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The Perceptions Held by East Asian Studies Faculty and Librarians Concerning the Roles Performed by East Asian Collection Librarians

Warrick Hwa-ruay Chin

Dorothy M. Shields

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Librarians staffing East Asian studies collections are uncertain what the faculty perceive as important regarding their roles. The lack of clear role expectations has resulted in confusion. Some of the roles suggested in library literature for academic librarians are research, selecting materials, providing reference and bibliographic services, interpreting the needs of library users to technical services, teaching, and administering the library program. Among these roles, research is generally described as the first and most crucial function directed toward expanding and developing the body of professional knowledge. But are these roles described in library literature considered realistic? How do librarians and teaching faculty involved with East Asian studies feel about their importance?

The purpose of this study was to find out how the perceptions held by East Asian faculty vary from those held by librarians concerning the roles performed by East Asian collection librarians at the five university libraries in the United States with the largest East Asian collections. These five largest East Asian university libraries are: (1) The Harvard-Yenching Library of Harvard University, (2) the East Asiatic Library of the University of California, Berkeley, (3) the East Asian Library of Columbia University, (4) the Asian Library of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and (5) the Far Eastern Library of the University of Chicago.

Two questionnaires were designed. One was sent to librarians. It was intended to survey their perceptions of their own role and how well they perform in it as well as their perceptions of what the East Asian faculty expect of them. The second questionnaire was sent to the East Asian faculty to survey their perceptions of the librarian's role and the quality of their performance.

A total of 185 questionnaires were sent to faculty and librarians of the five selected universities. Of these, forty-eight were sent to East Asian collection librarians and 137 to faculty members. There was a 60 percent return from the librarians and a 61 percent return from the faculty.

Background Data

Background information provided by the respondents indicated that a majority of both librarians and faculty were male. The native language of 51.7 percent of the librarians was Chinese, but for 61.4 percent of the teaching faculty it was English. Other native languages included Japanese, Korean, French, and Dutch.
Although many librarians mentioned reference work as part of their duties, only 6.9 percent claimed public service as their predominant responsibility. Another 37.9 percent had administrative assignments and 55.2 percent were engaged in technical services. Thirty-one percent taught some regular classes in either East Asian subjects or librarianship.

Most of the librarians held only a master of library science degree, but 6.9 percent held doctorates and 31 percent held dual masters degrees. Nearly 70 percent of the librarians had been trained in East Asian Studies and 58.6 percent had published.

In reply to a question regarding racial discrimination in their role as East Asian librarians, only three responded that they had ever experienced any degree of racial discrimination. One said he experienced "subtle discrimination—Difficult to get into the core of action and decision making; and at a disadvantage in competing for limited resources." Another librarian said, "In national conferences—Caucasians are somewhat discriminated against—but most discrimination is related to the size of your library."

As to the teaching faculty, about two-thirds of them claimed to use the East Asian collection between six and sixteen times a month. The other third said they used the collection less than five times a month. This group included six percent of the faculty who used the collection no more than monthly or infrequently because they felt their own personal libraries served most of their needs.

Professional Performance

For the purposes of this study, the professional performance of East Asian librarians was examined in six areas. These areas were scholarly/academic performance, managerial/supervisory capabilities, East Asian language capabilities, mastery of library science techniques, industriousness, and English language capabilities. Respondents indicated their personal perceptions of how well the East Asian library staff of their university was performing as a group in each of these areas by rating them from 1.0 (poor) to 5.0 (excellent).

Capability to use East Asian languages was seen by both librarians and teaching faculty as the greatest strength of the librarians in the study. This could have been anticipated after learning that Chinese was the native language of over fifty percent of those librarians who responded. Librarians and faculty also agreed that, overall, East Asian librarians are doing better than just an acceptable job. The average ratings given by the two groups cluster around 4.0 and could be said to fall into the category of "very good."

In contrast to these perceptions of actual performance were the expected ratings. In all six performance areas, the librarians believed the faculty would give them a lower rating than they felt they deserved. For example, if the librarians rated themselves as performing at over 4.0, they expected the faculty to see them as performing at under 4.0. This was not the case. The average faculty rating, in every performance area, was higher than the average rating expected by the librarians; and in half of the performance areas, the
average faculty rating was higher than the average rating the librarians gave themselves.

Librarians saw their own strengths as being language, industriousness, and mastery of library science techniques. Faculty believed language, scholarly/academic performance, and industriousness were particular strengths and rated mastery of library techniques lowest. The average ratings for each performance area in the three categories are given in Table 1.

**Importance of Librarians' Duties**

Eleven library duties were identified from the literature as being important to the professional growth of the staff and the general functioning of a university library. These duties ranged from the routine checking out of books to creative classroom instruction and research. Theoretically, none of the duties could be eliminated without severe damage to a library's effectiveness.

Table 1. Quality of professional library performance as expressed by mean values on a scale from 1.00 to 5.00

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance area</th>
<th>Librarians' self-ratings</th>
<th>Librarians' perceptions of faculty ratings</th>
<th>Actual faculty ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Asian Languages Capabilities</td>
<td>(1) 4.38</td>
<td>(1) 3.76</td>
<td>(1) 4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industriousness</td>
<td>(2) 4.27</td>
<td>(2) 3.72</td>
<td>(3) 3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery of Library Science Techniques</td>
<td>(3) 4.13</td>
<td>(3) 3.66</td>
<td>(6) 3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Capabilities</td>
<td>(4) 3.82</td>
<td>(4) 3.21</td>
<td>(4) 3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly/academic Performance</td>
<td>(5) 3.55</td>
<td>(6) 3.10</td>
<td>(2) 3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/supervisory Capabilities</td>
<td>(6) 3.45</td>
<td>(4) 3.21</td>
<td>(5) 3.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Arabic numerals within the parentheses represent the rank within the column.

East Asian teaching faculty and librarians were asked to rate the importance of these duties on a scale of 1.0 (not important) to 5.0 (most important). The
Librarians were also asked to guess how the faculty would rate the importance of the duties.

There was agreement between faculty and librarians that evaluating weaknesses in the collection and helping students find information were of great importance, and that regular classroom instruction was the least important duty listed. Differences of opinion were also apparent. Librarians see themselves as resource people and not just those who make sure that information is on the shelf. They would like to act as scholarly colleagues to a greater degree than the teaching faculty believe is needed.

While the librarians believed the faculty would place too little importance on any of the duties of a librarian, in six of the eleven cases, the faculty rated the duties involved as having more importance than did the librarians. It should be noted, however, that the duties which the faculty rated more highly than did the librarians were those which relied directly on training in library skills. In addition, the four duties which the faculty rated below 3.0 on a five-point scale dealt with the librarians acting as scholarly colleagues, instructors, and researchers. Acting as a resource person was barely above the 3.0 rating. These data are provided on Table 2.

The East Asian teaching faculty who responded to this study apparently do not picture the role of librarians as being creative intellectually. On the other hand, the East Asian collection librarians ranked the importance of instruction and research in the lower half of the duties rated. Yet participation in creatively intellectual activity could be the key to professional growth of individual librarians and strengthening the profession.

Research, particularly, is seen in this light. Research was described in library literature as being of crucial importance in expanding and developing the body of professional knowledge and essential for librarianship to develop and substantiate its claim to professionalism.

In fact,

a great increase in creative and sound research that will build the knowledge base for librarianship is needed, and research should be recognized by all librarians as a professional function for which paid time must be provided.¹

Remember, however, that not only did the teaching faculty see research as an unimportant activity for librarians, but librarians themselves rated it ninth of eleven activities, with only routine procedures and regular classroom instruction less important.

Perceived as least important by both groups was engaging in regular classroom instruction. The librarians in this survey would undoubtedly agree with the admonition of Kenneth W. Humphreys who cautioned subject specialists not to give the impression they are attempting to usurp the function of an academic staff.²
Table 2. Mean values in the area of professional duties' importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance area</th>
<th>Librarians' self-ratings</th>
<th>Librarians' perceptions of faculty ratings</th>
<th>Actual faculty ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate weaknesses in the collection</td>
<td>(1) 4.14</td>
<td>(1) 3.66</td>
<td>(1) 4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act as a resource person</td>
<td>(2) 3.86</td>
<td>(3) 3.24</td>
<td>(7) 3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students find information</td>
<td>(3) 3.82</td>
<td>(2) 3.62</td>
<td>(2) 4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage personnel/activities of the library</td>
<td>(4) 3.72</td>
<td>(4) 3.14</td>
<td>(5) 3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform the technical routines</td>
<td>(5) 3.66</td>
<td>(6) 3.00</td>
<td>(4) 4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act as a scholarly colleague</td>
<td>(6) 3.31</td>
<td>(9) 2.45</td>
<td>(9) 2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in library orientation instruction</td>
<td>(7) 3.24</td>
<td>(8) 2.59</td>
<td>(8) 2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalog materials</td>
<td>(7) 3.24</td>
<td>(5) 3.07</td>
<td>(3) 4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research works</td>
<td>(9) 3.17</td>
<td>(7) 2.66</td>
<td>(10) 2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check out books, shelve books, etc.</td>
<td>(10) 2.48</td>
<td>(10) 2.41</td>
<td>(6) 3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in regular classroom instruction</td>
<td>(11) 2.10</td>
<td>(11) 1.76</td>
<td>(11) 1.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Arabic numerals within the parentheses represent the rank within the column.

Relationship of Individual Background Data to Perceptions

Various factors in the backgrounds of the responding librarians related significantly to the perceptions they held. Some faculty perceptions were related to the frequency with which they used the collection.

Several factors were tied to how well librarians believed they were performing. Librarians with formal education in East Asian programs, those who taught some regular classes, and those who had produced research publications expressed
belief in a significantly higher degree of scholarly performance by the East Asian librarians in their universities than did other librarians. In addition, the greater the number of research publications they had produced, the higher was their perception of scholarly performance.

Teaching classes was found to be related to how librarians viewed their own language capabilities. Librarians who taught some classes perceived the East Asian language capabilities of librarians to be lower than did those who do not teach.

Length of working experience was also significant in some perceptions. Librarians who had worked more than ten years rated the industriousness and East Asian language capabilities of librarians significantly higher than did those who had worked fewer years.

The educational background and teaching assignments of librarians had a relationship to the importance they placed on various duties. Librarians with doctorates were involved with research and classroom instruction and believed these to be the most important duties in East Asian librarianship. Librarians who taught regularly, had more than ten years of working experience, and had never been trained in any East Asian program also perceived instruction as an important duty. Other librarians rated these duties significantly lower. Those who did not teach gave a significantly higher importance to being a special foreign language resource person.

In examining the perceptions of faculty members, we found that the frequency with which they used East Asian materials had some relationship to their attitudes. The more often faculty used collection materials, the higher they rated the library staff's scholarly performance, East Asian language capabilities, and industriousness, and the more they considered it important to evaluate weaknesses in the collection and attempt to rectify them.

Summary

This study indicates that East Asian collection librarians are perceived as doing a very good job. Obvious strengths are Asian language capabilities and industriousness. Librarians see themselves as more capable in use of library skills, but place somewhat less importance on duties directly tied to the operation of those skills than do the faculty. Librarians want to act as resource people but are not particularly seen in that light by the faculty. The top priority expressed by both groups was the development of a strong collection.

Neither group places emphasis on activities related to instruction or research for librarians, although faculty rate these of lower importance than do librarians. The faculty attitude toward research by librarians may have been expressed by one respondent who said, "Every librarian feels he/she really should be a researcher, that library work lacks glamour. Yet their training is for library work, not research." Library literature, however, suggests a vital role for research in the development of librarianship as a profession. The faculty responding to this study reject that role. Librarians who are involved in instruction and research displayed significantly different attitudes from other librarians about both professional performance and duties.
Recommendations

The importance of establishing and maintaining a strong library collection has been emphasized as the first priority for East Asian Collection librarians. Until a high degree of satisfaction is expressed in this area, there will be little encouragement to move into more intellectually creative activities.

If librarians will be more aggressive in getting the faculty to know and use the collection and do a better job of articulating their identity, their scholarly image will improve.

A background in East Asian studies should be encouraged since this was related to the librarians' perceptions of their own scholarly performance.

Subject specialist librarians should

perform the instructional function in coordination with academic departments by the development of formal courses of instruction in the bibliographical and research resources of a specific discipline. 3

In this way any feelings of competition can be avoided and librarians can play a vital but supportive role as instructors.

Finally, the importance of the role of research in librarianship needs support. Library schools must take the lead here. New librarians entering the field should not only have some acquaintance with research already done, but should be able to evaluate its adequacy and value to their own situations. In addition they should have training which will enable them to use research techniques to find answers to many of their library problems. Librarians must first see this as an important part of their role before others will accept a broader view of librarianship.

Notes


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