

## Promotional avenues for university librarians in Sri Lanka

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The paper identifies the existing promotional avenues for university librarians in Sri Lanka, the basic requirements needed for these avenues, the obstacles and obstacle mitigating strategies. The research design of the study comprised of three steps, viz., literature analysis, survey based on telephonic interviews, and finally, the opinion modeling. It was found that the major problems that hinder career advancement prospects among librarians are a combination of professional duties with research and publication requirements, inadequate opportunities to reach the rank of librarian and lack of higher educational qualification requirements.

### Introduction

According to Whyte<sup>1</sup> says, "Librarianship is an academic discipline but at present it occupies a basement in the house of intellect. It will climb upstairs when it can present a more firmly based tradition of scholarship, more certain and significant research findings, a less didactic approach to its subject matter". This statement clearly explicates the significance of the librarianship as other professions in the world. In general, most of the university librarians around the world hold faculty status which is not weaker than the status of teaching counterparts in their universities. Approximately half of all librarians currently employed by the colleges and universities in the United States possess "faculty status". Such librarians have been accorded a status equivalent to teaching faculty in terms of academic autonomy, rights and responsibilities. The faculty status is built on a series of logically connected

assumptions such as, (1) that teaching faculty have certain roles and benefits, (2) that administrators or other college staff do not have these roles and benefits, and (3) that librarians who are not considered faculty will be considered administrators or staff and thus will not have these roles or benefits. This paper explores the Sri Lankan situation with the academic status and the promotional avenues available to librarians in the universities in Sri Lanka.

### Contextual setting

The existing library staff in Sri Lankan universities are categorised into four broad categories; namely academic staff, administrative staff, clerical and allied grades and minor grade workers. In accordance with the University Act in 1978<sup>2</sup>, librarians are academic members of the university. The academic positions available to librarians in the Sri Lankan University system are given in Table 1.

Table 1—Designations in the library with parallel teaching staff in the faculty

Academic staff in the library	Academic staff in the teaching faculty
Assistant Librarian (Probationary)	Lecturer (Probationary)
Assistant Librarian	Lecturer
Senior Assistant Librarian (Grade II)	Senior Lecturer (Grade II)
Senior Assistant Librarian (Grade I)	Senior Lecturer (Grade I)
Deputy Librarian	Associate Professor
Librarian (Only one post)	Professor

The position of the librarian is that of a principal officer in the libraries of a university and he or she enjoys the status of a Professor and is entitled for the salary scale of a Professor<sup>3</sup>. According to the Universities Act, no 16 of 1978, "the librarian of a university shall be appointed by the Council upon the recommendation of a selection committee, the comparison of which shall be prescribed by ordinance. She/he shall be a full time officer of that university and shall exercise, perform and discharge such powers, duties and functions as may be conferred or imposed on or assigned to her/him by this Act or by any appropriate instrument<sup>4</sup>". The librarian shall, subject to the direction and control of the Vice-Chancellor, be responsible for the administration of the library or libraries of the university.

However, the librarian is not a member of the highest executive body, the governing authority, which is the council of the university. The council of a university, exercises the powers, performs and discharges the duties and functions conferred or imposed on, or assigned to the university. Although the librarian is not a member of the council, he or she is a member of the University Senate. The University Senate is the highest academic authority, which has control and general direction of instruction, education, research and examinations in the university<sup>5</sup>. The advantage of being a member of Senate for the librarian is that, she/he keeps herself/himself in touch with all academic developments, because it is in the light of such developments that she/he must necessarily plan and operate the university's library facilities and the other appropriate information services.

The other employees in the academic staff of the library are deputy librarians, senior assistant librarians and assistant librarians. In the capacity of senior assistant librarians and assistant librarians, they are responsible for the day-to-day academic and professional work/functions of the library. The university library also has a few of administrative officers, who are assistant registrars and/or senior assistant registrars (library services), those who are responsible for general administration work of the library/clerical and allied grades in the library are staff assistants, library assistants and computer application assistants, who are theoretically considered as para-professionals in the university library system. The third category is the non-

professionals who are minor grades workers such as labourers, library attendants, book binders etc. They are particularly answerable to routine library housekeeping activities and report to the academic/administrative staff in the library.

### Literature review

Ochai<sup>6</sup> reported that a circular issued by National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria in 1993 directed all federal universities in the country to accord academic status to librarians in appointment and promotion. Thus, the librarians in the universities are now required to publish scholarly work for their promotion, in the same way as their counterparts in the teaching faculty. However, until recently, there was no requirement to have a PhD for librarians to get promotion except a first degree in any field and a master's degree in librarianship, as well as a good record of publication. This has been changed now and the librarians who possess PhDs are given more marks for their promotion or even be offered appointment in senior positions.

Most librarians in the United States of America and Canada must have one or two-year masters degree in library and information science from an accredited university by the American Library Association (ALA). The librarians in United Kingdom must have a three or four-year bachelor's degree in library and information sciences and master's degrees in librarianship or relevant field which have been accredited by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and/or the Society of Archivists. The initial step to be an academic Librarian in Germany is a PhD in a subject field, followed by additional training in librarianship<sup>7</sup>. In Ghana, Kadiri<sup>8</sup> articulates that the librarians those who need academic status, must have a good record of research and publications.

In United States of America, some universities and colleges grant emeritus status for librarians as in the academia. The designation of emeritus which is a status is granted to those faculty or librarians whose careers at colleges/universities have been marked by distinguished, substantive achievement. Emeritus status is one of honour and recognition for librarians though it provides no remuneration or other tangible reward. The criteria for the emeritus status of the Westfield State College in the United States are as follows:

1. Librarians must have retired from full-time service and must not be employed as a member of the regular faculty or administration of any other school, college, or university.
2. Librarians must have achieved tenure during their employment and have served in a full-time capacity for a minimum of ten years.
3. Librarians must have demonstrated substantive, sustained achievement in their careers in one or more of the following areas: teaching, advising, scholarship, and professional service to the College, the community and the discipline. Self nominations must also include a letter of recommendation.

Another development in the status of Nigerian academic librarians is introduction of non-tenure appointment for university librarians. Before the promulgation of the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Decree of 1993, university librarians in Nigeria enjoyed tenured appointment which says the university librarian can remain on the job until the retirement age of 65<sup>9</sup>. The new decree made the position non-tenure by stipulating that university librarians are to be appointed only for five years in the first instance and may be re-appointed for another consecutive term on the discretion of university council.

### **The problem**

Currently, there is an emerging discussion about gray areas and the scarcity of the existing promotional avenues of university librarians in Sri Lanka. A number of academic staff members in university libraries point out and stipulate the University Librarians Association of Sri Lanka (ULA) to contemplate the prevailing recruitment procedures and promotional avenues. Accordingly, the major issue is that there are no opportunities for deputy librarians in the university system to get promoted to the post of librarians on the basis of merit promotion though their teaching counterparts have the opportunity to be promoted to professorial jobs such as professor and senior professor on merit basis. Post of librarian in a university is only one post and therefore only one person can hold the post for a given period of time that is predominantly until his/her retirement at age 65 or his or her

resignation/demise. Thus, the other librarians in the library are being stagnated in the post of deputy librarian even if they have the same or more qualifications than the appointed university librarian. The study extended the current requirement by empirically investigating the perceptions of academic staff in the library to propose a good solution for the dilemma. Hence, this dilemma among the librarians in the Sri Lankan university system guided the following identification of the research objectives of the study.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To identify the structure of promotional avenues of staff in Sri Lankan university libraries;
- To identify the basic requirements needed for these avenues;
- To investigate the obstacles faced by librarians in climbing the career ladder; and
- To propose strategies that could be adopted to mitigate the obstacles.

### **Methodology**

The design of the research study basically comprised of the three steps. Firstly, the existing literature in the field was reviewed to identify the existing promotional avenues and required qualifications, etc. The second step involved a telephonic survey which covered three main areas in the study viz., “major problems hinder career advancement prospects”, “combination of professional duties with research and publication requirements” and “opportunities to reach the rank of librarian”. Two librarians, five senior assistant librarians and three assistant librarians in university libraries in Sri Lanka were randomly contacted through telephone to interview them for finding their opinion regarding the existing promotional avenues of university librarians. Each session was an in-depth discussion which lasted 20 minutes. Based upon the findings of the survey, the researcher critically developed his own ideas towards the key elements found from the findings. In the third step, these ideas were modelled to present a solution to the identified problems in integrating the prevailing literature in the field.

## Findings

### Promotional avenues

A graduate who joins to the academic staff of the university library begins the career as a probationary assistant librarian, which is equivalent to probationary lecturer in the teaching faculty. The usual qualification for this post is almost equivalent to the probationary lecturer, i.e., first or second class upper division in a special degree. If not, she/he should have at least a special or general bachelors' degree with a postgraduate diploma or degree in library and information science with at least three years experience in library work in a recognized university library.

According to the currently valid circular numbered 653 dated 14<sup>th</sup> November 1995 issued by the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka (UGC), "An assistant librarian (probationary) shall be confirmed in the post on fulfilling the following requirements:

1. Three years of satisfactory service as an assistant librarian (probationary) in the permanent cadre, and
2. A relevant postgraduate qualification obtained after a full time course of study of at least one academic year or an equivalent part-time course of study."<sup>10</sup>

However, it was emphasized that the postgraduate qualifications referred to in (b) above could be a masters' degree, diploma or equivalent; such qualifications should not have already been recognized as a qualification for initial recruitment as assistant librarian (probationary).

The senior assistant librarian (grade II) is the next career grade and the salary scale is on par with the senior lecturer (grade II). According to the current scheme of recruitment/ promotion of the senior assistant librarian (grade II), an assistant librarian may be considered for promotion if she/he possesses postgraduate diploma in librarianship at the university of London or equivalent or higher qualifications in the same field with at least five years experience in the post of assistant librarian including the time devoted to acquire the postgraduate qualifications in library science.

The next grade is the senior assistant librarian (grade I) and the candidates should have the academic qualifications specified for the senior assistant librarian (grade II) and he/she should have completed at least six years in the grade of senior assistant librarian (grade II). In addition, the applicant must submit a self-assessment setting out the contribution that she/he has made since she/he became the senior assistant librarian (grade II) in the field of library work, library related research activities, teaching library science, other academic and professional work and other university related activities. A panel appointed by the senate consisting the librarian and two members of the senate will evaluate the self-assessment and make a recommendation to the council in relation to the promotion of the applicant.

### Major problems that hinder career advancement prospects

The findings noted the major problems that hinder career advancement prospects among librarians in the universities in Sri Lanka. They are

1. The combination of professional duties with research and publication requirements
2. Inadequate opportunities to reach the rank of librarian, and
3. Lack of higher educational qualifications requirements.

### Combination of professional duties with research and publication requirements

According to the respondents, the combination of professional duties with rigor of academic work such as carrying out research studies and publishing articles, books etc., was the greatest obstacle to career advancement. They feel that the librarians should not be expected to carry out research studies, write and publish in the same manner as their teaching counterparts. The logic behind the idea is that they are performing professional work rather than teaching in the university system as the teaching staff in the university. Thus, they pointed out that they do not have adequate time and facilities to carry out research and teaching in the higher education system whilst performing their professional work. Even if their teaching counterparts of the university do not have to spend eight hours a day from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. for

teaching and other academic work, the librarians should be in the library in spending time in administrating the library, answering and mediating to the queries coming from the wider user community which limits the academic autonomy of the librarians to a certain extent. They further noted that if there are such requirements for possible promotions to higher positions in the library, the marking scheme should merely be based upon the professional activities that they currently perform in the university library rather than emphasising the academic work thoroughly.

**Inadequate opportunities to reach the rank of librarian**

All respondents agreed that the rank of librarian is purely an academic position that is highly competitive. According to the Universities Act number 16 in Sri Lanka, only one person can occupy the rank of librarian in a particular university library at a time. The respondents clearly articulated that with dismay that many qualified librarians who could have reached their professional pinnacle stagnate at the rank of deputy librarian. The respondents compared their fate with teaching counterparts whereby those who have attained the rank of associate professor could be promoted to the post of professor and then to the senior professor but there was no time frame for one to occupy such a position or rank. The assistant librarians, senior assistant librarians, deputy librarians and the librarian are classified by the universities Act as teachers in the university<sup>11</sup>. Even though they are deemed to be teachers of the university, all deputy librarians with adequate qualifications and experience do not have satisfactory avenues to be promoted to the

librarian’s post within the university system on merit basis, if the post of librarian is already filled. Also there is no position in the library which is equivalent to the post of senior professor. This is clearly indicated in the Table 2.

**Strategies adoptable to mitigate these obstacles**

The strategies suggested here are purely personal views of the author and they were constructed based upon the existing universities Act implemented in 1978 and the discussion had with the librarians and senior assistant librarians.

**Feasible strategies for publication requirements**

Respondents of the study showed that there is an unnecessary emphasis on publication requirements at the expense of professional duties discharged and task accomplished by librarians in Sri Lankan universities. Over-emphasis on research and publication requirement could affect the professional duties and the quality of services rendered to the users, they argued. Campbell<sup>12</sup> complained that there was an over emphasis on research and publication which will affect the quality of service. He argued that the most important thing is to devote to quality library service at all times and research and publications. On the contrary, Issac<sup>13</sup> argued that the services would not deteriorate if librarians involved themselves in publishing. He emphasised that this would enhance library services and librarians’ position within the university community. Therefore, it can be noted that there are mixed reactions from different researchers in

Table 2—Comparison of career advancement of librarians with their teaching counterparts

Academic staff in the library	Academic staff in the teaching faculty
Assistant Librarian	Lecturer
Senior Assistant Librarian (Grade II)	Senior Lecturer (Grade II)
Senior Assistant Librarian (Grade I)	Senior Lecturer (Grade I)
Deputy Librarian	Associate Professor
----- STAGNATION -----	
Librarian (only one post)	Professor
NO POST IN THE LIBRARY-----	Senior Professor

relation to the research and publication requirements for promotions. When evaluating the Sri Lankan scenario, the librarians are classified under teachers by the university act and none of the other legal document including UGC circulars has mentioned that the librarians are professional staff. Thus, the question here is whether university librarians are professionals or academics. As suggested by the respondents of the survey, librarians are professionals. If they are professionals, do they entitle to receive the academic status which has not been granted to some other professionals in the university system vis-à-vis doctors, engineers etc. Because of this academic status, all librarians in the university system are being paid an academic allowance of 25 percent of the basic salary. Therefore, it symbolises a significant problem to be further investigated. However, in considering the legitimacy of the librarian posts in the Sri Lankan university system, they are absolutely academic staff members in the academia. Thus, it seems to be that the librarians are distinct group of community, who are granted academic status from the universities Act in 1978 and they are the academics of the university system. Hence, it is important in taking up the opportunity of becoming partners for teaching or mediating information literacy within the university education system while performing professional task too in the university library.

The respondents of the survey pointed out, since, they are professionals who perform professional task, the same teaching, research and publication requirements should not be applied in the promotional scheme. However, though they express that they are professionals who perform professional work, it has not been validated by any legal document issued by University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka that they are professionals. However, the university act clearly says that the librarians are deemed to be teachers.

Thus, the librarians can not be a distinct category and it is undoubtedly commonsensical that the promotional scheme issued for teaching staff should be adopted for the promotion of librarians too. If some criteria are exhaustive with respect to the genuine promotional requirements of librarians, it should be carefully amended enabling the librarians to score the marking scheme with their teaching, research and professional work.

**Feasible strategies to overcome the stagnation**

The issues raised by the respondents in relation to the inadequacy of prevailing promotional scheme to reach to the higher rank of librarian in the university, is a critical case which have not been so far addressed by any authority. But, this is a common predicament in some countries which have granted academic status to librarians. They also do not concede adequate promotional avenues to promising upcoming younger professionals to climb the ladder. Some librarians work hard and attain this enviable career position in every university system. This would be a great point if somebody needs to be a professor in the university system. If the marking scheme for the promotion of professors can be scored by librarians, they must also have the chance/opportunity to be a professor of librarianship or professor of library science. Thus, it would not be questioned by any teaching counterparts since the librarians too have the qualifications needed for the professorship. This would be a difficult task to librarians to score the marks from the existing professorial marking scheme, but if somebody can simply reach the eligibility, no restrictions should be placed before the promotions.

The next option is while maintaining the post of librarian in the university as the chair who represents the statutory committees of the university, others can

Table 3—Proposed new titles for librarians in the university system

Existing title	Title of the teaching counterparts	Proposed title
Assistant Librarian	Lecturer	Librarian
Senior Assistant Librarian (Grade II)	Senior Lecturer (Grade II)	Senior Librarian (Grade II)
Senior Assistant Librarian (Grade I)	Senior Lecturer (Grade I)	Senior Librarian (Grade I)
Deputy Librarian	Associate Professor	Associate Professor Librarian
Librarian	Professor	Librarian (Chair) and/or Professor Librarian
	Senior Professor	Senior Professor Librarian

be promoted to the same status. However, they should not be entitled to be the chair of the library. This will bring an improved image of the librarians as academics and raise their standing among all employees of the university community. Therefore, it is necessary to amend the existing titles in the library and modify the exiting recruitment and promotional criteria. The proposed titles are indicated in the Table 3.

This will not affect the existing posts of librarian and, the deputy librarians would not also be stagnated in the post as they have the opportunities to become professor librarians.

#### **Lack of higher educational requirements**

The trend today is that the senior staffs of the university libraries are library school trained. But after their formal training, their knowledge has to be updated by giving them opportunities to participate in such activities as study tours, short term courses, conferences and workshops in their specialized fields. In service training of staff is another important aspect of staff development in university libraries and it is often a programme for systematic preparation of a librarian particularly the junior cadre for effective performance in the library. This has usually been linked with the initial period of employment<sup>14</sup>.

The university authorities can consider granting assistant librarians to have a master's degree in addition to the professional/academic qualifications for the post of assistant librarians prescribed by the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka. A higher academic qualification in library and information science such as PhD is perhaps not required for librarians as much as it is essential for their teaching colleagues. Thus, when recruiting librarians to the university system, high priority should be given to the candidates, who have additional subject specialisation for the reason that they can contribute to a particular discipline more effectively than the LIS professionals who have only a LIS degree. Then they should pursue PhD in LIS after they have a dual degree vis. LIS and another subject at the time of appointment.

The academic qualifications for the appointment of probationary lecturers and assistant librarians (probationary) are the same. However, in the case of lecturers, they should additionally have at least one year of experience in teaching/research/professional work/postgraduate studies in the relevant discipline.

This requirement should be applied for librarians also. However the problem is that most of the graduates who prefer to be engaged in the field of librarianship do not have teaching or professional experience. Thus, they can be initially recruited as temporary Assistant Librarian and upon completion of one year period of time, they can be promoted to the Assistant Librarian (probationary) as a mitigating technique for the obstacle.

Taking into consideration the Ethiopian libraries, Clow as cited in Nanayakkara<sup>15</sup> says that they do not have a major problem with staff recruitment, except for a possible future shortage of seniors as many now approach retirement. Relation is less trouble free, among professionals there is some attrition, because of low morale arising from their low status within university, where they are not considered fully "academic", and get no sabbaticals or other "academic" perks. He further explains that some of the recently appointed young staff is actively seeking alternative jobs, including relatively appointed well-paid computer type or consultancy jobs. This is much unlike the Sri Lankan situation as they have been granted academic status by the statute of Higher Education Act.

However, according to a piece of research carried out by Nanayakkara<sup>16</sup>, the librarians are extremely dissatisfied with their achievements and opportunities for advancement as a result of lack of opportunities of research and the traditional system of promotions and so forth.

#### **Other problems**

##### **Restoration of library representation in the faculty**

According to the Universities Act 1978, Section 48(1) (b), the librarian or his nominee is a member of each faculty of a university. This provision resulted in greatly improving the faculty-library collaboration and building up library resources in universities with a high degree of cooperation from the faculties. However, the 1985 amendments to the University Act removed this important provision. Later, suitable changes to the Universities Act were made, to counteract the ill effects of the 1985 amendments except for the library's representation in the faculty board. It would be desirable to re-establish the librarian or his nominee as a member of the Faculty Board.

### Librarian's representation in the University Council

Librarian is the only officer in the university who is not represented in the university council in Sri Lankan universities. However, all members in the council including vice-chancellor and dean of faculties are appointed for a specific period of time. If the librarian is made member of the council, she/he cannot be appointed for a specific period, since she/he holds office until she/he resigns or retires. If this matter creates any statutory difficulty, she/he can be made a member of the council for 3 years period of time. She/he may also be re-appointed for the next terms without voting rights, if the continuous appointment is the main issue under consideration.

### Discussion

Although the status and fringe benefits gained by the librarians are similar to the teaching staff in the university, the promotional requirements are comparatively low. Though the associate professors and professors are required to collect the marks as per the marking scheme, deputy librarians and librarian do not have a proper marking scheme for their promotions. But, UGC has now drafted a very comprehensive recruitment and promotional procedure and a marking scheme, which will be activated in 2013. However, most of the lecturers up to senior lecturer (grade I) have a rather lenient procedure to get promoted to higher posts but associate professor and professor have very comprehensive and rigorous procedure and marking scheme for the promotions. The assistant and senior assistant librarians also use the same criteria for promotions, which does not demand a large number of research and publications. But, it is apparent that the very old and prestigious universities in Sri Lanka take into consideration a very good record of research and publications of their library academics when they are to be promoted to a higher grade. If they are unable to produce adequate number of papers, she/he is disqualified for the post by the promotion committee appointed by the Senate of the university. However, this is mostly unlike the other universities, which are located far from the Colombo, when they specially fill the post of Librarian. Even if all the university libraries must employ the same promotional criteria, some remotely located universities are little bit compassionate to the research and publication requirement for promotions as they

have fewer resources to conduct research compared to Colombo and suburbs.

### Conclusion

The academic status of the university librarians in Sri Lanka has contributed well to the development of the profession and thus the librarians cannot simply escape the requirements needed for the promotions as their teaching counterparts have. However, the problem is that they do not have the same kind of promotional avenues as available in their teaching colleagues. Since there is only one librarian in the university, others would have to be stagnated in the post of deputy librarian which should be addressed at policy level enabling the librarians to be promoted to similar posts as their counterparts. The professional status, credibility, respect, and acceptance of the teaching community in the universities are higher compared to the same library counterparts as the teaching faculty members are far more successful at promoting their academic credentials. Thus, the librarians should also look for opportunities to market their qualifications, publications and abilities and then it would be very much easy to gain the same benefits as the teaching counterparts now receive. Also, more avenues need to be created to be promoted to higher level such as "professor librarian", "senior professor librarian" etc., which would minimize the level of frustration and stagnation of the librarians.

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