



Faculty Perceptions of Librarians and Library Services: Exploring the Impact of Librarian Faculty Status and Beyond

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Introduction

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) recommends that librarians with faculty status have the same privileges and responsibilities as other faculty on campus. In addition to promotion and pay equity, tenure is intended to create a culture of respect between teaching faculty and library faculty across campus, provide opportunities to participate in college governance, and grant librarians academic freedom in their research. A recent study by Galbraith et al. revealed that librarians feel that being on an equal footing with other faculty improves their relationship.¹ It is not clear whether teaching faculty feel the same way. Does the status of librarians affect faculty's view of librarians and the services they provide?

This study seeks to investigate faculty perceptions of academic librarians in two types of institutions: those unambiguously granting and not granting librarians faculty status. Specifically, the research aims to find differences, if any, in teaching faculty's perceptions of librarians and the latter's role in helping with teaching, research and service in contrasting academic settings.

Methodology

To gain insight into faculty's perceptions of librarians and librarian services and the possible association of librarian faculty status with those perceptions, the authors surveyed faculty at two larger institutions (Indiana University, Bloomington and the University of Pennsylvania (Penn)) and two smaller institutions (Gettysburg College and The College of New Jersey (TCNJ)). In each pair, one institution granted equal faculty status to librarians (Indiana Bloomington and TCNJ), and one did not (Gettysburg and Penn).² To define faculty status, the authors used the ACRL guideline, which stated that “[f]aculty status entails for librarians the same rights and responsibilities as for other members of the faculty. They should have corresponding entitlement to rank, promotion, tenure, compensation, leaves, and research funds.”³ Every faculty member at Gettysburg and TCNJ was invited to participate in the survey. Because of their large sizes, half of all faculty members at Indiana Bloomington and Penn were invited to answer the survey.⁴

The survey, powered by the Qualtrics survey tool, consisted of three demographic questions (Institution, faculty academic rank, and disciplinary affiliation) and thirteen multiple-choice questions. Additionally, respondents were asked to provide free-text responses to two open-ended questions: their additional comments on faculty perceptions of librarians and librarian status, and their views on how faculty-librarians relationships could be enhanced or strengthened.

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To analyze free-text responses, the authors created a codebook to group individual answers. To ensure coding consistency of all responses, the authors coded an overlapping subset of responses for each free-text question and resolved differences in researchers' interpretations of responses. The authors issued email invitations to 2958 faculty across the four institutions. A total of 505 responses were received. The response rate is 17%. As with similar surveys, not all respondents completed all questions. For data analysis purposes, the authors employed a descriptive statistical methodology. For the purposes of the study, data analysis related to discipline will focus on the four disciplines that had a response rate of 10% or higher.

Results/Findings

Demographics

Of the 505 respondents, 61 (12%) identified themselves as Gettysburg faculty; 159 (31.5%) as TCNJ faculty; 189 (37.4%) as Indiana Bloomington faculty; and 96 (19%) as Penn faculty (Table 1). Over one-third of respondents (n=172 or 34%) were full professors followed by 133 (26.5%) associate professors; 109 (21.7%) assistant professors; and a little over 16% who belonged to other categories (adjunct professor: 11%; lecturer: 5.8%) (Table 2). One-third of faculty respondents (n=168 or 33.5%) were in arts and humanities followed by the sciences (n=98 or 19.6%), social sciences (n=86 or 17%) and education (n=53 or 10.6%) (Table 3). Respondents in other disciplines constituted individually less than 10% of all respondents.

Institution	Gettysburg	TCNJ	Indiana Bloomington	Penn
Number	61	159	189	96
Percentage	12.08%	31.49%	37.43%	19.01%

Rank	Full Professor	Assoc. Professor	Assist. Professor	Adjunct Professor	Lecturer
Number	172	133	109	55	29
Percentage	34.26%	26.49%	21.71%	10.96%	5.78%

Discipline	Arts & Humanities	Education	Science	Social Science
Number	168	53	98	86
Percentage	33.6%	10.6%	19.6%	17%

Interactions with Librarians

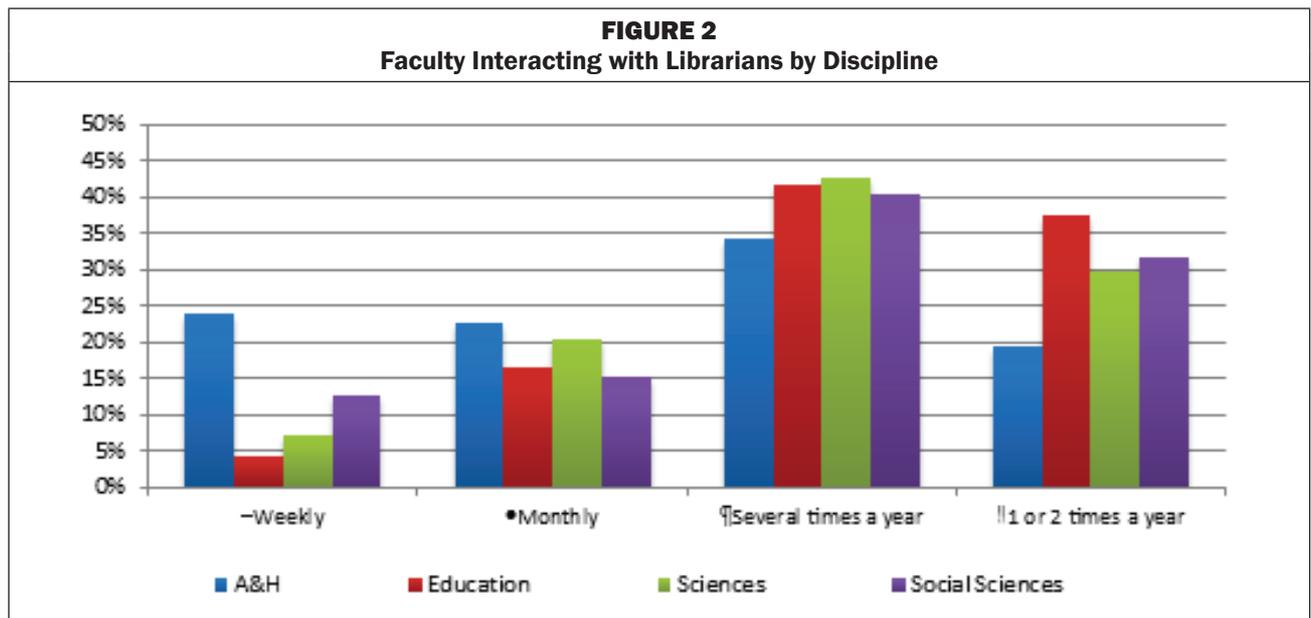
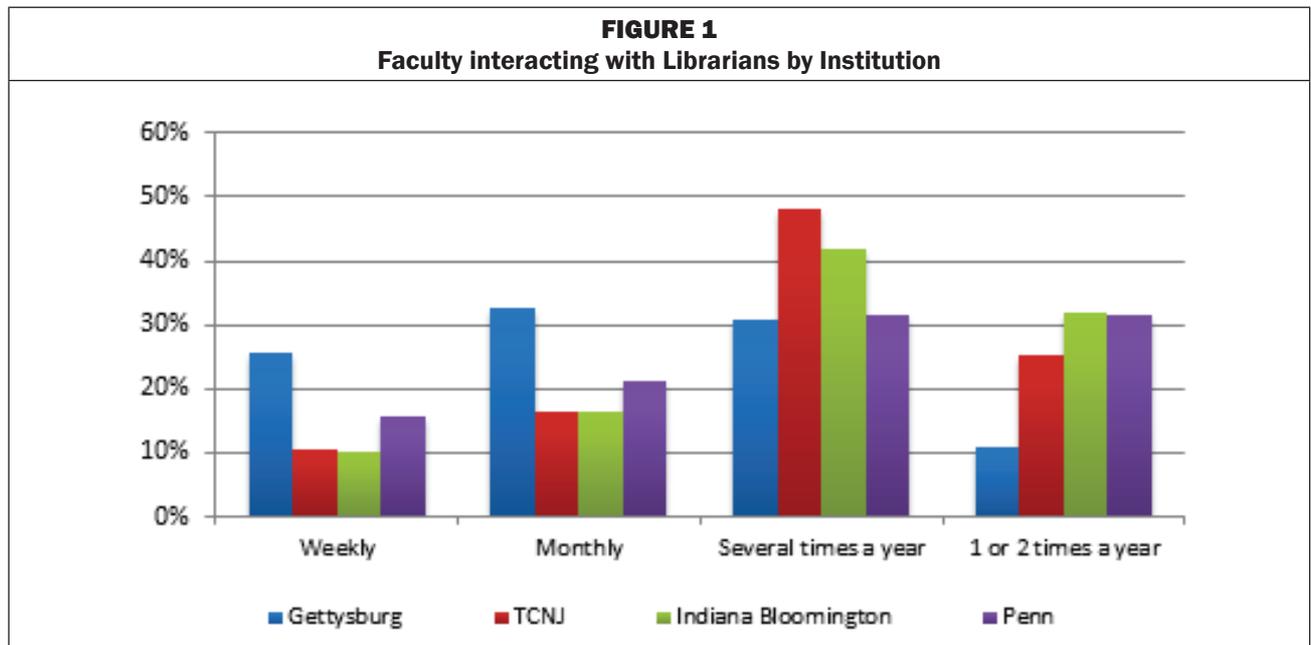
Respondents were asked whether they interacted with librarians at their institutions. The vast majority responded yes; ninety percent (90.5%) interacted with librarians (Table 4).

Of the faculty respondents who interacted with librarians, just over two-thirds (67%) did so only several times or less a year. One-third (32.6%) interacted with librarians weekly or monthly (Table 5). Adding the vari-

Institution	Gettysburg	TCNJ	Indiana Bloomington	Penn	ALL
Interacted with librarians	95%	89.6%	87.6%	94.7%	90.5%

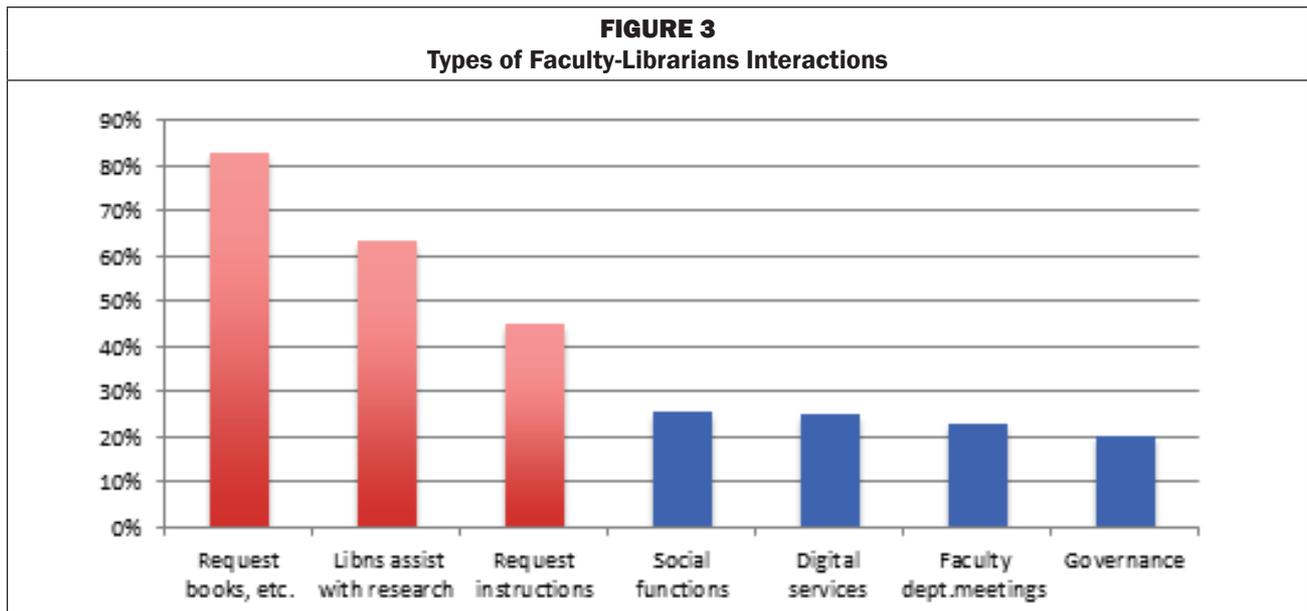
ables of institution, discipline, and faculty rank to the analysis, we found that faculty at Gettysburg and Penn interacted with local librarians more frequently than respondents affiliated with the two institutions that grant librarians faculty status. As shown in Figure 1, Gettysburg and Penn faculty outpaced their colleagues at the tenure-granting institutions in the weekly and monthly interaction categories, only slightly in Penn's case but by a fairly wide margin at Gettysburg. We also found that faculty respondents in the arts and humanities interacted with librarians the most (Figure 2).

Interacting with Librarians	Weekly	Monthly	Several times a year	1 or 2 times a year
Percentage	13.2%	19.4%	40.3%	27.1%



Capacities of Faculty-librarian Interactions

We asked *how* faculty interacted with librarians. Respondents selected from nine choices and could check all the answers that applied.⁵ Of all responses, as indicated in Figure 3, the top three interaction categories were collection development (83%), research assistance (64%) and in-class instruction requests (45%). Other activities selected by at least 20 % of respondents were work and/or private social functions (25.5%), digital services (25%), faculty departmental meetings (23 %) and campus governance (20%). Fewer librarians interacted with librarians to keep up-to-date in their fields (15%) and/or collaborate on research/teaching (13%).



We delved further into the data on faculty interactions with librarians, broken down by institution. Institution size (student and faculty body), setting, local culture, and formal and informal organizational hierarchies likely all played influential roles in faculty-librarian engagement. We examined data by ranking the popularity of activities across all four institutions. The top three activities in which engagement occurred were identical across institutions:

- Work with librarians to request books, journals, etc. (i.e. collection development);
- Librarians assist me or my students with research;
- Request in-class library instruction/workshops.

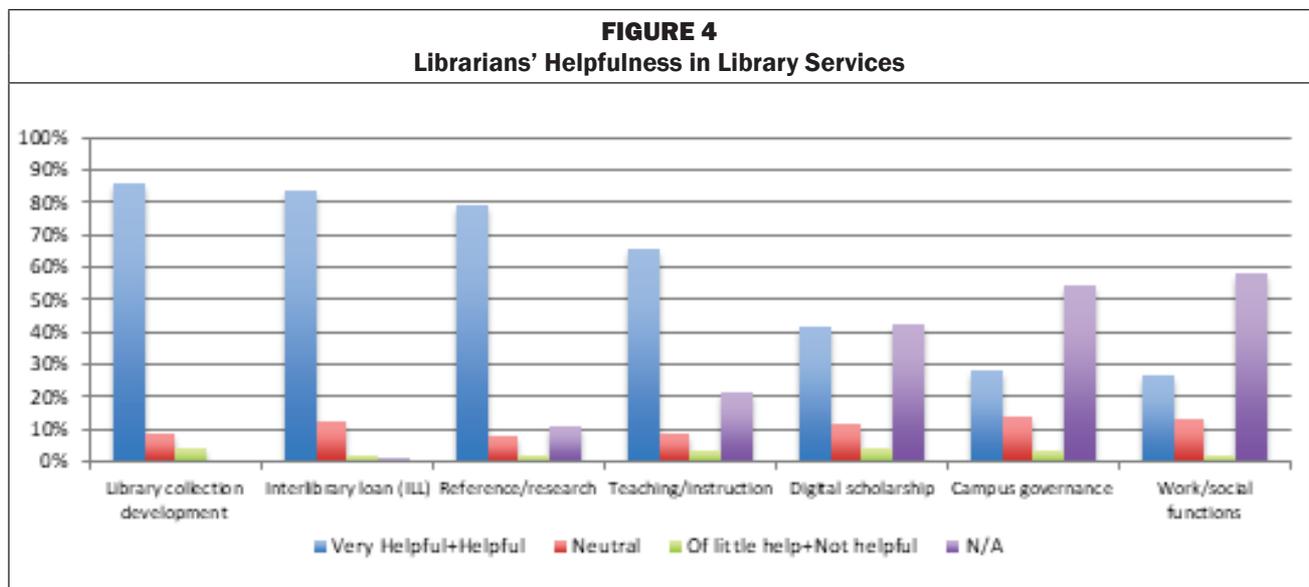
Faculty engaged least with librarians in research/teaching collaborations (13%). Relatively few faculty across institutions interacted with librarians to keep up-to-date in their fields (13%). Faculty affiliated with TCNJ interacted with librarians on governance committees at the highest rate (33%) followed by Gettysburg (21%), Indiana Bloomington (17%), and Penn (7%). The percentage of Gettysburg faculty who interacted with librarians on governance relative to their colleagues at Indiana Bloomington surprised the investigators. We expected that only members of the faculty (i.e., librarians with faculty status) would be eligible to serve on governance committees, but Gettysburg librarians sent *representatives* in 2018-2019 to three faculty senate committees. This unexpected prerogative at Gettysburg likely boosted the perceived relevance of librarians in campus-wide governance at that particular institution. The relatively high percentages of faculty who interacted with librarians on governance at TCNJ and to a less extent Indiana Bloomington the investigators expected given that faculty status librarians at those institutions are eligible and encouraged to participate in governance. These findings suggest overall that librarians' active participation in campus-wide governance at TCNJ and Indiana Bloomington but also Gettysburg made impressions on the faculty members at those institutions.

Helpfulness of Librarians' Services

To learn faculty's perceptions of the services librarians provided, using a Likert scale, we asked respondents to assess the level of helpfulness in seven *service* domains:

- Campus governance
- Digital scholarship
- Interlibrary loan (ILL)
- Library collection development (acquiring books, journals, etc.)
- Reference/research assistance
- Teaching/instruction
- Work and/or private social functions

The data show that, in general, most faculty respondents assessed librarians' services as having been very helpful or helpful in all domains applicable to their academic lives. Specifically, the top three very helpful or helpful domains were collection development (86%); interlibrary loan (ILL) (84%); and reference/research (79%). The percentage was only somewhat lower for teaching/instruction (66%). By contrast, fewer respondents selected very helpful or helpful in digital scholarship (42%), campus governance (28%), and work/private social functions (27%). However, this does not mean that librarians were perceived as less helpful in those domains; higher percentages (42%-58%) of faculty respondents answered not applicable for those service domains (Figure 4). Thus, the data suggest that respondents had very positive experiences interacting with librarians in all service areas.



To see whether librarians at institutions granting or not granting librarians faculty status were perceived differently in terms of the helpfulness of services provided, we cross-tabulated the data by institution. The data do not show noticeable difference between the two types of institutions except for the area of campus governance in which nearly half (45%) of all respondents from TCNJ perceived librarians' service on campus governance as having been very helpful or helpful, and thus outpaced the other institutions (27% at Gettysburg, 23% at Indiana Bloomington and 10% at Penn) (Table 6). This findings strongly suggests that librarians at TCNJ played a particularly active and effective role in campus governance.

Gettysburg		TCNJ		Indiana Bloomington		Penn	
Coll. Dev.	95%	Coll. Dev.	87%	Coll. Dev.	86%	ILL	85%
ILL	88%	ILL	81%	ILL	85%	Reference/Research	83%
Reference/Research	83%	Reference/Research	78%	Reference/Research	77%	Coll. Dev.	82%
Teaching/Instruction	78%	Teaching/Instruction	69%	Teaching/Instruction	61%	Teaching/Instruction	64%
Digital Scholarship	58%	Governance	45%	Digital Scholarship	41%	Digital Scholarship	42%
Work/social functions	41%	Digital Scholarship	35%	Work/social functions	25%	Work/social functions	26%
Governance	27%	Work/social functions	24%	Governance	23%	Governance	10%

Knowledge of and feelings about librarians' status

Survey respondents were asked to answer what best describe the academic status of librarians at their institutions, selecting from faculty rank (or equivalent), no faculty rank (or equivalent), and don't know. The vast majority of respondents at all four institutions who selected faculty rank or no faculty rank responded accurately, and thus demonstrated a basic level of understanding about the academic status of librarians at their institutions. Approximately two-thirds of respondents at both TCNJ (70.5%) and Indiana Bloomington (62.6%) correctly responded that their librarians held faculty status (Table 7). Nearly two-thirds of faculty from Gettysburg (62%) knew that their librarians did not have faculty status. A solid majority of Penn faculty, however, were confused and did not know their librarians' (non-faculty) status (61%).

Respondents were then asked to describe their feelings about librarians' local academic status. Noticeably higher percentages of faculty from TCNJ (66%) and Indiana Bloomington (49%) were pleased with librarians' (faculty) status (Table 8). Fewer respondents from Gettysburg (34.5%) and Penn (20%) were pleased with their librarians' (non-faculty) status. What is more, higher percentages of faculty affiliated with the non-faculty-granting institutions simply did not know whether they were satisfied with librarians' local status. These findings sug-

Librarians' academic status	Gettysburg	TCNJ	Indiana Bloomington	Penn
Faculty rank/status	0.00%	70.47%	62.60%	2.13%
No faculty rank/status	62.00%	0.67%	4.40%	37.20%
Don't know	38.00%	28.86%	32.97%	60.64%

Feelings of librarians' status	Gettysburg	TCNJ	Indiana Bloomington	Penn
Contented/pleased	34.48%	66.44%	48.90%	20.21%
Unfair/displeased	1.72%	2.01%	3.85%	8.51%
Indifferent/no thoughts	17.24%	12.75%	21.98%	21.28%
Don't know	41.38%	18.79%	23.08%	50.00%

gest librarian faculty status at TCNJ and Indiana Bloomington not only accorded better visibility to librarians but elicited from some respondents an expression of solidarity.

Nature of the Faculty-librarian Relationship

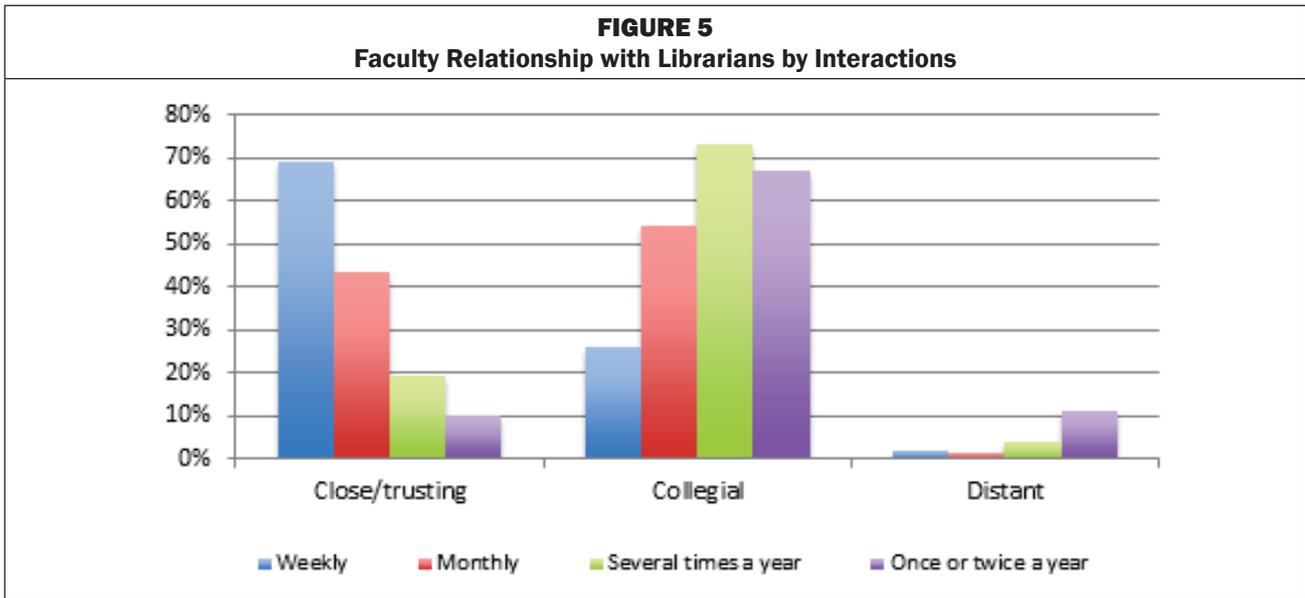
Survey respondents were asked to describe their relationship with librarians at their institutions. The vast majority of faculty (84%) at all institutions maintained close/trusting/collaborative or collegial/courteous relationships with their librarians. But the data show variation by institution worth exploring. More than 40% of respondents from Gettysburg maintained a close/collaborative relationship with local librarians, followed by TCNJ (28%), Penn (24.5%) and Indiana Bloomington (19%) (Table 9). This finding suggests that, among other factors, the size of an institution (e.g., its faculty and student bodies, the variety of programs offered) and even campus size might play relatively significant roles in cultivating faculty-librarian relationships. Librarians' academic status does not seem to be a significant factor. The data suggest that faculty affiliated with smaller institutions, where libraries are ostensibly more geographically within reach, experience greater opportunities to interact with librarians, and in turn develop closer and more collaborative relationships. Such conjecture is bolstered by the relatively high percentage of Gettysburg faculty who interacted with librarians via work/social functions and at departmental meetings. In fact, with only collection development and campus governance as exceptions, Gettysburg faculty interacted with local librarians in the remaining interaction categories at the highest rates.

Faculty relationship with librarians	Gettysburg	TCNJ	Indiana Bloomington	Penn
Close/trusting	41.40%	28.20%	18.70%	24.50%
Collegial/courteous	53.40%	59.06%	59.34%	59.57%
Distant	1.70%	4.00%	9.30%	6.40%
Indifferent/no thoughts	1.70%	8.10%	11.50%	7.40%
Unfriendly	0.00%	0.70%	0.50%	0.00%

Perceptions of Faculty-librarians Relationship by Interactions

To study faculty's perceptions of the faculty-librarian relationship based on the frequency with which members of the two groups interacted, we cross-tabulated data from the two questions: faculty's perceived relationship with librarians and how frequently they interacted with librarians. Unsurprisingly, the results show that faculty who interacted with librarians frequently perceived closer relationships. As shown in Figure 5, almost 70% of respondents who interacted with librarians on a weekly basis perceived close/trusting relationships with local librarians. Only 10% of faculty respondents who interacted with librarians once or twice a year perceived close/trusting relationships.

To investigate whether librarians' faculty status possibly contributed to the development of closer relationships between faculty and librarians we cross-tabulated the data from the two questions: faculty's knowledge of librarians' status and perceived closeness with librarians. As indicated in Table 10, the data reveal that faculty in institutions granting librarians faculty status *did not* perceive closer relationships with their local librarians. Rather, there emerged a negative association between size of the institution and close/trusting relationships with a full 41% of respondents affiliated with Gettysburg reporting close/trusting relationships with their librarians. Nonetheless, faculty's *awareness* of librarians' status was associated with perceived closeness. As shown in Table 10, faculty who were (correctly) aware of librarians' status in their institutions, whether faculty or non-faculty,



perceived a close/trusting relationship with librarians (i.e., 29% from institutions granting librarians faculty status and 39% from institutions not granting librarians faculty status) as compared with faculty who were unaware of librarians’ status (15%).

TABLE 10
Faculty’s Knowledge of Librarians’ Status and Their Perceived Relationship

Relationship	Faculty rank	No faculty rank	Don’t know
Close/trusting/collaborative relationship	29%	39%	15%
Collegial/courteous relationship	60%	56%	58%
Distant relationship	5%	3%	9%
Indifferent/no thoughts	5%	1%	16%

The finding that faculty’s *awareness of librarians’ status* (faculty status or no faculty status) was associated with perceived closeness in their relationships with librarians is important. As previously discussed (Figure 5), faculty who interacted more frequently with librarians also perceived closer relationships. We hypothesize that faculty who interacted more frequently with librarians were more likely aware of their librarians’ status, as they had more opportunities to learn about or have their attention drawn to librarians’ status. Such frequent interactions and communication, over time, would probably foster a closer relationship. This can be seen in Table 11 in which interaction frequency was associated with awareness of librarians’ status. As frequency of interactions with librarians decreased so did awareness of librarians’ status.

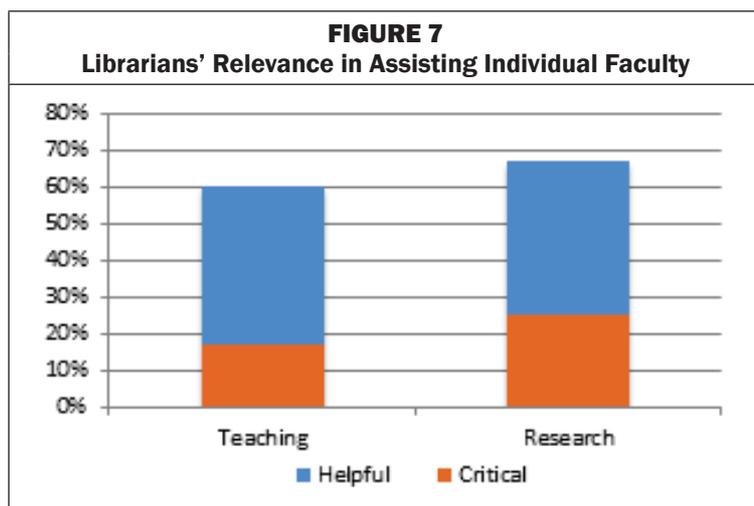
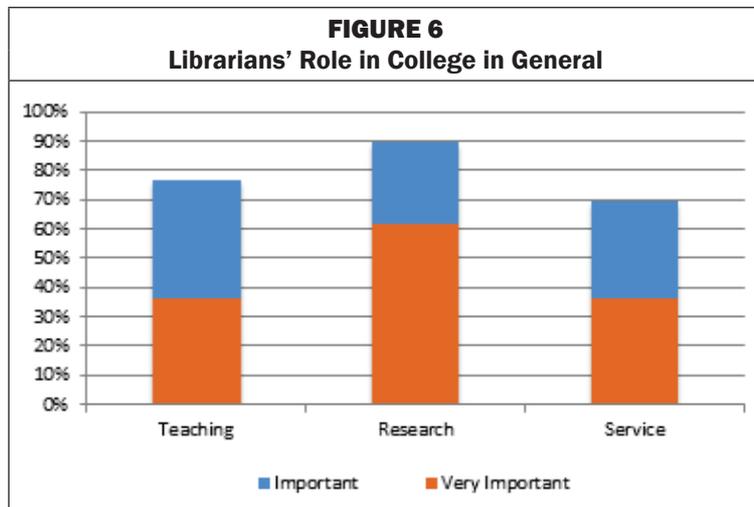
TABLE 11
Faculty’s Knowledge of Librarians’ Status and Their Interactions with Librarians

Knowledge of faculty rank	Weekly (Interactions)	Monthly	Several times a year	Once or twice a year
Faculty rank	40%	48%	52%	43%
No faculty rank	40%	27%	15%	6%
Don’t know	21%	25%	33%	51%

Librarians' Role and Relevance in Teaching and Research

To learn faculty's perception of librarians in assisting teaching and research, we devised the questions from two different standpoints:

- Librarians' institution-wide *importance* in teaching, research and service
- Librarians' *relevance* in assisting individual faculty members' teaching and research



The results, as shown in Figure 6, revealed that a majority of respondents across institutions felt that librarians' held very important or important roles in teaching (77%), research (90%) and service (69%). From the disciplinary faculty perspective, librarians played a more important role in research than in teaching and service, a finding consistent with past studies.⁶ The research role dominated teaching and service, a pattern evident in the twenty-five-percentage-point gap between faculty who felt librarians played a very important role in research as opposed to teaching. The results show a similar pattern in faculty's perception of librarians' *relevance* in assisting their own teaching and research (Figure 7). Higher percentage of faculty respondents felt librarians were relevant in assisting their own research than teaching. However, a gap was found between the perception of librarians' *overall importance* to the institution and the perception of librarians' *relevance* in assisting individual faculty. That is, the percentage of faculty who felt librarians' relevance was critical in assisting either their own teaching (17%) or research (25%) was significantly lower than

those who felt librarians' institutional roles were very important in teaching (37%) and research (62%). These findings suggest that librarians were perceived as having played an *important role* in institution-wide teaching and research but were less *relevant* in assisting individual faculty members' teaching and research. These data echoed those of Christiansen et al., who observed that academia is often an isolated and proprietary environment in which faculty "value solitary work highly" and "maintain exclusive control over teaching and research projects." In terms of teaching, disciplinary faculty "do not see librarians as experts in faculty's fields of expertise and therefore not appropriate for consultation." And in terms of faculty members' research, they generally do not see librarians as "experts who may play a central role in the preparation and execution of a research project."⁷

Qualitative Data

Two open-ended questions concluded the survey and garnered over 150 responses each. Responses to the ini-

tial question—Do you have any other comments on the perceptions of faculty about librarians at your institution?—the investigators sorted into fourteen thematic categories, of which five received *at least* ten responses. For additional comments about perceptions of librarians, of those who chose to respond, approaching half (43%, a plurality) reinforced their positive impressions of and gratitude for academic librarians' services. Typical responses included "Librarians = good," and "They are very professional and always willing to provide meaningful and academic assistance." A number of responses echoed the general admiration of librarians but added details, often involving praise for librarians' research-related help and/or classroom-based information literacy instruction. "They are absolutely necessary to help me and my students when doing research..." "I love our librarians. They generously have developed workshops and resources for my courses. The work and teaching they produce are always comprehensive and helpful." Nine percent of respondents mentioned the importance of subject specialization. A typical response: "Well trained, specialist librarians are the lifeblood of a research institution; indeed, I could not carry out my work effectively without their help and assistance." Of interest, the vast majority of comments centered on librarians' academic-adjacent or traditional support roles. Exceedingly few respondents mentioned collaborations that involved digital scholarship and other emergent roles in academic librarianship. Indeed, nearly as many respondents felt that technology hindered interactions with librarians (7%) as felt librarians' technological proficiency benefitted them (8%).

As for how the effectiveness of the partnership between faculty and librarians could be enhanced and strengthened, nearly one third (32%) of respondents who answered this question placed the responsibility squarely on librarians' shoulders; 17% placed the onus on faculty. Regardless of on whom the burden fell, respondents pointed to the need for proactive outreach and communication. In an expression of solidarity with librarians, 17% of respondents indicated that they wished to see better institutional support for the work of librarians. A related theme involved the removal of administrative barriers. Eleven percent again mentioned the importance of reinforcing librarians' subject specialization through, to cite but one example, the acquisition of advanced degrees. A few faculty respondents suggested that incorporating librarians into the academic process would effectively strengthen faculty-librarian interactions. Complementary of the quantitative survey data (e.g., Figure 1, Table 11), 8% of respondents felt that maintaining physical proximity to librarians was essential for strengthening faculty-librarian partnerships.

While our study bolsters the conclusion reached by previous investigators (Christiansen, et al), namely that faculty commonly perceived librarians as less relevant in assisting them with their own teaching and research, largely due to long-established disciplinary practices, efforts can still be made to strengthen faculty-librarian bonds and enhance librarians' utility in the academy. Overcoming cultural norms will likely remain a long-term challenge. The ultimate goal should be for librarians to commit to building trusting environments conducive to the establishment of substantive collaborations and partnerships that only grow and strengthen over time. Phelps and Campbell described three contributors that lead to trust and commitment in faculty-librarian relationships: perceived benefits of the relationship (i.e., the positive effect of working together on student learning), shared values/goals, and strong communication. Collaboration can only be sustained by "mutual appreciation of how interdependent activities impact the partnership."⁸

Conclusion

The current research aimed to study disciplinary faculty members' perceptions of librarians across four higher education institutions. We hoped specifically to identify factors (e.g., faculty status for librarians) associated with (a) closer faculty-librarian relationships; and (b) improvements in perceptions of librarians' teaching, research, and service roles in the academy. Based on the data, we found no noticeable differences in overall perceptions

of librarians in institutions that unambiguously grant and do not grant librarians faculty status. Faculty who frequently interacted with librarians were both more aware of librarians' status and perceived closer relationships. Respondents affiliated with Gettysburg, far and away the smallest of the institutions surveyed, both interacted with librarians at the highest rate (58% did so *at least* monthly) and perceived the closest connections (41% maintained close/trusting relationships) with local librarians. The survey revealed, however, that faculty status afforded librarians greater visibility on campuses at which they could participate in shared governance (e.g., faculty senate). Librarians' participation in campus governance at TCNJ particularly but also at Indiana Bloomington and to a lesser extent Gettysburg faculty clearly recognized and appreciated. Faculty across institutions perceived librarians as having been less relevant in assisting their own teaching and research as compared with librarians' institution-wide importance in those roles.

The study revealed much needed up-to-date information about disciplinary faculty members' perceptions of librarians and the services offered by librarians. Results can be used to promote faculty-librarian relations, whether local librarians hold faculty status or not. Survey data can also inform the ongoing debate about the value of faculty status for librarians. Most importantly, the data suggest that librarians who are thoroughly integrated into the academic lives of their campuses are empowered to further any college or university's two primary missions: teaching and research.

Endnotes

1. Quinn Galbraith, Melissa Garrison, and Whitney Hales, "Perceptions of Faculty Status among Academic Librarians," *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 5 (2016): 582-93.
2. Chris Lewis, "Academic Librarian Status," last updated March 22, 2018, accessed November 15, 2016, <https://academiclibrarianstatus.wordpress.com/> (website). The investigators, in addition, employed their own knowledge and contacts to confirm the academic status of librarians at the four selected institutions.
3. "Association of College & Research Libraries Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians," Association of College and Research Libraries, accessed March 7, 2018. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/jointstatementfaculty>.
4. The investigators invited every second faculty member listed on the universities' departmental websites to participate in the study. For any faculty member whose email address was not available or who was listed as being on sabbatical the survey the investigators simply selected (to receive an invitation) the next faculty member on the list.
5. Respondents selected any or all of the following answers could also write in a response: (a) Work with librarians to request books, journals or databases for the Library to support teaching, learning and research (i.e., collection development); (b) Librarians assist me or my students with research; (c) Request in-class library instruction/workshops; (d) Librarians help me keep up-to-date with information in my field; (e) Campus-wide governance (e.g., Faculty Senate); (f) Digital services (e.g., data curation, data visualization, digital repository, text mining, etc.); (g) Faculty departmental meetings; (h) Research/teaching collaborations; and (i) Work and/or private social functions.
6. Larry R. Oberg, Mary Kay Schleifer, and Michael Van Houten, "Faculty Perceptions of Librarians at Albion College: Status, Role, Contribution, and Contacts," *College & Research Libraries*, 50 (1989): 215-230; Ada M. Ducas and Nicole Michaud-Oystryk, "Toward a New Enterprise: Capitalizing on the Faculty-Librarian Partnership," *College & Research Libraries*, 60, no. 1 (2003): 55-74; Gaby Divay, Ada M. Ducas, and Nicole Michaud-Oystryk, "Faculty Perceptions of Librarians at the University of Manitoba," *College & Research Libraries*, 48 (1987): 27-35.
7. Lars Christiansen, Mindy Stompler, and Lyn Thaxton, "A Report on Librarian-Faculty Relations from a Sociological Perspective," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 30, no. 2 (2004): 118.
8. Sue F. Phelps and Nicole Campbell, "Commitment and Trust in Library-Faculty Relationships: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 38, no. 1 (2012): 16.