noted by most posters to the list. Discussions of low faculty wages, time constraints, and the competing demands of teaching and research schedules, all contribute to a more dynamic exploration of library-faculty roles and relationships. Although the majority of posters provide negative accounts of faculty-librarian interactions, the minority voices that contradict these images provide a hopeful tone to the discussion; that, in better **under-**

standing faculty members' work roles and obligations, librarians may be able to push beyond feelings of frustration and outrage, to find a common ground that will fulfill the goals of most IL programs.

### *5.5. Perceptions of faculty members' opinions of librarians and their work*

The listserv postings were replete with assertions about the ways in which teaching faculty view librarians and their work. While several posters stated that some teaching faculty are supportive of their library and its goals, most of the perceptions on the part of librarians were less than positive. For instance, many posters made the point that faculty do not understand librarians' work, and so do not appreciate that librarians cannot simply provide instruction on an *ad hoc* basis as students need it and wander into the library. A number of posters clearly believe that some faculty do not see the intellectual content associated with library instruction, and view library instruction as only tangential to class content. One poster noted that teaching faculty often find the term "information literacy" to be ambiguous and simply jargon. Faculty were accused of seeing library use as a set of mechanical skills requiring only average intelligence to master, or worse, viewing the library as an "obstacle which must be dealt with as quickly and painlessly as possible." A frequent complaint was that many faculty do not sufficiently respect librarians. Related to this perspective was the point that, "Most faculty seem to view the library as an infrastructural resource and not [as] a learning resource ...." The bottom line seems to be the perception that faculty do not understand librarians as librarians understand themselves. At worst, "professors seem to think that we librarians are too persnickety." Regardless, the listserv contained many postings expressing strong beliefs that information literacy instruction is librarians' turf. By positioning themselves as owners of the library territory — as well as library-based instructional activities — and by positioning faculty members as obstructionist, unsupportive, or even simply unknowing individuals, librarians may actually further entrench the existing polarities that appear to define their relationships with faculty.

### *5.6. Librarians' perceptions of themselves*

At the heart of this issue, then, one question remains: How do librarians see themselves in relation to the faculty members on campus? Some posters to the listserv clearly perceived themselves to be full-fledged faculty. One librarian, for example, noted: "I consider myself to be a college

professor with the assigned field of library science and/or information studies." This statement is not only interesting for its surface content—the fact that this librarian does not see any difference between **his/her** role and that of faculty members in chemistry, philosophy, or other academic units—but also given the fact that library and information studies itself is governed by professors of LIS. From this standpoint, this poster's claim appears odd—and probably quite incongruous with the perspective of LIS faculty attached to schools that teach future librarians. However, given the postings that appear on **BI-L/ILI-L**, it appears that many librarians appreciate being introduced to students as "Professor." By positioning themselves as faculty, librarians perceive that they are able to gain credibility in the eyes of students. This self-construction is supported by the following posting: "I NEVER use the word "serve" when describing what librarians do. I always say "support" the faculty or the curriculum or student research needs. We facilitate, assist, co-teach, but we do not 'serve' the faculty." While this form of self-positioning is clearly empowering for librarians, particularly when trying to connect with students and gain legitimacy in the role of teacher, this approach also (even if unintentionally) positions faculty as lesser on the meritorious rungs that define their academic work. Faculty members, for example, typically engage in research and service activities—in addition to their teaching responsibilities—and generally hold doctorate degrees in their areas of specialty. To be equated with librarians, who may not do any research, and who typically hold masters-level degrees, many faculty may rebel and further strive to define themselves as very different from the librarians on campus. Such entrenchment into work 'camps,' where individuals position and reposition themselves in light of such unintentional, tacit acts of social positioning, can work against the intended goal of the individual who is attempting to self-identify. In this case, by attempting to gain legitimacy by positioning themselves as equals, librarians run the risk of further distancing those faculty with whom they need to connect.

Quite a number of criticisms were leveled at librarians by their own colleagues; the result is a clear indication of the complexity of librarians' feelings concerning their relationships with faculty. Some posters expressed frustration with their peers who do not wish to expand their activities beyond the "traditional," believing that some librarians are uncomfortable with teaching or with doing something different. According to one poster, librarians are "professional nice people, perceived by many as close to extinction, afraid to say no or offend." Another wrote,

"It's not that the librarians here are non-motivated, but mostly they are overworked and techno-stressed." Other posters expressed regret that some colleagues seem to believe that others think of themselves as "second class citizens" and have a "fear of rejection." One stated, "The real enemy is in our ranks." However, one poster noted, "if we constantly cater to faculty, do things on short notice, etc., then we are complicit in devaluing our own time and efforts." Another stated, "We librarians, along with our colleague professors have failed to instill in our students the joy of real research. We've made the whole process look so stuffy and difficult, or else we've provided so little real help in our one-shot sessions." The limitations of some library instruction approaches were also articulated, with a few posters questioning the effectiveness of instruction provided by many librarians. Others wrote about the limits of librarians' subject knowledge, for instance, as it relates to topic development.

There were several points of debate, demonstrating a lack of consensus among librarians about some of these issues. For example, some posters were more sanguine about their status on campus: "We reference/instruction librarians are all handmaidens to the research process, and the term is neither offensive nor pejorative. I have no problem in considering myself a handmaid, or handmaiden, to the teaching faculty. We perform a service, a necessary service, for them; but we aren't their peers even though we may have faculty rank or status." Debate was also evident about whether librarians should train faculty to train students, or train students directly. Additional discussion focused on whether librarians ought to be teaching "computing" literacy, especially word processing.

## **6. Conclusions**

The berating of faculty for not being intuitively information literate, or for not taking the time to become information literate is a puzzling attitude—particularly given librarians' professed mandate to guide users and provide instruction in the use of information resources. However, this attitude may also hold the key to understanding the limitations—and complexities—of the librarian-faculty relationship debate. Both explicitly, and by implication of the expressed attitudes explored here, librarians on the BI-L/ILI-L list made clear that they generally do not consider faculty members to be their clients—only those faculty members' students. The images of troublesome, arrogant faculty, who have little

understanding of librarians' roles, point to a problem at the core of the relationship issue; that until librarians embrace faculty as clients themselves, deserving of the same level of respect and support afforded undergraduate and graduate students, IL librarians may continue to fight an uphill battle to bring faculty members **onside**. Why do librarians, for example, assume that faculty should necessarily understand what they have not been taught, or necessarily understand how to use information systems that are not user-friendly? Do librarians ask this of other users? Or is there something inherent to the role of "faculty member" that causes librarians to think (and treat these users) differently?

While many librarians clearly do take a proactive role in supporting faculty in their research, and guiding their use of the library, many librarians posting to BI-L/ILI-L expressed a deep level of disrespect for the faculty members with whom they worked. Additionally, there seems to be an irreconcilable dichotomy between librarians who assume that faculty should have the same specialized knowledge that librarians have (concerning library resources, etc.), and those who argue that librarians have specialized knowledge that faculty cannot possibly attain, thereby making librarians indispensable for training students. The "important library facts-of-life that too few around here understand" (as expressed by a number of librarians on the list), are not *de facto* facts-of-life for faculty members. The disbelief expressed by many librarians, who are horrified by what faculty are or may be teaching their students about the library, needs to be matched by self-reflection about the level of expertise any librarian can bring to a discipline-specific classroom. By positioning faculty members and librarians as masters of their own realms, librarians may be able to make more strides in forging respectful (and productive) working relationships.

This approach would also ably serve those librarians who would prefer that faculty "take ownership of the information literacy agenda." For faculty members, who must fulfill their own research, teaching, and service obligations (along with serving the agendas of their departments and institutions), the expectation that they take on an additional role, for which they have no training or expertise, is not only unlikely—it also positions faculty members in a way that is disrespectful of their time and implies that they misunderstand the academic enterprise. If librarians can come to realize that most faculty do indeed view the campus library as a valuable infrastructural resource, perhaps a new construction of librarian-faculty relationships may be possible. In the end, it is the disre-

spect that many librarians seem to have for the concept of "service" that is particularly interesting within a self-defined "service profession." Faculty members "serve" on committees, "serve" students in their teaching, and "serve" their disciplines by contributing to a body of research. For librarians to equate "service" with "servitude" is not only misguided, but it is very possibly detrimental to the development of positive relations with faculty on campus—and ultimately, the students that librarians hope to reach.

A few questions remain: How and why do the attitudes expressed by posters to this listserv develop as they do? What roles do MLIS educators (predominantly professors, themselves) have in modeling or developing librarians' predispositions towards faculty members? One possibility may be that in their roles as students, first as undergraduates, and then as master's students, librarians position faculty members as "other"—as individuals engaged in roles that they cannot see, and which, at times, appear to conflict with what goes on in the classroom. When these students become academic librarians this construction, along with its attendant defensive nature, may be carried over to the professional role. If the foundation for librarian-faculty relationships is one of suspicion, cynicism, and derision, can librarians and faculty ever find the common ground that they so desperately need to find?

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