Introduction

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Labor in academic libraries has reemerged as an area of critical interest in both academic library and archives communities. Librarians and archivists have long worked to counter the diminishment of their labor within an academy that centers the concerns of disciplinary faculty who may, in turn, see knowledge workers as a footnote to the scholarly enterprise. Recent years have seen a renewed attention to the social and economic conditions of our work, as researchers turned to topics such as affective labor in libraries and archives, attitudes toward labor unions, and information work under capitalism (Sloniowski 2016; Mills and McCullough 2018; Burns 2018). As the landscape of higher education changes dramatically after decades of reduced public investment, rising tuition, and an explosion of student loan debt, colleges and universities have sought to streamline, downgrade, and outsource labor. Workers have in turn fought back by organizing, withholding their labor, and articulating new visions of the academy and the academic workplace.

To that end, we sought to collect new scholarship reflecting the broad range of issues facing information workers in the academic setting. From professional status and credentialing to emotional labor and discrimination, we saw a need for a thorough assessment of the conditions of labor in the contested terrain of libraries and higher education. The editors of this collection come to this topic as academic librarians, labor activists, and educators who have worked as union organizers, officers, staff, and rank-and-file, and as information workers in the labor movement.

Library workers' associations have long been riddled with deep-seated tensions between labor and management, unionism and professionalism, that weaken their potential as vehicles for discourse and coordination. It's something of a cliché, but entirely factual, to state that the American Library Association, ostensibly the primary professional organization for librarians, is an association organized for *libraries* and not the *librarians*

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or *library workers* who staff them. As academic librarians involved across the organization, including with the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) division, we are well aware of the lack of a forum for conversations about the profession. At the 2017 ACRL conference, when Drabinski and Shirazi presented on the feminization of librarianship, they were dismayed to find that among the available session "tags" there was no suitable category to discuss the work of librarianship. Geraci has organized labor-oriented programming at ALA Annual for the AFL-CIO/ALA Labor Committee and the ALA-APA Salaries and Status of Library Workers Committee since 2012, resorting to tagging sessions with "career development," "personnel and staffing," "human resources," and "advocacy" in the hopes of surfacing sessions in the conference Scheduler, and often decentering unions, work, and labor in program proposals in order to win limited session space in the shrinking conference footprint. Year after year, there is plenty of room secured for conversations about library administration, management, and leadership—but few spaces for library workers seeking to critically examine libraries as a site of our own labor.

There have been promising developments in this area as library workers begin to form new structures for facilitating these conversations, such as the Digital Library Federation's Working Group on Labor in Digital Libraries, Archives, and Museums. In the announcement for that group, Ruth Tillman, one of the group's organizers, touches on the ways in which examining the issue of labor in libraries can reach beyond our institutional walls: "Where a digital library might contract with a company which exploits the under-compensated labor of incarcerated persons for lower-cost digitization, a state library may be mandated to use such labor and prohibited from making up a difference to minimum wage" (2017). The ability to connect our own workplaces to the broader struggle for social justice is just one step we hope to take through the contributions in this issue.

In moving beyond topical discussions of the workplace from a personnel management perspective, we seek to advance a shared understanding and analysis of library labor from a worker-centered perspective, with the objective of promoting collective organization and analysis independent from library management.

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The articles contained herein continue past conversations in *Library Trends* on work, labor relations and collective bargaining (Chaplan 1976; Thomas 1997; Schmidle 2002; Marshall, Solomon, and Rathbun-Grubb 2009; Marshall, Rathbun-Grubb, et al. 2010), and race and ethnicity (de la Peña McCook 2000; Cooke 2018) in libraries. This special issue represents a small slice of the growing conversation, activity, and knowledge production on work and labor in libraries and academia. "Labor in Academic Libraries"

was interpreted by issue contributors through topical explorations of different aspects of the academic library employment continuum, as an experience of library workers, and as a function of the library organization and parent institution.

We begin by attending to the library as managed institution. Leebaw, Nicholson, and Popowich each deploy theoretical frameworks from outside LIS scholarship to examine the library as an organization that manages and employs workers in contemporary society. Leebaw asks us to apply a critical management studies approach to strategic planning; can we reimagine this staple of library management practice into a more participatory, worker-oriented activity? Drawing on notions of "time as power," Nicholson considers the work of instruction librarians through the frame of accelerated time in the neoliberal university, while Popowich brings Autonomist Marxist theories of immaterial labor to bear on information work and the restructuring of labor processes in academic libraries.

Kendrick and Domasco, Lischer-Katz, and Seale and Mirza approach questions of status, access, and retention from an experiential lens and consider pathways and barriers for current and prospective professionals within academic libraries. Extending Kendrick's previous study on low morale in academic libraries (2017), Kendrick and Domasco investigate the impact factors and enabling systems that characterize the low-morale experiences of minority librarians in academic libraries. Lischer-Katz addresses the issue of invisibility by examining the practice of digitization by media preservationists, while Seale and Mirza theorize prestige and professionalization through the gendered history of librarianship.

Applegate and Hartnett et al. return to the contentiously familiar terrain of librarian status within the university and academia, prompting us to consider what material gains can be won through titles and faculty status. Are we setting our sights on the right goal when we strive for "equity" with classroom faculty? Stringer-Stanback deploys an auto-ethnographic approach to examining structural barriers to library employment by institutions complicit in slavery and oppression, raising questions of restitution and justice in library recruitment and LIS culture.

We close with a discussion of venues and vehicles for organizing through firsthand analysis from McElroy on organizing for Oregon State University's new faculty union, and Phillips et al. on the University of California's latest contract campaign. Both works address issues of collaboration with allied academic workers, and institutional and occupational cultures that inhibit library worker identification with unions and solidaristic action on the library shop floor.

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This issue arrives at an auspicious time for libraries and for the labor movement. As we began discussing the need for this issue in 2016, the future of

each felt grim. The installation of the Trump presidency was a culminating moment in a right wing turn in United States politics, one intentionally draining funding and support away from public goods like libraries at the same time that it attacks working people who need public resources more than ever. In the lead up to the U.S. Supreme Court's *Janus v. AFSCME* decision on agency fees in public sector unions, many in the labor movement feared labor's final demise after decades of plummeting union density in the private sector.

But as they say in the labor movement, management is the best organizer. The arrival of Trump coincided with growing resistance originating in the Wisconsin labor protests, Occupy, and Black Lives Matter uprisings, and intensified by increasingly untenable conditions in K-12 workplaces and reanimated public sector organizing to maintain membership. As submission deadlines for this issue passed, notifications sent, and reviews solicited, received, and incorporated, we witnessed an explosion of union activity in the education sector (Shoot 2019). West Virginia watched its K-12 teachers walk off the job, shutting down 680 schools across the state for nine days. The months that followed saw teacher strikes in Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and California, many of them "wildcat" actions organized and carried out independently from union and professional association leadership.

Labor activity in higher education is similarly growing and intensifying (Herbert 2017). Adjunct faculty and graduate student workers are organizing new unions and winning elections, especially in the private sector. In states with high union density or established bargaining units, movements are becoming more militant. In 2016, after seven years without a negotiated contract, 92 percent of union members at the City University of New York voted to authorize a strike despite prohibition of public employee strikes by New York state's Taylor Law. While the union ultimately ratified a contract, staving off a strike, mobilizing work continued. As this issue goes to press, some faculty at CUNY are pushing for "7K or strike," placing this weapon at the center of their campaign for a new contract. In early 2019, faculty at Wright State University walked off the job in the wake of an imposed contract, a twenty-day work action that was the second longest strike in the history of higher education. New faculty unions were established at Oregon State University (as described by Kelly McElroy in these pages), adjunct faculty at Temple University ratified their first contract, graduate students at University of Illinois–Chicago struck for two weeks and returned with significant jumps in pay and decreases in health care costs. Full-time faculty at Rutgers, under threat of strike, successfully secured a new contract that included contractual pay equity for white women and faculty of color, and then immediately began solidarity actions on behalf of part-time faculty.

Librarians were at the center of multiple recent labor struggles, including

the lockout of faculty at Long Island University, Brooklyn, in September 2016 and at the Westland Public Library, where workers fired in the wake of an organizing struggle fought successfully to oust management and reclaim their jobs. As attacks in the ongoing class war against worker rights continue to emanate from state legislatures, and the Supreme Court and the Trump administration gut worker protections around overtime pay and wage theft, the call to organize now overpowers the conciliatory voices that once dominated labor's long decline.

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In this effort to build a worker-centered movement in academic libraries, we face a critical challenge: our collective perception of management as benevolent colleagues (or as representations of our current and future selves), who mean well but are simply hamstrung by externalities (austerity budgets, university policies, grant-funding limitations, capricious vendors). In the spirit of collegiality and collaboration, we are urged to view precarity as an issue of invisibility, and be satisfied by mere attribution and recognition of our intellectual contributions as if it could compensate for short-term contracts and lack of health insurance. We see an increased attention to expansive definitions of care work that reify library work as outside capitalist modes of relations and production despite our complicity in maintaining, reproducing, and promoting them. We contend that the extractive systems under which we labor are exploitative *by design* and that it is our responsibility to identify the beneficiaries of these conditions and locate ourselves as comrades in a mutual fight against those forces. And that means *against management.*

Those who decry such agitation as too divisive are advocating for a false neutrality under the guise of collegiality. To be collegial is to work cooperatively with our colleagues, but as Desmond Tutu reminds us, to be neutral in the face of injustice is to be on the side of the oppressor. The pressure to sacrifice each other and ourselves as laborers to satisfy the demands of our institutions speaks to our fundamental misunderstanding of the stakes of this political moment. As academic librarians, when we allow ourselves to be exploited as workers, we are enabling a transformation of higher education that is in direct opposition to our professional values. If we are serious about supporting students, dismantling social inequity, and broadening access to information while protecting patron privacy in the age of surveillance capitalism, we must fight back when our colleges and universities cut faculty lines and entire academic departments (Dutt-Ballerstadt 2019), refuse to recognize or bargain with staff unions (Kroeger et al. 2019), and compensate senior administrators like corporate CEOs (AAUP 2019). These are necessarily risky positions to take, but it is only when the veil of benevolence is lifted that the structural conditions are revealed.

As we move through this contentious moment, we will find structural

solutions to structural problems of labor in academic libraries by joining with workers within and outside of the academy, in strategizing together and sharing information, tactics, and inspiration across industries and workplaces. We recognize that solidarity is not altruism; it is a calculation of how to build power and win, and an understanding that together we are stronger because there are more of us than there are of them. As knowledge workers, the stakes of our fight are higher than our interpersonal interactions, but we must embody our values and enact them in our individual worlds as we work to remake the systems and structures that produce the conditions of life.

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