

# **Towards Achieving Work-Life Balance: The Librarian Context<sup>1</sup>**

Joint Administration-Massachusetts Society of Professors Work-Life Committee Report

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## **Introduction**

The Joint Administration-MSP Work-Life committee designed and administered a campus-wide survey and led focus group luncheons to shed light on the ways in which faculty and librarians at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst negotiate the boundaries between work and life. This report focuses on the specifics of balancing work and life in the librarian context. Because of the place-based nature of librarian work, working conditions for librarians depart sharply from the working conditions of faculty, generating a different set of constraints and suggested supports for maintaining work-life balance.

## **Major findings from this report include:**

- UMass-Amherst librarians enjoy their jobs and their relationships with one another. Several excellent supports already exist for balancing work and life: sabbaticals, parental leave, and the ability to reduce work hours. However, librarians report a lack of adequate coverage, which impairs their ability to take breaks or extended leaves. Librarians perceive that leaves are less likely to be requested or approved because the lack of coverage intensifies work for remaining librarians. Thus, the supports in place to facilitate work-life balance and the pursuit of professional development are underutilized.
- In addition, Librarians note increased job duties make it harder to complete work tasks; working hours bleed into non-work hours as librarians have to work from home to get the job done.
- Because it is a service-based job, librarians are required to be onsite, creating the feeling of always being "on call" which plays out at two levels. First, some librarians have a limited ability to leave their workstations during the workday. Second, because the library operates nearly every day of the year, librarians are rooted in Amherst over traditional faculty breaks.
- Amid increasing job duties, librarians do not have time to pursue professional development. This professional development time-crunch occurs alongside a

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<sup>1</sup> We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable assistance of numerous librarians, who willingly gave their time before, during, and after the study. And thanks to Brian Baldi and Lori Reardon for their work on this project, which was funded by the Office of Faculty Development's Mellon Mutual Mentoring fund, the UMass Provost's Office, and the Massachusetts Society of Professors.

perceived request from library administration for increased publications and conference attendance.

- There is lack of uniformity in the application of policies and supports designed to facilitate work-life balance. For example, accommodations for lactation supports or parental leave are negotiated on a case-by-case basis, generating variations in the level of support provided to librarians.
- Late career librarians need more institutional support in navigating requests for anomaly increases and transitioning from full to part-time employment.

### **Industry Context: Trends in the Research Library Profession**

The UMass-Amherst libraries are situated in a professional field with trends toward increasing workloads and increasing hours. University libraries are service based organizations which historically required librarians on-site to answer patron questions or to manage material collections. Over the last thirty years new technologies have radically changed the nature and intensity of librarian work (Buttler and Rajinder, 1998; Poole and Denny, 2001; Simmons-Welburn, 2000). Academic librarians are also spending more time providing library services outside the library: in classrooms, visiting academic departments, etc. (Aamot and Hiller, 2004).

During the same time period, Steel and Walter (2001) also find a trend toward lengthening library hours of operation for Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member libraries. Eighty-three percent of the ARL libraries surveyed reported extending library hours, either by increasing the number of days they operate twenty-four hours, opening on more holidays, or extending weekend and evening hours.<sup>2</sup> But while academic libraries are extending their hours of operation, Aamot and Hiller (2004) report that academic libraries saw a decline in the number of people who physically come to the library, which the authors credit to the increase use of electronic resources. This shift toward electronic resources, however, has not decreased the need for patron assistance, but rather shifted, and in some ways increased, user demands. UMass-Amherst libraries have seen this increase in the use of electronic resources, but have also experienced a dramatic increase in the number of patrons visiting the library, a trend which will be discussed in detail.

The shift toward electronic content changes the services provided by librarians on multiple fronts. In their review of the literature on technological change in academic libraries, Poole and Denny (2001, p. 505) find that as collections transition to online content, patron expectations increase; “the conveniences of unmediated searching is assumed; yet patrons also insist on immediate personal assistance in navigating complex databases and expect instant online satisfaction from the push of a button.” Patrons expect instant service and expect librarians to assist with technical troubleshooting. Aamot and Hiller (2004) add that the increasing number of information sources available at research libraries means that patrons find the library “information

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<sup>2</sup> 63 of the 121 ARL member libraries responded to this survey, a 52% response rate.

environment” harder to navigate, making contact with librarians all the more important. Also, librarians find themselves as the intermediary between database vendors and database users. Vendors can change the database interface or format quickly, leaving librarians in a race to learn the changes ahead of patron queries (Poole and Denny 2001). In addition to changing the expectations and needs of patrons and the roles of service librarians, technology also provides new avenues for librarian and patron correspondence. Email and instant messaging open the door for contact that does not require either party to be physically located at the library (Foley, 2002), although the literature suggest few research libraries have developed polices to build on this off-site potential for librarians.

The changes noted above shift the experience of the librarian profession. Through a review of library job postings across time, Lynch and Smith (2001) and Simmons-Welburn (2000) find an increased emphasis on strong communication skills, the ability to work in teams, flexibility, and an increase in providing instructional services. The transition to electronic cataloging services has also led to an increase in cross-training as cataloguers, and other technical staff who have been partially replaced by technology, are trained to work in public service areas (Buttlar and Rajinder, 1998). And for both service and technical librarians, keeping pace with changing technologies requires frequent retraining, adding to workloads (Poole and Denny, 2001).

Technology created many changes both in how patrons interface with library resources and the way librarians interface with patrons. The first changes the role of librarians, increasing the instructive and troubleshooting services provided and increases user expectation for instant assistance while the latter allows librarians and patrons to interact in ways that do not always require either the librarian or the patron to physically be at the library. Technological changes in non-services areas have created an increase in cross-training for technical librarians, and keeping pace with technological changes requires increases training for librarians as a whole. Finally, these changes occur alongside a simultaneous trend in research libraries to extend hours; librarians working at research libraries are thus increasingly asked to do more while working more hours outside the traditional nine-to-five.

### **Understanding the UMass Context**

The industry trends toward providing librarian services outside the library setting and an increase in the provision of technical and instructional services are mirrored at UMass-Amherst libraries. Librarians teach classes, provide trainings in using new educational technologies, and bring their expertise directly to departments by holding office hours in the departments themselves. In addition to these industry wide shifts, the main branch library at UMass-Amherst, the W. E. B. Du Bois library, has changed dramatically. The introduction of the Learning Commons in the fall of 2005 has transformed the library into a space for multi-media learning, providing students with personal and group work stations and bringing together library services, technical services, and tutoring and writing supports all in the lower level of the library. With seating for up to four hundred

patrons, and two hundred multi-media work stations, the Learning commons provides a dynamic workspace and dramatically increased the number of library users.<sup>3</sup>

On the whole, librarians express excitement about the reinvigorated role of the main library and the increasing focus on providing instructional services both in the library and on campus, but librarians also expressed dissatisfaction with a number of working conditions. Although technological advances have made it possible for librarians to perform a portion of their duties outside the library, the bulk of work at UMass-Amherst libraries is still place-based, revolving around the physical location of the libraries, creating a set of work-life issues particular to librarians. Because of the rooted nature of the job, librarians report feeling “on-call.” This plays out on two levels; librarians have very little flexibility in the workday, and as an amenity for students who are unable to leave campus during holidays or breaks, the library is nearly always open. While this is a useful service for the campus community, it leaves librarians rooted in place over campus breaks and holidays. In these respects, librarian day-to-day conditions are more akin to those of staff than of faculty. While faculty members also remain responsive to professional demands over breaks and holidays, they are often working off-site.

Full-time librarians at UMass-Amherst work 37.5 hours per week: librarian-friendly hours compared to peer intuitions. A recent study of ARL member libraries finds a 40 hour work week to be the most common requirement for full time status (Martyniak and Keith 2009).<sup>4</sup> And while the length of the work week is reasonable compared to the weekly hours reported by UMass-Amherst faculty, librarians have very little autonomy within the workday, creating a different set of constraints on work-life balance for librarians than faculty. Librarians are required to maintain a weekly time sheet, delineating exactly how their time was spent. Hours must balance each week and librarians are required to use sick time or personal leave for appointments scheduled during the workweek. While all librarians are held to these standards, variation between librarian positions gives rise to a range of work-life balance issues. For example, some librarians exclusively work weekdays from 8-5 while librarians working in public service areas also work nights and weekends. Additionally, librarians working in areas with few employees (e.g. branch librarians) have a harder time maintaining coverage and completing duties during paid working hours.

Organizationally, librarians report to both their departments and the library administration. While library departments were mentioned in the survey and focus groups as sources of support, it is ultimately the larger library administration that makes decisions related to taking leaves or other scheduling requests. Creating policies to establish uniformity in the use and application of policies designed to facilitate work-life balance is a key librarian request.

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<sup>3</sup>For more Learning Commons facts visit <http://www.umass.edu/learningcommons/lcfactsheet2010jan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The threshold for full-time status ranged from 26 to 40 hours per week with 90% of the responding institutions requiring at least 35 hours per week for full-time status.

The UMass-Amherst library structure is crucial for maintaining work-life balance in a professional field with trends toward increasing workloads and increasing hours of operation; the organization of work determines how these tendencies play out in a particular locality. While the technological shifts outlined above create the tendency for longer hours and require retraining, they also provide an opportunity to inject much needed flexibility into library scheduling. Librarians inhabit a structural middle ground. They currently have the rigid scheduling of staff positions coupled with the professional development demands of faculty, and it is from this position that solutions to work-life balance issues should be considered.

## **Methods**

Data were collected as part of the faculty and librarian caregiver equity study commissioned by the Joint Administration-MSP Work-Life committee. Most of the data in this report come from a librarian focus group luncheon, in which twelve librarians participated during March 2009. Data are also drawn from a survey sent to all librarians at UMass-Amherst in March 2009. Thirteen librarians returned the survey (twelve were completed), a thirty one percent response rate. Finally, data was also drawn from several informal meetings between researchers and librarians in December 2008 and January 2009 in preparation for the library survey. To maximize anonymity, participation of individual librarians was not traced, leaving open the possibility that the same individuals participated in the survey and the focus group luncheon.

Participants worked at a range of library departments, and combining survey respondents and the focus group participants, years of service to UMass-Amherst ranged from two years to thirty five years. Respondents and participants tended to be female—ten out of twelve survey respondents and ten out of twelve focus group participants were female. The majority of participants in both the survey and focus group were white.

## **Findings: General Themes**

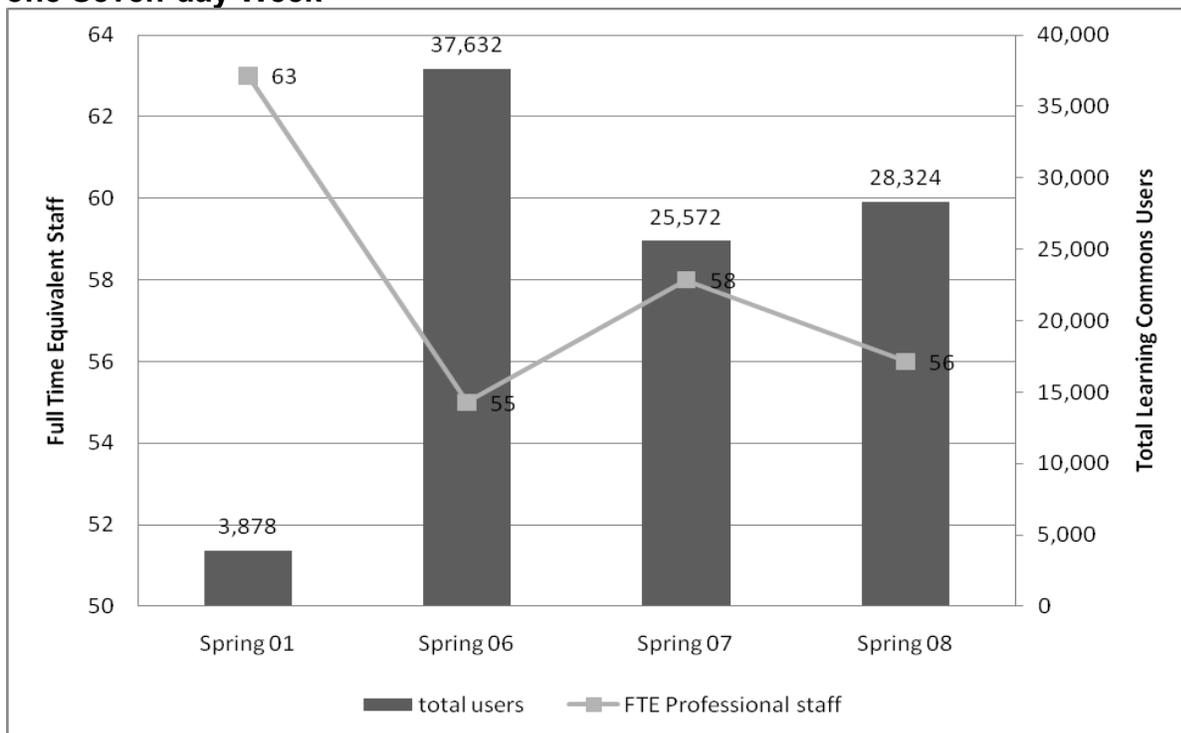
Librarian concerns centered on working conditions: increasing workloads, lack of coverage, rigid scheduling, and lack of time for professional development. Holding these challenges in mind, librarians identified several key changes to facilitate achieving work life balance at UMass-Amherst.

### **Increasing workloads**

In keeping with the national industry trends and the working conditions of UMass-Amherst faculty, increasing workloads provide the context for all librarian work-life balance concerns. Stated as the number one problem facing librarians by two of the three small groups at the focus group luncheon, “*job expectations are increasing (more new and different things without giving up the old) so work starts to eat into personal time.*” Librarians face heavy workloads, “*with multiple competing projects*”, resulting in

the need to take work home to get the job done—work which goes unpaid and interferes with work-life balance. As one participant articulated, “[w]e work harder, faster, and under more pressure.” While the industry trends suggest the shift to electronic resources decreases the number of physical patrons, the addition of the Learning Commons to the UMass-Amherst main library has dramatically increased the number of library users. Thus for UMass-Amherst librarians the number of physical and virtual patrons is on the rise. However, as figure 1 illustrates, the number of professional staff has not kept pace with the increase in traffic.

**Figure 1: Number of Full-time Equivalent Staff and Learning Commons Users for one Seven-day Week<sup>5</sup>**



Source for FTE Professional Staff numbers: Association of Research Librarians statistics <http://www.library.umass.edu/assets/aboutus/assessment/ARL10yrdata08.pdf>, accessed June, 24th, 2010.

Source for Learning Commons users: UMass-Amherst Learning Commons Assessment. <http://www.library.umass.edu/learning-commons-assessment/>. Accessed June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Spring 2001 was pre-Learning Commons and thus user counts were taken on the main floor.

Spring 2001 provides an example of the number of users visiting the library in a single week prior to the introduction of the Learning Commons. Comparing 2001 patron counts to 2007, the post-Learning Commons year with the fewest patrons in a single week, we still see an increase of 21,694 library users and five fewer professional staff. So while increased job duties are an industry wide trend, this trend is intensified by lack of adequate coverage at UMass-Amherst libraries and, as will be discussed below, rigid

<sup>5</sup> Data were collected by Gordon Fretwell from the following weeks: spring 2001 May 2-8; spring 2006 May 17-23; spring 2007 April 22-28; spring 2008 April 27-May 3.

scheduling. Thus, policies suggested to address coverage and increase workplace flexibility have the potential to mitigate increasing workloads.

### **Lack of Coverage**

Librarians noted three primary scheduling problems—lack of predictability, inadequate coverage, and rigidity of hours. Departments with small staff or branch librarians find themselves short staffed when librarians take sabbatical, parental leave, vacation, or attend trainings; the small staff also creates the need to cover unexpected shifts on short notice. This lack of coverage intensifies the workloads of librarians on duty, and covering shifts on short notice hinders the ability to schedule life outside work.

#### *Mechanism to fund replacement hires:*

The lack of adequate coverage acts as a barrier to using the benefits that facilitate work-life balance (vacations, parental leave, FMLA) and acts as a barrier to pursuing professional development through attending conferences, trainings, or taking sabbatical. Recognizing that current budget constraints likely preclude hiring permanent librarians, we suggest creating a mechanism to insure that replacement hires could be made for librarians on extended leave (parental leave, FMLA, or Sabbatical).

### **Scheduling**

In addition to scheduling issues related to lack of coverage, librarians noted that the rigidity of the library schedule hindered work-life balance. *“Especially for people working services desks, there are increased expectations to work outside of a normal 8-5 schedule, including weekends, and holidays like Labor Day.”* Or as another focus group participant noted, there is no *“down time in the library--[we] work summer, x-mas week, spring break, and intercession.”* Unlike faculty, breaks are not built in for librarians, and as discussed above, breaks are difficult to navigate with a small staff. The rigidity of daily and weekly schedules was also cited as hindering work-life balance; librarians are required to use personal or sick leave for appointments scheduled during working hours and must balance their hours every week. And simply put by a survey respondent, *“I would like to have time away from my desk!”*

#### *Telecommuting:*

To address rigidity study participants requested developing library wide policies for telecommuting, flextime, and job sharing. All three of the small groups at the focus group luncheon suggested telecommuting as one way to interject flexibility into their schedules, and 8 of the 11 survey respondents who responded to the question about telecommuting expressed that they would use the benefit if it existed. In the focus groups, librarians argued that if they were to telecommute from home, they would likely be *more* productive, because they would face fewer interruptions.

The turn to electronic resources and electronic communications with patrons provides an opportunity for at least a portion of librarian work, even for the traditionally face-to-face librarians, to be done via telecommuting (Foley 2002, Poole and Denny 2001). While this potential exists, few university libraries have developed comprehensive

policies for telecommuting, so to do so would provide current librarians with the flexibility they request and place UMass-Amherst at a competitive advantage when recruiting new librarians.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Flextime:*

Flextime exists in a limited way in some departments, and the request for uniform, library wide flextime policies figured prominently in the study. Two of the three small groups from the focus group luncheons suggested flextime policies as a way to facilitate work-life balance and 8 out of 11 survey respondents who answered the question about flextime said they would use flextime if it were an option. Flextime is a well-established practice in research libraries; 84 percent of the research libraries participating in a 1992 ARL study on flexible work arrangements report having flextime policies (Zabel 1992). The ARL report includes the flextime contract language for a number of universities, and a review of these policies reveal there is variation in the way flextime is implemented, all with an eye to balancing librarian need and institutional need.

For example, several policies build in language to protect existing breaks, limit the number of hours that can be worked in a single day, and limit librarians to work only during hours while security staff are on site. Most policies establish “core hours” of operation where flexibility is not allowed and “flex hours” during which librarians may manipulate their schedules as they see fit. At most universities in the study flextime schedules must be agreed upon by librarians and administration, and at the University of Iowa schedules are assessed for viability monthly, and assessed every six months at Colorado State. Most libraries in the study require hours to balance each week, but the University of Waterloo and the University of Toronto allow employees to carry hours over from one week to the next, balancing within a four week period. Multi-week accounting maximizes flexibility and since UMass-Amherst librarians already keep weekly timesheets, such accounting could be easily implemented.

#### *Job Sharing:*

Finally, one group of librarians from the focus group noted job sharing, splitting full time positions, as another way to increase workplace flexibility. While Zabel (1992) found that 28 percent of participating ARL libraries reported having job sharing options, a review of these policies found job sharing most frequently took the form of cross-training (learning to work in multiple library positions). Buttler and Garcha (1998) find job sharing, particularly transfers from technical service areas to public service areas, are on the rise, arguing (p. 320):

This trend of job sharing has some positive aspects, including heightened job interest among participants, better understanding between technical and public services, and more flexibility. However, sometimes combinations of duties have drawbacks as well, including lack of expertise and thus lack of quality and consistency in multiple job functions.

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<sup>6</sup> Telecommuting policies specific to research libraries could not be located; however the University of South Florida provides a clearinghouse of university wide telecommuting policies which could be referenced when developing a policy for the UMass-Amherst libraries:  
<http://www.nctr.usf.edu/clearinghouse/univtelework.htm>

Job sharing in this form might be one way to make flex scheduling, sabbaticals, and family leaves available to departments with small staffs or for librarians working in specialized positions and could facilitate sharing knowledge of new technologies cross-generationally. In the case of cataloguers, a position that is on the decline, it allows them to maintain their skills but also learn other tasks in order to maintain full employment in the face of technological job replacement (Buttlar and Garcha 1998). But this option also has the potential to heighten existing feelings of overwork, and as noted above, could potentially lower the quality of service.

With a variety of existing models for implementing telecommuting, flextime, and job sharing, it is recommended that librarians and the library administration work together to come up with policy guidelines for these practices. Policies are intended to assist librarians in maintaining work-life balance, and, as will be discussed below, provide space for professional development, so it is crucial that librarians have a strong voice in shaping the policies. At Virginia Tech Libraries, strong librarian presence in the processes of policy formation and implementation met the needs of the library administration and librarians with the unintended positive outcome of creating a shift toward "mentoring and mutuality" among librarians (Lener, Pencek, and Ariew 2004). As suggested by Fennewald (2009), the collegial environment engendered by this process is one of the key factors for fostering a supportive environment for professional development, another central concern for UMass-Amherst librarians.

### **Professional Development:**

Across the board, librarians expressed a desire to pursue professional development activities, but amid their other duties, librarians report little time for professional development during their workweek. While professional development is not considered a primary part of librarians' central duties, it is a requirement for career advancement; promotion is pegged to job performance and professional development.<sup>7</sup> In terms of professional development, the working conditions of librarians most closely match those of contract faculty. For both groups, professional development is required for career advancement, but unlike tenure-line faculty, librarians and contract faculty are not provided time to pursue these endeavors as part of their job duties. Some study participants report feeling supported to attend conferences while others did not, but across the board in both the survey and the focus groups, librarians noted a lack of support for research and writing which left them pursuing these activities outside of paid working hours, impairing work-life balance.

In addition to librarians' personal interest in pursuing professional development activities, study participants noted there is a recent push from the library administration to increase their publication rates and conference attendance. However, this push comes without matching material or technical support and in the context of increasing

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<sup>7</sup>From the Librarians' Personnel Committee Promotion and Merit Policies: The general criteria for promotion and merit awards are primarily the demonstrated quality of performance (including both effectiveness and productivity) in the candidate's area of responsibility; and secondarily the demonstrated quality of professional growth and development; of service activities on Library committees and within the University; and of professional activities outside the University.

work demands, makes the expectation for increased publications hard to reach. As stated by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), academic institutions have a responsibility to support librarian professional development:

Through enlightened self-interest, academic institutions should appreciate the importance of—and materially support—professional development for academic librarians. *Colleges and universities should demonstrate their commitment to personal mastery and continuous learning, e.g., through financial support, administrative leave, and/or flexible work schedules for academic librarians engaged in learning activities. They should also measure, recognize and reward exceptional individual and team performance.* Institutions have a further responsibility to create, sponsor or offer learning events for their professional staff [emphasis mine].

The professional development supports suggested by UMass-Amherst librarians—leaves, scheduling flexibility, rewarding performance, and sponsoring learning events—closely match these ACRL suggestions and each will be discussed in turn.

#### *Leaves:*

The library has excellent professional development leaves in place—Short-term Professional Leave and sabbaticals. Acting as a mini-sabbatical, librarians may take time-off to write through the Short-term Professional Leave Program. After librarians have been on staff seven years they are eligible for full sabbatical—five and a half months for research. However, both Short-term Professional Leave and sabbaticals must be approved by the library personnel committee and lack of coverage means these professional development supports are underutilized; for example, one librarian reported that only half of all eligible librarians take sabbatical. We suggest a mechanism for ensuring replacement hires for librarians on sabbatical and Short-term Professional Leave to increase the approval rate and uptake rate for these leaves, allowing librarians to make better use of their pre-existing supports.

#### *Scheduling Flexibility:*

As highlighted by the ACRL professional developments standards, the scheduling flexibility requested by UMass-Amherst librarians for maintaining work-life balance is also considered an industry standard for promoting professional development. Fennewald (2009) finds flexibility in scheduling to be crucial for publication-productive librarians at Penn State. As one study participant noted, “If I had to be in the library from 9 to 5, I would not have been able to produce half as much as what I have done” (p. 111). Introducing flex options--telecommuting, flextime, and job sharing--would thus facilitate balancing work-life and meeting professional development aims. In addition to flextime, UMass-Amherst librarians expressed strong interest in carving out time (such as three hours a week) in the workweek for research and writing .Such work arrangements do exist at peer institutions, but in a recent survey of ARL libraries, only 37% (19) of participating libraries reported that librarians have dedicated research times as part of their regular schedule (Martyniak and Brian, 2009).<sup>8</sup> Like introducing a

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the University of New Hampshire and York University have dedicated time for research.

telecommuting policy, introducing dedicated research time would put UMass-Amherst libraries on the cutting edge of librarian supports.

#### *Rewarding Performance:*

Related to the salary parity issues covered later in the paper, librarians plateau when they reach the highest rank, Librarian V. There is support for attending conferences while librarians are advancing through the ranks, but librarians report feeling overlooked when they reach Librarian V. While librarians cannot advance in rank beyond Librarian V, they do have contract renewals every five years, and librarians request providing professional development funds along with these contract renewals. This practice would help later career librarians feel more appreciated, and also help create parity across bargaining unit members as tenure-line faculty currently receive professional development funds when they pass reviews.

#### *Learning events & Mentoring:*

In recognition of their professional development demands, librarians request an increase in supports analogous to those offered to faculty. For example, study participants requested training on writing in the library context similar to faculty writing workshops held by the Office of Faculty Development (OFD). Librarians also expressed interest in a mutual mentoring program which could be modeled after the mutual mentoring program offered to faculty by the OFD. Mutual mentoring provides an opportunity for a bidirectional transfer of knowledge: early career librarians receive support learning the ropes of professional development while late career librarians have an opportunity to learn new technical skills. Fennewald (2009) finds that the collegiality engendered by both formal and informal mentoring enhanced research productive at Penn State.<sup>9</sup> Formal mentoring ensured that new librarians learned what resources were available to them, how the promotion system worked, and how to start the writing process. Informal mentoring provided the opportunity for co-authorship and fine grained polishing. UMass-Amherst libraries currently have a trial mentoring program, and transitioning to a mutual mentoring program could facilitate an increase in publication rates and the transfer of technological knowledge while facilitating a shared knowledge of library policies and supports, a need that appears in multiple contexts.

### **Librarians across the life course: the interaction of life situation and library structure**

In addition to the general concerns shaped by the library structure, librarians also articulated concerns shaped by the intersection of library structure and life course. Early career librarians, caregivers, and late career librarians all articulated concerns specific to their context.<sup>10</sup>

#### Early Career Librarians/New Hires

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to a robust mentoring program, librarians at Penn State receive considerable material and structural support which also affects productivity.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that these stages are not mutually exclusive; early or late career librarians may also have caregiving responsibilities.

### *Access to benefits:*

Librarians request the same immediate access to benefits provided to tenure-line faculty. Currently, librarians must be on staff for four months before they are eligible for benefits such as parental leave.

### Caregiving

#### *Caregiving Responsibilities:*

Caregiving takes multiple forms and survey respondents noted being responsible for providing childcare and eldercare. While librarians are currently able to use leaves afforded by the FMLA to provide eldercare and use the MSP parental leave to provide childcare after the birth of a child, librarians note increasing scheduling flexibility would provide the greatest support in meeting caregiving obligations. Scharlach et al. (1991) find employees with elder care responsibilities who also had flexibility in their work responsibilities experiences less strain and were less likely to leave their jobs than those with elder care responsibilities and less work-place flexibility while Lee and Duxbury (1998) find flexible work arrangements are important for parents as well. The library currently has a policy which allows librarians to reduce their work hours, and study participants request more cultural support for using this option: discussing its availability and increasing administration approval of its use. Additionally, librarians with caregiving responsibility request the flexible work arrangements previously discussed: telecommuting, flextime, and job sharing.

#### *Breast feeding:*

Librarians reported needing both private space and time for pumping, constraints specific to the lack of personal offices and finding time within their rigid schedules. Survey respondents noted different lactation accommodations provided by the library with varying levels of satisfaction. Librarians provided with personal carrels reported feeling satisfied and supported with the space. In contrast, another librarian was provided access to a conference room for pumping, but with multiple keys to this room in circulation she never knew if someone else would enter the room. All respondents noted difficulty finding time to pump. One respondent noted that always pumping during her breaks left her unable to leave the library during the day and other respondents noted the difficulty of balancing finding time to pump with meetings and rigid work schedules, a balancing act which continues for months. We recommend generating a uniform library policy for breastfeeding mothers, including a lactation room in the library, and a formal recognition of the time constraints of pumping.

#### *University childcare:*

Librarians were dissatisfied with the availability, hours of operation, and the expense of UMass-Amherst childcare. These concerns are discussed in greater detail in Lundquist et al. (2010). However, the major themes from librarians related to the unaffordable cost for university childcare for the number of hours that librarians work.

### *Parental Leave:*

Although full-time librarians have access to parental leave (part-time librarians do not), the ability to take parental leave is negotiated on a case-by-case basis, leading to a lack of uniformity in use and approval of the benefit. For example, one study participant decided not to take parental leave; she did not feel she could take that much time away from her project. She instead used FMLA for part of her break and then telecommuted for a month. However, another librarian in a similar situation was denied this option. As discussed above, coverage issues lead to tension around taking extended leaves – a tension that occurred in the focus groups, with colleagues concerned about their colleagues' use of parental leave when the impacts on themselves were so great. To ensure that librarians feel they can take parental leave, we suggest generating a mechanism to insure replacement hires for anyone taking parental leave.<sup>11</sup> We also suggest creating library-specific language around the use of parental leave (or arrangements like the one noted above) to insure uniformity in access.<sup>12</sup>

### Late Career Librarians

#### *Salary Parity:*

Late career librarians expressed concerns about salary parity. *“For those who went through promotion many years ago, they don’t benefit from recent increases in promotion raises, leading to inequitable compensation.”* And as another focus group participant articulated, *“People here thirty years make less than people here five years.”* And as noted by a peer, this lack of parity brings down morale for late career librarians, negatively affecting the individuals and the library as a whole. MSP has worked with the library administration to clarify the process of anomaly increases, the policy aimed at reaching salary parity, although budget crises have made this issue difficult. We suggest the anomaly increase policies be discussed with librarians annually so they have the opportunity to use the policies.<sup>13</sup> Coupling professional development funds with the five year reviews for later career librarians would be an additional way to reward and promote their continued contribution to the library.

#### *Phased Retirement:*

Late career librarians also express continued excitement for their jobs with the recognition that retirement is on the horizon. One focus group participant started

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<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the culture surrounding the choice to use parental benefits in the UMass-Amherst context see Lundquist et al. (2010).

<sup>12</sup> The University of Iowa has exemplar contract language for promoting uniformity in benefit uptake; “Flextime scheduling is voluntary and, in departments in which flextime scheduling is permitted, if one individual is deemed eligible, then all employees with similar duties and responsibilities are eligible” (Zabel 1992, p. 89).

<sup>13</sup> There are four different categories under which an employee can apply/be considered for an anomaly increase. The first one has to do with your salary not being in line (or sufficiently above that of) the most recent hire and there is NO limit on the number of these (in category 1) that can be awarded per year. There is a limit on the other 3 categories such that in a unit with more than 20 members no more than 3 awards (from categories 2, 3 and 4 combined) can be given (personal email correspondence with Lori Reardon).

working at the library late in life and noted, *“I have been here five years and feel like I will be enthusiastic for another fifteen.”* This participant wanted to keep working, but not necessarily full time; however, librarians are not currently eligible for phased retirement, and cannot become so without changes to state law.<sup>14</sup> In light of this legislative roadblock, it is suggested that the library administration develop a uniform policy to facilitate a transition to part-time employment for interested late career librarians, working with the union to ensure that such a policy would not diminish librarian retirement benefits.

## **Conclusion**

Across the board, librarians had many positive things to report about their colleagues and experiences working at UMass-Amherst. Yet they also expressed dissatisfaction with general working conditions: increasing workloads, a lack of adequate coverage, schedule rigidity, and lack of time for professional development. These general concerns also interact with concerns specific to life course--early career librarians, caregivers, and late career librarians all expressed particular needs.

While UMass-Amherst librarians have access to a range of benefits for maintaining work-life balance and pursuing professional development, such as parental leave and sabbatical, the structure of the workplace makes it hard for librarians to make use of these benefits. Lack of coverage coupled with increasing work demands creates tension around the use of leaves and reduces the likelihood for approval for time away from the desk. Emerging from the trenches, the librarians suggested a range of synergistic solutions that we encourage the university and library administration to consider:

- Interjecting flexibility into the library structure by generating and implementing policies for telecommuting, flextime, and job sharing. Creating a more flexible working environment facilitates work-life balance and facilitates the pursuit of professional development, two key librarian requests. We recommend that the library administration, MSP, and librarians work together to generate these policies. Because policies are aimed at improving work-life balance for librarians, librarians should have a strong voice in shaping the policies.
- Creating a mechanism to insure replacement hires for any librarian taking extended leave (parental leave, FMLA, Professional Short-term Leave, or sabbatical) would ease coverage issues and develop a culture where librarians are more likely to ask for and take the leaves that they need.
- Ensuring that new and existing policies are clear, consistent, and are applied uniformly across departments, with some mechanism in place to ensure librarians have full knowledge and understanding of the benefits available to them.

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<sup>14</sup> Phased retirement can only be offered to those who have the Optional Retirement Program (OPR), and librarians are currently on the State Employees Retirement System (SERS). In order for phased retirement to be offered to those on SERS, state law needs to be changed (MSP contract: [http://umassmsp.org/msp\\_contract](http://umassmsp.org/msp_contract)).

- Developing a uniform policy to facilitate a transition to part-time employment for interested late career librarians, working with the union to ensure that such a policy would not diminish librarian retirement benefits.
- Discussing policies for anomaly increases with librarians annually, so that they recognize and use these policies.
- Generating a uniform library policy for breastfeeding mothers which provides lactation rooms and recognizes the time constraints of pumping.
- Providing the same immediate access to benefits (such as parental leave) provided to tenure-line faculty to increase parity among MSP members.
- Developing an annual workshop, modeled on those taught in the OFD, regarding writing, publishing, and conference presentation.
- Providing professional development money alongside Librarian V five year reviews as a way to reward and promote their continued contribution to the library.
- Shifting to a mutual mentoring program, similar to the program provided to faculty through the OFD, to provide a support network for meeting professional development aims and sharing technical knowledge cross-generationally.

To meet the needs of current librarians and maintain competitive recruiting new librarians, UMass Amherst libraries must demonstrate the ability to meet the profession on its current terms: by proving work place flexibility to ease the trends toward increased work demands, and by providing the support necessary for pursuing professional development and continued technical training. As Poole and Denny (2001) argue, “one of the few constants in library life is change itself...” and for UMass-Amherst librarians to meet their full potential while balancing work and life in this context they require a flexible, supportive environment.

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