

Once You Get Tenure, You're on Your Own: Mentoring and Career Support for Mid-Career Academic Librarians

Jennie Gerke, Juliann Couture, and Jennifer Knievel

Little research exists that evaluates the existence and importance of mentoring for academic librarians with faculty status who have already achieved tenure but have not yet been promoted to a more senior rank, such as full professor or full librarian. This study represents the second of a two-part research project seeking to better understand the existence and accessibility of mentoring, career planning, and other supports for mid-career, tenure-track librarians. The authors conducted seventeen structured interviews with individual librarians who were at associate or full professor/librarian rank with tenure in order to gain insights into these questions. Analysis of the interviews identified several areas of support and guidance that are of particular importance for promotion and career growth for mid-career academic librarians: Criteria, Mentoring, Process, and Responsibilities.

Introduction

The importance of mentoring for the success of academic faculty and librarians has been widely demonstrated, mostly focused on early career success and tenure-track faculty.¹ Librarians inhabit many different roles and ranks within the academy, and institutions of comparable size and focus do not necessarily place librarians in the same place in their hierarchies.² Tenure-track faculty positions are not inherently superior or inferior to non-tenure-track faculty positions or staff positions for librarians. Regardless of their job classification, librarian positions often come with dramatically different sets of expectations and criteria for success. Due to these drastic differences, tenure-track librarians face particular barriers to success in this type of role. The authors sought to better understand the existence and accessibility of mentoring, career planning, and other supports for mid-career librarians. Additionally, the authors sought to better understand how mentoring and other career supports influenced the promotion and career growth of mid-career librarians. Mentoring and career support take many different forms and might include both formal and informal mentoring, official and unofficial professional support, and coaching for career planning and professional development. This study represents the

**Jennie Gerke is the Associate Dean of Success and Engagement Strategies and Associate Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, email: jennie.gerke@colorado.edu; Juliann Couture is the Director of Research & Collections Engagement at the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, email: juliann.couture@colorado.edu; Jennifer Knievel is the Instructional Designer at Ball Corporation, email jennifer.knievel@ball.com. ©2023 Jennie Gerke, Juliann Couture, and Jennifer Knievel, Attribution-NonCommercial (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) CC BY-NC.*

second of a two-part research project seeking to gain insight into the questions of mentoring and career support for mid-career librarians.

The first part, reported in Couture et al., described the responses to a targeted survey delivered to mid-career librarians, investigating their access to mentoring and career planning, as well as their intentions for seeking additional promotion.³ That study found that mentoring became significantly less available to librarians after tenure, but that those librarians still felt the need for mentoring. Librarians reported substantial changes to their workloads, expectations, and Ross post-tenure career directions. The survey also measured factors influencing whether librarians were seeking further promotion. Those factors fell into the categories of financial, political, workload, work/life balance, and procedure/process. The survey identified relationships between the availability of mentoring and individuals' intention to pursue promotion, identified that unclear promotion guidelines have a depressive effect on librarians' intentions to seek promotion, and suggested that men are slightly more likely than women to pursue promotion.

This study represents a follow-up analysis related to the initial survey, in which the authors conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews of survey participants in order to more deeply understand the factors influencing promotion for mid-career librarians. In these interviews, participants discussed their professional experiences and access to mentoring or other kinds of post-tenure professional support. Four primary themes arose from these interviews: Criteria, Mentoring, Process, and Responsibilities.

Literature Review

There is a wealth of literature documenting mentoring programs in academic libraries and their importance for the acculturation and development of early career librarians.⁴ These programs often follow the typical junior-senior dyad mentoring model, but others have described varied approaches such as team mentoring and peer mentoring.⁵ Most mentoring programs in libraries are targeted specifically toward new librarians.⁶ These programs most often focus on providing early-career guidance and training to new librarians, or on shepherding librarians through the tenure process.⁷ In the literature, there is a noticeable gap in mentoring support for post-tenure, mid-career librarians, who frequently need to navigate increased workload expectations, work-life balance challenges, leadership development, and career planning.

Beyond libraries, mentoring is widely recognized as an essential part of success in academia.⁸ Mentoring not only bolsters the success of the individual being mentored but also improves the engagement of the mentors.⁹ Structured mentoring programs improve diversity, especially when those programs are designed from the perspective of supporting and welcoming all participants, rather than focusing on a deficiency narrative among one's under-represented faculty and librarians.¹⁰ Most formal structures for mentoring, focused as they frequently are on the achievement of tenure, are then withdrawn upon promotion, leaving little guidance for navigating the different challenges of the post-tenure stage of one's career.¹¹

Mentoring networks can contribute to career success and satisfaction, but without the scaffolding provided by mentoring programs might be harder to establish.¹² Social persuasion, while effective at encouraging individuals to apply for promotion, is unfortunately a system known to be fraught with bias, making such networks, even when well-intentioned, problematic.¹³ Mentoring also has an influence on the demographics of leadership in academic libraries. While it is not a secret that the profession of librarianship is profoundly dominated by

white women, leadership positions are more likely to be held by men, and the representation of people of color in leadership positions is even worse than in the rest of the profession.¹⁴ A high rate of retirements continues to drive high turnover at senior leadership positions, which often require full professor rank, making the mentoring and promotion of women and people of color even more critically important.¹⁵ The dearth of mentoring toward senior positions for librarians thus potentially contributes to the insufficiency of librarians with high enough rank to fill these leadership positions.

Both formal and informal mentoring support has been identified as beneficial for success for women and BIPOC librarians. For librarians of color, being partnered with other librarians of color and having cohorts of peers of color reduced isolation and gave space for advice on navigating professional abuse and neglect.¹⁶ The obstacles faced by librarians of color can be systemic, and are consistently more acute than the obstacles faced by their white counterparts.¹⁷ Academic librarians across ranks reported having access to leadership programs and trainings, but minimal access to support networks such as formal and informal mentors to navigate difficult work situations or get guidance on advancement opportunities.¹⁸

Increasingly there has been attention devoted to the gender disparities in promotion rates.¹⁹ Geisler et al. found that women were 2.3 times less likely to be promoted than men.²⁰ Women are more likely than men to feel isolated, less likely to have mentors, and more likely to leave their institutions.²¹ Women with children are less likely to get tenure, and more likely to devote their time to service and “care” work such as committee assignments, advising, and mentoring of students.²² O’Meara and Stromquist highlight the various barriers to promotion for women faculty and document the value of peer networks to increasing women’s sense of agency post tenure.²³ Promotion is often influenced by an individual’s sense of agency.²⁴ Terosky et al. examined how women associate professors were influenced in their decisions to apply for promotion to full professor. They explored what would help mitigate those factors, including institutional interventions, self-selected support networks, and perceptions of ability.²⁵

Recently, the literature has delved deeper into what barriers exist for promotion to full professor and other leadership opportunities. In these studies, common themes emerge: lack of clear criteria and process, increased service and teaching workloads, gendered expectations that inhibit dedicated time and resources for research, and absence of mentoring and post-tenure career planning.²⁶ For academic librarians, similar factors have proved to be barriers to promotion to full professor and to pursuing leadership opportunities.²⁷ Recommendations to improve rates of promotion include crafting clear criteria and procedures, and increasing mentoring and support networks.²⁸ Additionally, implementing regular reviews to assess workloads and progress towards promotion have positive impacts on promotion rates.²⁹ Part 1 of this study includes an extensive discussion of relevant literature summarized in this section.³⁰

Method

The authors identified a dataset of tenured academic librarians at public R1 institutions, since those institutions are more likely than private institutions to offer tenure to librarians.³¹ When the data were collected in 2017, the authors identified forty public R1 institutions that tenure their librarians (see appendix A). After securing IRB approval, the authors identified specific individuals with tenure at each institution, for a total of 1,009 individual librarians. Each individual was sent a personalized invitation to complete a survey about mid-career mentoring, career planning, and professional development. Of those invited, 387 individuals

completed the survey for an overall response rate of 38 percent. The final question of the survey invited respondents to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews, which compose the dataset used in this article. Of the 387 survey respondents, 171 volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews, for a volunteer rate of 44 percent of the survey respondents, or 6 percent of the entire initial sample.

After reviewing the data from the survey, the authors identified a number of areas where in-depth conversations would help provide a clearer picture of the factors influencing promotion for mid-career librarians. While the authors started this research with a focus on mentoring, the survey hinted at other possible drivers that might be influencing promotion. These findings drove the development of a list of guiding questions for each interview (See appendix B). The questions were not necessarily asked exactly as written, nor in the order that they appear in the appendix, but rather the content of the conversation drove the direction, and the guiding questions acted as prompts for the authors to encourage participants to address particular areas of interest to the researchers. Generally, the interviews asked participants about

- their overall career plans;
- the support and guidance they had received or were still receiving after achieving tenure;
- their portfolio of service and research commitments and how they related to those same portfolios before tenure;
- their mentoring experiences with both individual mentors and group programs, either formal or informal;
- the barriers to promotion they had seen or experienced;
- their desire for mentoring.

The authors invited all 171 self-identified survey respondents to sign up for one of ten individual, semi-structured interviews. After the initial round of interviews, the authors assessed the ranks and institutions of all participants who had completed an interview session. Finding that associate professors and some institutions were well represented, the authors then reviewed the list of remaining survey respondents to identify full professors, members of institutions with particularly rigorous criteria (as identified by earlier survey responses), and members of institutions who did not already have an interviewee signed up.

Through multiple rounds of solicitation, a total of seventeen individuals participated in semi-structured interviews. Existing research supports the approach of using a data set of this size for this type of qualitative research.³² This research approach serves to add depth and nuance to individuals' responses about mentoring and promotion in ways that a large-scale survey cannot. While it is not necessarily the case that these individuals are representative of the field as a whole, this approach provides insight into individual experience and identifies potentially broader implications for the field at large to consider, whether librarians at any particular institution are tenure-track or not. These discoveries, when situated within the broader context of research about these populations in academia, contribute to a picture of how librarians differ from, or are similar to, other academic groups. Qualitative assessments like structured interviews illuminate areas in which the profession can improve to ensure mid-career librarians are receiving the support and growth they need.

The authors conducted a total of seventeen semi-structured interviews over a period of two months with a set of tenured librarians representing a variety of ranks and institutions. The researchers collected the rank of each participant, as well as their pronouns. The initial study sample included such a small percentage of librarians of color that their responses could not

be separated as statistically significant. Therefore, the authors did not request racial identity for the interviewees. In some cases, during the interview the participants voluntarily disclosed their race in the context of their responses. Gender identities described below were inferred from the pronouns. If no pronouns were provided, the authors did not assume an identity (see figure 1). Roughly two-thirds of the participants were associate professors or a comparable rank, and the remaining one-third were full professors or a comparable rank (see figure 2).

The authors kept notes during the discussions. Additionally, each interview was recorded and then transcribed. Using the collected transcripts, the authors conducted topic modelling analysis.³³

Topic modeling examines a corpus of text, in this case the interview transcripts, for terms that occur near each other frequently. This topic modeling provided a framework for the qualitative codebook the authors developed to analyze the interviews. The authors added to this codebook the overall themes they had noticed while conducting the interviews and reviewing the transcripts.³⁴ Using the codebook, at least two of the authors coded each transcript for the presence of the identified concepts. The resulting coded transcripts were analyzed using software designed for this purpose in order to establish the relationships among the various themes in and across the interviews. Data analysis of the transcripts showed that the three highest occurring codes were "process," "mentoring," and "criteria." Analysis also indicated high co-occurrence of these codes with "absence," "promotion," "full," "post-tenure," and "pre-tenure."

The authors then reviewed each transcript to further understand the occurrences of these codes.

Results

This deeper content analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four major themes that appeared across the interviews: Criteria; Mentoring/Support Structures; Process; and Responsibilities. While there is considerable overlap among all these themes, they each merit separate discussion.

FIGURE 1
Gender of Respondents

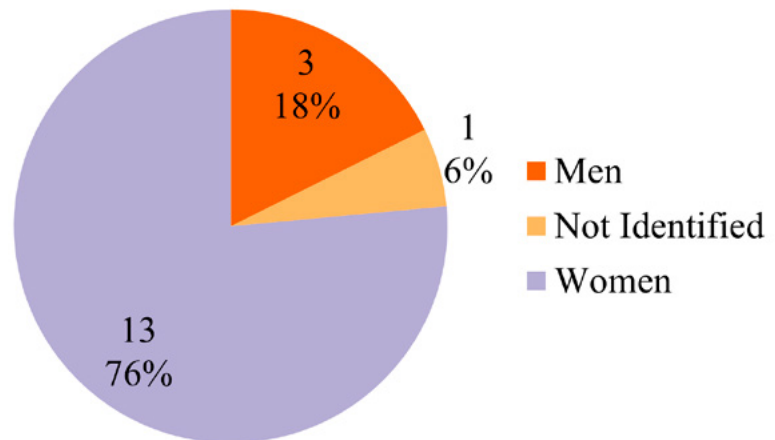
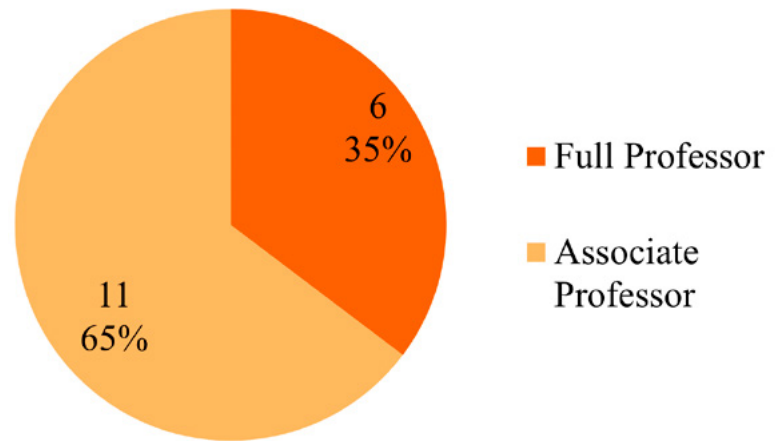


FIGURE 2
Rank of Respondents



Criteria

Regarding the theme examining the criteria employed at candidate's institutions for promotion to full professor, interviewees frequently noted that their institutions had engaged in substantial effort to clarify criteria for librarians to achieve tenure, but that rarely had criteria for promotion to full professor received similar attention or clarification. One woman associate professor described their institution this way: "...it was pretty laid out for assistant to associate and what you needed to get tenure. But then going up from associate to full was less laid out." In some institutions it was even worse, with librarians describing criteria that were either non-existent, circular, vague, or ignored. These concerns can be summarized by comments such as one woman associate professor's description: "I believe there's some vague language about demonstrating increasing responsibility and increasing impact in the field, but there aren't any specifics." Another woman associate professor added that "We don't have a clear sense, especially for specialists, like in my unit, how people are evaluated." One woman associate professor described the references leading to nothing: "It just says, follow the university guidelines, which say we follow the department guidelines." A woman associate professor pointed out that the existing full librarians were simply ignoring the criteria: "This may seem like a simple thing, but I wish they would read the guidelines we're going up under."

Librarians often believed that the paths to promotion to full professor were known only to a few, or worse, open only to a few for reasons of popularity rather than performance. For example, one male full professor described a system that demonstrated unfairness: "A colleague of mine did not receive [tenure] because she refused to be in the department's play and the department's rock band... Really." Another woman associate professor observed, "Here it seems like getting promoted to full is very much a popularity thing and so it's more personal than professional." Or a woman associate professor who said that "The associate to full feels much more arbitrary and political." One woman full professor suggested that some librarians plan their promotions around avoiding the perceived unfairness of the process: "She has never liked me. I mean, every meeting we're in, she takes my ideas and all of a sudden, they're hers, and I just do not like working with her, but I have to, and the last thing I want is her reviewing me. When is she retiring?" Some of these experiences go beyond problematic or even unethical into the realm of illegal, such as the rock band example.

The particular challenges faced by women and people of color regarding the criteria for promotion were also evident in the interviews. One woman full professor pointed out the way race contributed to the stress of review: "So, it's pretty white here, so I don't think my colleagues feel, probably, the anxiety that I felt. I don't think that was an issue for them." Another woman associate professor called out the role of gender in their perception of the criteria: "It's kind of seen as an exclusive club that it feels like they don't want anybody else to enter... This last year, three new librarians went up for full and received it, and I feel comfortable asking them because it was a male dominated group, and now we have a few more women to it." One man full professor pointed to the sense that promotion was more about admittance to a club than about one's work: "[There was a] so-called old guard, or committee of five, that basically had life and death control over new faculty members. And if you didn't see things their way, they would not vote for you on promotion."

Interviewees frequently described the criteria as unwritten but expressed they had heard informally about how things really work, such as this comment from a woman associate professor: "There are not [clear criteria]. It's just rumors and the experience." One woman associate

professor specifically addressed the unwritten secret components of their criteria this way: "the collegiality was because, you know, the cultural norms were different in interaction... Collegiality is not—it definitely is not written down. But everybody knows it's there. It's the white elephant in the room, basically."

The authors noted that participants described substantial inconsistencies across institutions about what kinds of productivity are required for promotion. One woman associate professor pointed out this difficulty in the context of identifying appropriate external reviewers for promotion cases, who would apply the appropriate criteria in their evaluations: "I found, in talking to my colleagues, that their systems are pretty different from ours. So, I think it's kind of difficult to translate their criteria or the expectations that they have into our system." Some institutions required a significant record of peer-reviewed publications or a book, some required high levels of professional service, but not necessarily publication, while others required time- and fiscally-intensive professional development such as additional graduate degrees. One woman associate professor described their library's promotion structure this way: "To get to a III, you have to have... 24 post-baccalaureate credits, but the IV requires the second master's... and also leadership. You have to demonstrate leadership in the field in order to be promoted to that level." Some institutions required that librarians pursue additional post-tenure promotion in order to assume leadership positions, and others did not. These differences across institutions often make transferring among institutions challenging for librarians seeking new positions.

Process

This category included observations from the interviewees about the clarity, existence, or effectiveness of the processes in place for promotion to full professor. Some described a fairly clear process, such as in this comment from a woman associate professor: "The personnel committee is required to notify everybody who's eligible of that opportunity, and you have to respond in writing by a certain date whether you are planning to or not." Or another woman full professor said that "You either need to be nominated by a full professor or you can self-nominate, and our policy states you can ask to be reviewed every three years." In many cases, respondents reported opaque processes that individuals interested in promotion could not understand, or processes that were haphazard or ad hoc, rather than consistent or documented. One full professor described an expectation of informally surveying the senior librarians before seeking promotion: "If...you wanted to go from associate to full...you would go around and ask all the people at that higher rank...what they thought about it."

Librarians described networks of social persuasion, by which individuals are identified through some unknown process as being "ready" for promotion, and then encouraged to apply. For example, one man associate professor described the process at their institution this way: "Our process is that the associate dean would identify that you would put forward your dossier. You cannot self-identify and put forth your dossier for promotion to full rank. It has to initiate [from] library administration." Another woman full professor described social persuasion from the full professors: "We encourage them [tenured librarians] to come and talk to us, to set up meetings with us.... So, they have to self-identify, but we again, we encourage folks who are associates to—we remind them that, hey, we could use a few more of you, we would like to see your materials." Social persuasion, while effective at encouraging individuals to apply for promotion, is unfortunately a system known to be fraught with

bias, making such networks, even when well-intentioned, problematic. One woman associate professor described the mixed messaging of social persuasion: "Sometimes we're encouraged to go up and then other times, it's just you don't have enough, and it feels like you'll never have enough."

In the cases where the process was known but was formalized social persuasion, the nature of the process remained unclear or suspicious to candidates. One woman associate professor expressed this suspicion: "I sometimes have suspected that the university librarian may have voted against people because she didn't want to have to deal with their pay raises." In some circumstances, a subtext of the wishes of the dean of the library underlaid the comments of participants. One man full professor described their dean's influence in this way: "When our former Dean was here, there was a sense among a lot of the faculty that oh, she had to sort of anoint you in order for you to be able to make it." Respondents sometimes reported that the dean did not support tenure for librarians or did not wish for librarians to seek promotion to full professor. For example, according to one woman associate professor, "...it seems to me that they should want to increase the ranks of higher-ranking librarians, but that doesn't seem to be the case." Another woman associate professor explained that "we have an administration in the library that really doesn't like the faculty status that librarians have here." Other respondents described their deans as encouraging more promotions in order to increase the ranks of senior level librarians. This subtext of the wishes of the deans appeared to then influence the process by which promotions were handled in the institution, as well as the interest of individuals in pursuing promotion. One recently tenured woman associate professor explained that they wanted to pursue promotion but had been discouraged: "There's some pretty strong resistance at my institution to... [seeking promotion] in any kind of timely fashion. I think they suggested a minimum of five years. I meet the standards right now."

Mentoring/Support Structures

This category included comments related to the mentoring programs available, in addition to related support structures that might improve the opportunities available for individuals to pursue promotion. The question of racial diversity, in particular, is an acute challenge of academic librarianship, as described by one woman full professor: "I like my colleagues, but there are some days when I don't see anybody who looks like me unless I go to the bathroom and look in the mirror." Existing research suggests that lack of diversity is a pervasive problem both in the field of librarianship specifically, as well as at senior ranks in academia generally.³⁵ These kinds of sentiments among BIPOC librarians, and the centering of whiteness that create them, are widespread in the profession.³⁶

The authors asked participants about the availability of post-tenure mentoring at their libraries and universities. Even in cases where promotion is desirable, support is not always available. As one woman associate professor explained: "There is some interest on the campus level to move people towards full professor but not in a particularly structured way and it tends to be abdicated to figure it out." But as another woman associate professor put it: "Just because you have promotion in tenure doesn't mean that you don't need to continue being mentored." Our respondents reinforced the understanding that upon receipt of tenure formal mentoring was withdrawn. One woman associate professor described previous efforts to analyze the availability of support for mid-career librarians: "I did a survey of ARL libraries about supports they have for...senior librarians. And there are very few formal supports out

there." Participants, in most cases, commented that even if their institution offered a robust, structured mentoring program for new librarians, in almost all cases formal mentoring was withdrawn at the time of tenure. As one man full professor observed: "But once you get to associate, everybody's just kind of on their own. And I think that's really a lot of people then don't really have the confidence or know where they stand, and people just tend to kind of coast along. And I don't think that's a good thing for their careers. It's not a good thing for the libraries." One woman full professor stated that "We have a formal program for pre-tenure faculty, but once you hit associate you're on your own." Others described similar situations at their institutions. A woman associate professor said that "I think most of it is there's this mindset that oh, you know, you've already achieved tenure, then, you know, you don't really need to have someone to work with you or help you." Or another woman associate professor said, "We prepare people to go up for tenure very well. Better than most, and have for many years, but the promotion thing is a completely different story."

While some librarians noted that their mentoring relationships continued after tenure, in those cases the mentoring relationships typically had been established before tenure and persisted afterward, or were simply good fortune in hierarchical relationships. As one woman associate professor mentioned: "I have been fortunate to have a great supervisor." A man associate professor reported a good mentoring relationship that ended due to a retirement: "I no longer have a formal mentor. You know, when I was pre-tenure, I had a formal mentor. They retired. I was told that if I wanted someone to mentor for full it would happen only the year I was asked to go up." Very few participants reported access to formal or structured mentoring either in their library or provided by their campus. One woman associate professor explained that "right now we don't have any [mentoring] formal or really informal even." One woman full professor described an informal peer mentoring network: "The associate professors have an unofficial mentoring group going on." One woman associate professor described the way the absence of mentoring resulted in an absence of career planning and direction: "the people who got associate professor aren't necessarily thinking about the future."

Particularly shocking were the reports from many participants that their workplace culture discouraged or prohibited them from taking advantage of support that is designed to improve one's readiness for promotion or did not integrate time for research and scholarly pursuits into regular workloads. A woman associate professor described an unused policy of dedicated research time: "I have not really had a lot of chance to do research.... Even though the library has a policy of, you are allowed to take ten percent of your time to apply it to research." Another woman associate professor wasn't even sure what their options were: "I'm honestly not sure if we're eligible [for sabbatical]." Many librarians reported that while they are eligible for sabbatical leave, in their culture sabbaticals are simply not taken. A woman associate professor explained, "I have heard them joke about [taking a sabbatical], but I have never heard anybody seriously go for it. To test whether it would be acceptable." Another full professor explained that "maybe in the last four years, I'm not aware of anybody who's done one. Even though we have enough people that certainly some of them [are eligible]." A man full professor described an environment where sabbatical is rare: "We are eligible for sabbaticals. People don't take them as much and it's not like every seven years, like it is with the teaching research faculty." One woman associate professor described guilt as the primary motivator for foregoing sabbatical: "In the library, the culture here is such that [sabbatical is] certainly not a given. We all feel a little guilty about forcing our colleagues to take on our day-to-day

during our absence.” That same participant went on to explain that this guilty response was actively encouraged by the administration: “The message that we got about... the deadlines for sabbatical, within that message, it said, ‘These will be looked at very carefully given our staffing shortages, and you can’t expect other people to cover’... It was a very discouraging message.” Respondents who reported not taking sabbaticals or dedicated research time generally described environments where using these supports were frowned on because of the burden it placed on others, the focus it took away from librarianship responsibilities, or the assumption that research is something one conducts on personal time. In many cases, access to sabbatical and research time was a faculty-wide benefit, but because the roles of librarians are often structured very differently from instructional faculty, these benefits were considered inappropriate for librarians to employ.

Access to sufficient time for producing research is one of the main barriers to promotion, and sabbatical is a potentially fruitful way to overcome this barrier. Sabbaticals are often used to focus on research and publication, and respondents who specified having taken sabbatical typically had spent it that way. This was evidenced by the participants who commented on the influence of sabbatical on their timing for pursuing promotion. One woman associate professor explained that “after sabbatical, I can come back, start working on my packet, and submit it in the fall.” Or another woman associate professor described the difficulty of producing research: “I would say it’s mainly because we don’t have any release time to do research. So, unless you can do it while you’re on sabbatical, it’s really hard to make the time to do it.” A woman full professor reported that her institution recognized the importance of sabbatical and supported it: “People do take sabbaticals and they really lead to productive work and that leads to promotions. We highly encourage faculty members to take a sabbatical.” Another woman full professor reported that “I did the sabbatical, and then I wanted to go up for full.” Given this influence, the cultural pressure for librarians to forego sabbatical leave is highly problematic.

Some respondents indicated that in an effort to support untenured librarians, their organizations instituted policies restricting travel or professional development funding for tenured librarians, requiring them to pay out of pocket to present at or attend conferences. One woman associate professor said, for example: “Going from assistant to associate and getting tenure is very formal. It’s a very formal mentorship program, and there’s a lot of things they get—like at that level they get more travel support, ‘cause they’re at the lower salary level, but they have to do this. After that...there really isn’t any kind of formal program for going forward.” Another woman associate professor explained their travel support similarly: “You get less money once you get promoted. And you get tenure, then you get less money reimbursed to attend those conferences.”

Responsibilities

This category included comments about individual librarians’ workloads and professional expectations. Participants routinely described research and publication, which is typically required for promotion to full professor, as work that is extra, additional, or not considered part of their “real” job. That perspective was inherent in several comments from participants. One woman associate professor said that “Budget cuts or flat budgets, leaving all of us doing more with less does make it hard to carve out the time when we’re in the midst of trying to get our job done to meet all those expectations.” Many described that their workloads were

greatly increased after receiving tenure. As a woman associate professor explained: "My work commitments have changed dramatically [since tenure], so I have not really had a lot of chance to do research." Another woman associate professor described multiple pressures on their workload: "Not just because I received tenure, but family responsibilities, also inheriting [a very large ongoing project], so having increased job duties without additional staffing initially." In some cases, these workload increases were part of a move into a managerial role, which then influenced how they spent their time. One woman associate professor described the need to prioritize professional development as a manager: "You may want to be going to like the ARL Fellows or UCLA Fellows thing, which is a huge time commitment, but that doesn't result in new scholarship."

Respondents reported that once they achieved tenure, they were expected to adopt much higher service loads, in addition to increased responsibilities in librarianship and management. One woman associate professor simply stated, "That service piece right there has definitely ramped up." The authors asked all participants about their distributions of workload among various categories of research, service, librarianship, leadership, etc. Respondent's answers to these questions revealed extremely wide disparities about what kind of work "counts" toward promotional evaluations, which work is expected, and which is considered "extra." Consequently, service was valued very differently in some institutions than in others, and service to the profession or to the institution was also valued differently at different institutions. Service contributions were also valued in inconsistent ways between annual evaluations and promotional evaluations, making it even harder for librarians to determine the best choices for engaging with service. These wide disparities in expectations contribute to a confusing landscape of the value of work across the field, creating hyper-local bubbles that influence the professional choices of mid-career librarians, and possibly limiting their mobility to positions elsewhere.

In some libraries, their organizational practices included actively protecting the time of untenured librarians by assigning higher workloads to tenured librarians. One woman associate professor described her institution's expectations: "It's expected... that you take on a little bit more service and a little bit more leadership, so that then the tenure-track individuals could focus on their publications." Several participants expressed that while the expectations increased, they felt more agency over what research and service they took on in mid-career. One woman associate professor expressed gratitude for being able to abandon an unfulfilling research project: "For me, [tenure] was a pretty awesome moment to recognize that I had more choice in what I did." Another man associate professor described their service participation: "I'd say that I choose my opportunities with more discretion." However, some pointed out that a post-tenure slow down can be detrimental to any future promotions: According to one man full professor, "What I had always heard was as soon as you get continuing status, you can't let off the pedal." Another woman full professor had witnessed the same problem: "People say, 'Oh, I finally got tenure. I finally got promoted to associate professor. Now, I can relax.' Then, they never get back on the treadmill to work toward full professor."

It was extremely common to hear that research and publication were activities that librarians were expected to engage in on their own time rather than at work, where they were expected to devote all of their time to librarianship, management, and service activities. One woman associate professor and manager expressed their concern about the influence of this perspective on the newer librarians: "I have so many early career librarians on my team that

I need to also set a model for that on how to set boundaries, so that they don't burn out." Librarians with non-professional responsibilities outside of work like caregiving, or indeed, with healthy work-life balance, considered it impossible to devote non-work time to research and publication, and therefore felt that further promotion was beyond their capabilities. One woman associate professor described the tension this way: "I will definitely say, yes, as a woman, parenthood, and needing to skedaddle at the end of the day and do other things with my evenings and weekends, I'm not able to throw as much into my job as I was when I was on the tenure-track." That same participant explained that they were using the time they could spend on service to try to improve the demands on caregivers: "Some of my institutional service has been about family-friendly policies; so, again, the timing of my parenthood and how it intersects with the timing of my tenure—those issues became important to me at the post-tenure part of my time here." One woman full professor described, in fact, their lack of work-life balance as key to their ability to succeed: "I don't have kids or a husband or dogs or anybody, so I can work as late as I want. I can stay up as late as I want. I can come in on the weekends if I want to or not, and it just gets done somehow." Since women disproportionately provide primary caregiving responsibilities, the competition of caregiving and work is especially problematic for women, as the recent pandemic has made painfully clear.³⁷

For mid-career librarians without interest in senior level leadership, the phase of their career between achieving tenure and preparing for retirement might still be characterized by changes in workload and expectations as their organizations evolve, changes that may or may not support any one individual's efforts toward promotion to a senior rank.

Implications

The themes brought out by these semi-structured interviews suggest a variety of implications for the field, whether librarians are in tenure-track positions or not. The challenges described above are relevant for mid-career librarians in all job classifications. The absence of criteria for promotion creates obstacles for librarians who might be interested in achieving it. Inconsistencies of criteria across institutions seriously inhibit the mobility of librarians to new positions. This study found extreme differences in what kind and quantity of work were valued for mid-career promotion. Librarians who have been focusing their efforts on success in their current position are likely to find themselves ill-qualified or incorrectly focused to move to a new position in another institution with different and possibly unwritten requirements. As the field experiences a widespread transition in senior leadership, this restriction of mobility and inconsistency of criteria will impede the growth of the field as a whole.

Unclear processes employed by different institutions to identify candidates for promotion, and to handle those promotions when they are attempted, create a ground of instability for librarians. These opaque or inconsistent approaches then risk creating an outsized influence of the opinion of the dean or of a small group of full professors at individual institutions. If the dean is unenthusiastic or ambivalent about the tenure system for librarians generally, promotion processes can become even more opaque, and promotion itself more difficult.

Mentoring for mid-career librarians appears to be extremely rare, despite the clarity across many studies of its importance for career success generally, and for academics specifically. While many robust mentoring programs exist for new librarians, in order to support their continued success similar mentoring should be made available to librarians beyond the tenure review.

Of particular note to the authors was the frequency with which respondents reported that while they technically had access to sabbatical leave, their institutional culture discouraged it so effectively that it was considered unusable. To withhold, via social discouragement, this fundamental benefit to tenured librarians robs the field of the many benefits of sabbatical leave: scholarship, re-energizing of individual faculty, the ability of librarians to seek promotion, even opportunities for colleagues. Additionally, it robs librarians of one of the most tangible advantages of a tenure-track librarian position, since staff and non-tenure-track faculty positions rarely include this benefit. The withholding of sabbatical leave appears to be particularly damaging for individuals who would pursue promotion but cannot produce sufficient scholarship without the leave. This generates additional structural unfairness for librarians compared to their teaching faculty counterparts, who are also more likely to work nine-month rather than twelve-month contracts. These structures inhibit librarians' ability, compared to their faculty peers elsewhere on campus, to produce the kind of work that is expected for promotion and career advancement.

Professional responsibilities also strongly influence the ability and interest of individuals in pursuing promotion. Respondents reported that they are expected to conduct research on their own time, making research unattainable for anyone with substantial responsibilities or interests outside the workplace. This is not a healthy expectation, and academic libraries should identify ways of establishing expectations for both workloads and scholarly productivity that are achievable in a reasonable work week. Library services and research expectations should be scaled to what is achievable.

These collective barriers combine to suggest important implications for the field, beyond the obvious outcome that fewer people will get promoted. While being overrepresented in the field generally, women are underrepresented in academic library leadership.³⁸ Since women are more likely to pursue promotion if they have access to mentoring³⁹ and are more likely to have caregiving or other out-of-work obligations, the existing lack of support and overwork disproportionately reduce the number of women able to pursue promotion, and therefore either willing or qualified to undertake senior leadership. Statistics and previous research all point to these challenges being more acute for BIPOC librarians, and even more so for librarians with intersectional identities.⁴⁰ The experiences expressed here by participants who self-identified as BIPOC add to the multitude of barriers independent of their race or other identity that mid-career librarians face. Respondents in this study shared experiences that suggest a broad pattern of problematic if not outright unethical or illegal choices by members of promotion committees, leaders, or administrators in a variety of contexts. And yet, few respondents described reporting this behavior to their local or campus offices designed to protect individuals from unfair or unethical treatment.

For some librarians, promotion is the only meaningful source of salary increases, making the importance of mentoring toward promotion critically important for their financial health, especially in a field with low salaries. Additionally, the expectations of overwork, withholding of support structures, or withdrawal of professional support such as travel funding upon achieving tenure, serve to exacerbate burnout and disengagement and depress morale among mid-career librarians.

All of these barriers that make promotion less likely also serve to harm the role of librarians on the campuses they serve. The rank of full professor is often a requirement for institutions' most important and influential committees, which compromises the ability of librarians to

engage with their governance structures in ways that support the best interests of the library. Full professor rank is also often a minimum qualification for senior leadership positions in libraries and elsewhere in universities. Barriers to promotion generate, as a result, a narrow applicant pool for these kinds of leadership positions, and consequently make it harder to expand the diversity of senior leaders in the ways the profession wants and needs.

Summary & Conclusion

The authors sought to more thoroughly understand the existence and availability of mentoring and other types of professional support for mid-career librarians in tenure-track faculty positions who have already achieved tenure. Participants' comments reflected four major themes: criteria, process, mentoring, and responsibilities. Generally, participants reported absence of clear criteria for promotion, hazy and opaque processes for pursuing promotion, lack of structured mentoring and other professional supports past the tenure review, and both increases and changes to professional responsibilities after tenure.

For many reasons, promotion and career planning remains important for mid-career librarians in any job classification, whether they are tenure-track or not. Formal structured mentoring should continue to be offered to librarians throughout their careers, even for librarians who don't intend to pursue further promotion, in order to support the success of mid-career librarians in reaching their career goals. Libraries should work to resist cultures that tacitly or explicitly discourage the use of career supports. Libraries should additionally ensure that research and publication, if it is required for career advancement, is considered "normal" work responsibilities to be conducted at work, not "extra" responsibilities to be conducted on personal time.

Benefits of better mentoring and workplace culture are widely recognized: more diversity, more successful individuals, more engagement and connection to the workplace, higher rates of promotion, and more productivity. Providing mentoring and professional support beyond tenure supports the best interests of institutions generally, as well as those of individuals, because mentoring improves retention, satisfaction, and faculty success.⁴¹ Institutions have made admirable progress in clarifying promotion criteria and providing mentoring for new career librarians. Similar attention must be paid to higher level promotions as well to clarify criteria and process, provide access to mentoring and support, and to establish reasonable expectations that allow librarians to complete all aspects of their job at work.

Appendix A. Tenure Granting Institutions

Public R1 Universities

Note: These universities self-identified as tenure granting. Some of them grant continuing appointment.

1. Clemson University
2. Colorado State University-Fort Collins
3. CUNY Graduate School and University Center
4. Indiana University-Bloomington
5. Iowa State University
6. Kansas State University
7. Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College
8. Michigan State University
9. Ohio State University-Main Campus
10. Oregon State University
11. Pennsylvania State University-Main Campus
12. Purdue University-Main Campus
13. Rutgers University-New Brunswick
14. Stony Brook University
15. SUNY at Albany
16. Texas A & M University-College Station
17. Texas Tech University
18. The University of Tennessee-Knoxville
19. University at Buffalo
20. University of Alabama at Birmingham
21. University of Arizona
22. University of Arkansas
23. University of Cincinnati-Main Campus
24. University of Colorado Boulder
25. University of Florida
26. University of Hawaii at Manoa
27. University of Illinois at Chicago
28. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
29. University of Kansas
30. University of Kentucky
31. University of Louisville
32. University of Mississippi
33. University of Nebraska-Lincoln
34. University of New Mexico-Main Campus
35. University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus
36. University of South Carolina-Columbia
37. University of Utah
38. University of Washington-Seattle Campus* (not classed as faculty)
39. Washington State University
40. Wayne State University

Appendix B. Structured Interview Questions

Theme 1: Introductory questions

1. What is your current position?
2. When did you receive tenure?
3. What is your current rank?
 - a. If you are full professor/librarian, when were you promoted?
 - i. Amount of time between receiving tenure and going up for full?
 - b. If not, are you considering going up?
4. That will lead to these possible questions:
 - a. What type of career planning have you done since receiving tenure?
 - b. What type of support or guidance is available for planning your career post-tenure?
 - c. Are you encouraged by your institution or organization to pursue promotion to full? Possible Follow-up: how does that process work at your institution?
 - d. What type of support is provided to associate professors to guide them to promotion and leadership opportunities?

Theme 2: Distributions/Workloads

1. What is the official distribution for librarians at your rank? Follow-up: How does your workload compare to this distribution and/or is that the distribution that people are reviewed on when they go up for promotion?
2. How have your service commitments shifted since receiving tenure?
3. Have you taken on additional administrative/managerial responsibilities since receiving tenure?
4. How has your research shifted since receiving tenure?
5. How long have you been at the rank of associate professor?
6. Does your distribution match that of the teaching faculty?

Theme 3: What you need to succeed/ Professional Support

1. Does your institution/organization offer mentoring for associate professors? If so, what does this look like?
2. Do you know if there is mentoring or professional development support for associate professors at your campus level?
3. Are there specific barriers you perceive as preventing or delaying your promotion to full professor?
4. What type of support is offered tenured faculty in your institution, such as sabbatical leave and travel funding? Dedicated research time, research assistants, etc.?

Theme 4: Clarity of Process

1. Are there policy changes that you see as needed to help remove barriers to promotion to full professor?
2. What type of guidance, if any, have you received regarding promotion to full?
3. Do you think your institution's decisions about promotion to full professor are made fairly? Do you, or do you believe others, perceive that the decisions are influenced by factors other than performance, such as race or gender?

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