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When 'Non-Instructional' Librarians Teach
Navigating Faculty Status and Teaching Portfolios

Cailean Cooney, Wanett Clyde, Kel R. Karpinski, Junior Tidal and Nanette Johnson

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Article abstract

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Cailean Cooney
New York City College of Technology, CUNY

Wanett Clyde
New York City College of Technology, CUNY

Kel R. Karpinski
New York City College of Technology, CUNY

Junior Tidal
New York City College of Technology, CUNY

Nanette Johnson
New York City College of Technology, CUNY

ABSTRACT

This article shares individual and collective experiences from five faculty ranked librarians with roles outside of formal instruction who are employed at an academic institution in the United States, and their approach to developing and embracing a teacher identity in the context of their professional trajectory. The article explores how the authors prepared to be evaluated against traditional classroom teaching for promotion by forming a cohort-based group to support "non-instructional" librarians to create a teaching portfolio, and how they approached teaching from liminal and, at times, tenuous positions and career stages. Authors conclude that the process challenged and expanded their perceptions of librarians and their own roles by revealing essential teaching functions performed regularly, regardless of their "non-teaching" title. Furthermore, developing a teaching portfolio has additional value in supporting the profession at large and demonstrating the essential role of the library at higher education institutions.

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Keywords: *academic librarianship · faculty evaluation · faculty status · teaching portfolios · tenure and promotion*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente les expériences individuelles et collectives de cinq bibliothécaires de rang professoral ayant des rôles autres que l'enseignement formel et travaillant dans un établissement universitaire aux États-Unis, ainsi que leur approche du développement et de l'adoption d'une identité d'enseignant.e dans le contexte de leur trajectoire professionnelle. L'article explore la façon dont les auteures.eurs se sont préparé.e.s à être évalué.e.s par rapport à l'enseignement traditionnel en classe pour leur avancement professionnel en formant un groupe de cohorte pour aider les bibliothécaires « non enseignant.e.s » à créer un portfolio d'enseignement, et comment ielles ont abordé l'enseignement à partir de positions et d'étapes de carrière liminales et, parfois, précaires. Les auteures.eurs concluent que le processus a remis en question et élargi leur perception des bibliothécaires et de leur propre rôle en révélant les fonctions d'enseignement essentielles exercées régulièrement, indépendamment de leur titre de « non enseignant ». En outre, le développement d'un portfolio d'enseignement a une valeur supplémentaire en soutenant la profession dans son ensemble et en démontrant le rôle essentiel de la bibliothèque dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur.

Mots-clés : *bibliothéconomie universitaire · évaluation du corps professoral · portfolios d'enseignement · statut du corps professoral · titularisation et avancement professionnel*

The teaching portfolio emerged in higher education in the 1990s (Centra 2002) in response to concerns about insufficient models to assess instruction beyond student evaluations (Knapper 1995). The teaching portfolio is a typical component of a faculty member's tenure and promotion application as one prepares to be reviewed by peers for their contributions to teaching, as well as scholarship, and service. The portfolio typically consists of a selection of evidence of teaching accomplishments, curriculum developed and taught, and teaching effectiveness (Edgerton et al. 1991; Seldin 1997). Though the teaching portfolio is only one component of the overall package considered for evaluation in tenure and promotion, it is where faculty librarians struggle the most to demonstrate equivalency to classroom faculty. Beyond its utility in performance review settings, the literature on teaching evaluation explores various benefits to portfolio creation as a reflective exercise to improve one's teaching (Cerbin 1994; Hutchings 1998; Zubizarreta 1995, 1997), and an opportunity to form a community of practice. The teaching portfolio is also fluid in its intention and purpose. For instance, it can be oriented toward formative or summative assessment, or blend the two (Lally and Trejo 1998, 776; Knapper and Wright 2001, 27).

Existing scholarship is diminutive on the topic of academic librarians and teaching portfolios, with scant accounts of teaching portfolio creation among "non-

instructional" librarians. The authors identified four articles published about non-instructional academic librarian teaching portfolio creation from universities in the United States (McCallon 2006; Mills 2015; Sterling et al. 2022; vanDuinkerken, Coker and Anderson 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly, instructional librarians are most often the subject of extant literature. Most accounts of teaching portfolio creation detailed an approach that embraced the portfolio as process and product oriented, blending formative and summative approaches (Fast and Armstrong 2003; McCallon 2006; Mills 2015; Parker and Hillyer 2008). Academic librarians have been among those early adopters of "course portfolios" for individual course assessment (Fast and Amstrong 2003) and among the first at their institutions to adapt the teaching portfolio to their professional context, a trend the authors believe extends to the activities detailed in this article. Another dimension reported in the literature is a need to alter the composition of teaching portfolios to the librarian context. For example, the library at the University of Nebraska at Omaha reported working with software developers to add "reference, academic liaison, library instruction, administration/coordination, access and metadata, collection management, electronic resources, and service" to better represent the breadth of academic library work (Parker and Hillyer 2008, 15).

Literature that explores the tenure process in relation to academic librarians raises some important factors and overall concerns that set librarians apart from their instructional counterparts. First, academic librarians, regardless of faculty status, are often expected to work a forty-hour week yet have the same expectations of scholarship as faculty on instructional schedules (Cramer and Hill 2021) and in some cases, do not share contractual parity with other faculty. For example, at The New York City College of Technology, CUNY, colloquially known as City Tech, librarians with faculty status have a twelve-month appointment, whereas faculty in other departments have a nine-month appointment. As a result, some librarians with faculty status have expressed that because they do not receive the same time and flexibility as the rest of faculty, they feel further hindered in their ability to accomplish the requirements of tenure and promotion (Werrell and Sullivan 1987). This concern becomes increasingly salient as there has been a shift in recent years away from having librarians in faculty positions at many academic institutions in the United States and a decrease in tenure-track positions overall (Becher 2018, 2019).

The following section describes City Tech librarians' approach to the teaching portfolio in greater depth. This includes teacher identity and how to create a teaching portfolio, challenging the perceptions of librarians as teachers, and how the librarian-teacher identity context can further strengthen the profession and libraries. While City Tech faculty document teaching and learning accomplishments as part

of the peer evaluation process for promotion (as per college governance procedures), such an activity is by no means standardized or implemented at other institutions. It is also important to note that at City Tech, instructional faculty and library faculty are subject to the same promotion and tenure procedures regardless of distinctions in their functional duties and labour contracts.

A Teaching Portfolio Program for "Non-instructional" Librarians

The authors of this article are based at City Tech where librarians have faculty status, which is not typical of academic libraries across North America. The City Tech website describes the teaching portfolio as, "...a reflective opportunity for faculty to organize, question and challenge themselves as educators. This self-reflection helps to articulate teaching philosophies, identify ways to continuously improve teaching methodologies, and maintain balance and create synergies between teaching, scholarship and service" ("Teaching Portfolio Resources - Faculty Commons" 2014). At City Tech, the teaching portfolio is a requirement for faculty promotion, yet the template is designed exclusively for faculty teaching credit-bearing courses. This is an immediate barrier for librarians whose positions do not predominantly include teaching a course or one-shot instruction. This puts the burden on the individual to retrofit an institutional convention, demonstrating a lack of parity among academic librarians even when they have faculty status.

The library's program was initiated at the recommendation of the former director of City Tech's Center for Teaching and Learning, who suggested a need to mentor library faculty in "non-instructional" roles. The library faculty facilitator had most recently experienced the promotion process and brought their experience of compiling a portfolio of non-instructional work into the design. This created a dynamic where the program facilitator could reflect on the successes of their own teaching portfolio as well as consider scaffolding and support that could benefit their colleagues outside of formal instructional titles. The cohort was composed of the department's most recent hires with tenure-track appointments. Teaching portfolio workshops were conducted in person and via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total of five participants across two cohorts and one faculty librarian lead, who designed and facilitated the program (four participants and the program facilitator are authors of this article).

Through a series of peer-led workshops, "non-instructional" library faculty learned how to construct their individual teaching portfolio over the course of an academic semester. This enabled participants to form a community of practice, defined as, "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger and Snyder 2000). Though this term has

origins in the business sphere, it is a useful way to frame collaborative work and the teaching portfolio workshop in particular. The general definition fits most instances of these communities, but there is room for shifting interpretations where more structure or formality may be introduced.

Each workshop was devoted to the creation of a single portfolio component: I. Biography, II. Teaching Responsibilities, III. Statement of Teaching Philosophy, IV. Description of Teaching Methodologies, V. Course Syllabi, VI. Student Learning and Assignments, VII. Teaching Effectiveness (Peer Assessment of Teaching, and Student Assessment of Teaching), VIII. Teaching Improvement Activities, IX. Future Teaching Goals, X. Appendices. The first workshop of the teaching portfolio series included an introduction of cohort members, followed by homework assignments that consisted of writing a one to two sentence reflection from a given writing prompt, starting with an autobiography, to be discussed at the following workshop. The cohort explored components of the portfolio as the workshop series progressed, which led to the creation of a draft version of the portfolio at the conclusion of the program. Throughout the seminar, cohort members were encouraged to share drafts and engage in peer review with one another during the writing process, which provided helpful feedback and collaboration.

Adapting the Teaching Portfolio to the Academic Librarian Context

As previously mentioned, the structure of the college's teaching portfolio template is designed for faculty teaching credit-bearing courses. Together, cohort members engaged in reconceptualizing the following sections to better suit "non-instructional" librarians: course syllabi, student learning and assignments, teaching effectiveness, and teaching improvement goals. A reasonable initial reaction to the task may be to ask: how can a technical services librarian share a course syllabus if they have no course to teach, or how can a multimedia librarian reflect on their own pedagogy with a lack of student evaluations?

Developing a Teacher Identity

The concept of whether academic librarians are perceived as teaching equals to faculty counterparts has been explored throughout academic librarian literature. With respect to librarians collaborating with instructors on information literacy instruction, Meulemans and Carr argue librarians should take a non-service approach (2013, 81) to support effective instruction which "...requires the professor and librarian to work together as partners to achieve a common goal" (2013, 82). Furthermore, they argue that developing a teaching philosophy is one way for academic librarians and their partnerships with course instructors to work against

traditional relationships that may default to a subservient service dynamic as opposed to a collaborative teaching relationship, a phenomenon raised by Manuel, Beck, and Molloy through ethnographic analysis (2005). With the propensity for academic librarians to have complex, and sometimes fraught attitudes about their place in teaching, for various reasons including gendered perceptions of members in and interacting with the profession (Julien and Pecoskie 2009), a structured teaching portfolio program with a community of practice model provided the authors with support to grapple with these ideas and their lived experiences. Authors contend that because of academic librarians' positionality within the academy, this approach can be a valuable model for many in the field regardless of professional status (faculty or otherwise).

Teaching in academic libraries is most prominently associated with one-shot instruction via a guest lecture or delivering an information literacy or research workshop. As members of the cohort drafted their initial portfolio, they evaluated their librarianship and recontextualized "non-traditional" instructional work in pedagogical terms, such as conducting a reference desk transaction. Their reflections within a community of practice challenged and helped to expand the cohort members' own perceptions of themselves as teachers, especially for those with minimal experience teaching a class or workshop.

Teaching is also present in subtle ways and many sites across the library. Despite not being perceived in the same light as a traditional classroom, the library is a space where knowledge transfer happens between librarians and patrons (students). Polger and Okamoto explain that for library faculty, teaching is beyond what happens in the classroom and includes any kind of transmission of knowledge (2010). This can be demonstrated by librarians assisting students with research as peer-coaches (Woodard, 2005), usability studies with librarians assessing and evaluating information systems (Valentine and West 2016) and making choices about how metadata is displayed in an online catalog (Chapman 2007). Information literacy is also part of librarians' work in traditionally technical and systems librarianship (roles shared by the authors). This includes media literacy, open educational resources, knowledge creation and management, outreach, and academic program accreditation, all requiring librarians to possess and apply teaching knowledges.

Cohort participants adapted the student learning and assignments, and teaching effectiveness components to their own job positions and duties, and in the process, forged a stronger sense of teacher identity. Librarians in the teaching portfolio cohort were encouraged to brainstorm analogous activities that support student learning and function like assignments. Participants uncovered teaching interventions such as the development of a research guide, finding aid, catalog record, or other tangible

activity that facilitates academic research and discovery. Participants contextualized how teaching effectiveness could be found within the librarian's job duties, perhaps measurable, and demonstrative of how well a service or workflow impacts student learning. Examples to demonstrate impact included statistics collected on library website usage, and one-shot and workshop evaluations. A skilled librarian working in acquisitions must think as both a teacher and a student. Putting on these metaphorical hats is essential to making choices that lead to more robust and relevant collections for teaching and learning. The reference interview can be thought of as a pedagogical methodology composed of Socratic questioning, much akin to in-class discussion. Robinson notes that "Socratic questioning establishes a cooperative relationship between librarian and student that empowers the student to take agency over the interaction" (2017). This process required library faculty to express their work as an activity of mutual learning and teaching and can be expanded on in a teaching portfolio.

Librarians in the cohort also realized they step into the role of a teacher when sharing institutional knowledge and individual expertise with library colleagues at their campus and at other institutions. Creating instructional guides or designing and presenting workshops relevant to others who utilize shared resources is not only a service to peers, but it also ensures that vendor products are being put to effective use, to benefit patrons at and beyond one's own campus. Librarians sharing resources can also help buoy librarians who are unfamiliar with new practices and information products that can be subject to or necessitate rapid change. In this sense, librarians not only teach students and instructional faculty, but other librarians as well.

Impacts of the Teaching Portfolio Program

Fostering a Community of Practice in the Library

The teaching portfolio workshops brought together librarians across disparate functional units and into a professional environment completely distinct from their prior working conditions. Peers, including the program facilitator, engaged in mutual teaching and learning, brainstorming, and reflection. In a practical sense, this was an opportunity for the cohort to learn how to characterize, organize, and document evidence of their professional teaching work. These are highly prescriptive activities that most often occur in isolation (e.g., preparing a dossier for annual review). In the process, the facilitator and participants also gained a better understanding of each person's job role which can have implications for future tenure and promotion review at the department level.

Despite the initial challenge and added labour of adapting the portfolio to that of a "non-instructional" librarian, conducting this exercise among peers prompted deep examination of participants' work through a teaching lens. It gave participants a venue to discuss and think about ways they already teach, enriching their pedagogical practices. Through these conversations and sharing their experiences, participants were able to evaluate their own teaching in ways they may not have previously thought of. They re-examined certain aspects of their work as teaching upon hearing the stories of other participants. For example, when a non-instructional librarian faculty member first hears the term "teaching portfolio," they may not necessarily think they teach. After discussions with cohort peers, faculty librarians may realize that time spent assisting students, such as explaining their syllabi, how to use the intranet/library website, or how to access help within the college, are all forms of teaching that they are already participating in.

Participants also felt that engaging in a formalized teaching portfolio program brought a sense of legitimacy that may have been absent had participants worked individually. There was also a collective acknowledgement that participants should consider themselves at the same level as their instructional faculty counterparts, as opposed to bifurcated, or viewed in a subservient role. The overall structure of the program drew participants to extract and claim teaching that occurs every day even if it happens outside of the classroom or through "learning environments" (McCallon 2006, 150). A department level teaching portfolio program also has the potential to evolve as former participants move forward in their careers and provides opportunities to continue to learn, teach, and contribute to an evolving community of practice. Participants could facilitate future cohort groups, for example. The program also offers substantive department service and mentoring opportunities to document on tenure and promotion dossiers.

Participants noted unique advantages to having participated in the portfolio training at different points on their tenure clock. Participating in the program earlier on the tenure clock, which is seven years at City Tech, helped illuminate how teaching connects to librarianship and other professional responsibilities of tenure-track faculty such as scholarship and service. As a result of observing and documenting the significant achievements they already made to the teaching component of their dossier, a cohort member who participated several years into their tenure clock noted that the reflective process motivated them to prioritize seeking promotion earlier than they originally expected to. In their case, their "non-instructional" designation significantly hindered their approach to the teaching component despite being enveloped in teaching through a faculty development initiative to support

open educational resources. This is where a community of practice can be extremely valuable.

Reaching Beyond the Library

Over the course of the portfolio program, the cohort uncovered how much the services and library space encourage and promote cross-college partnerships. This is a distinct position to leverage in a portfolio and in demonstrating professional advancement. Unlike many of their instructional faculty counterparts, academic librarians often occupy a unique role at the college. They serve as department and discipline subject liaisons. Fruitful liaisons leverage their individual research expertise in these roles and can introduce further collaboration and synergies through their functional duties. For instance, with technical services librarians, and particularly with collection development, expertise can be applied to make more attuned collection purchases, to create enhanced instructional materials to support information literacy, and to have more substantive interactions with students when advising them on research and assignments. Embracing academic librarians' expertise with complimentary subject liaison pairings, where possible, can produce teaching and learning interventions beyond the limits of credit-bearing courses and traditional curricula such as a guest lecture, or a visit to the archives. A skilled librarian working in acquisitions will also think from the perspective of both a teacher and a student. Putting on these metaphorical hats is essential to making choices that lead to more robust and relevant collections for teaching and learning.

Librarians in the cohort also experienced that they could effect change with the instructor with whom they are advising or collaborating in their subject liaison roles. A librarian can offer their deep understanding of the collection, familiarity with current research trends in scholarly communication and information proliferation (such as open access or open educational resources). This can then lead to fruitful suggestions to adapt assignments and, more importantly, expectations for student knowledge creation and acquisition. Librarians bridge a gap by occupying a liminal teaching space. Through conversations with students, librarians have the opportunity to teach and forge relationships with them. Participants have observed that students are often more forthcoming about where they are in their research, namely how far they may be behind. Students show a willingness to share if they feel overwhelmed, underprepared or confused by assignment instructions whereas communicating these woes to their professor can be a challenge.

Academic Library as Indispensable and Vital to Teaching and Learning Activities

In the authors' local setting, the library faculty teaching portfolio is used to convey to the promotion committee members, at both the department and college level,

the individual's job duties and responsibilities. It translates a record of library work into processes that peers across the institution can better understand and relate to by providing the necessary context of library work and its value. This is vital, as the committees that review promotion and tenure are composed of mostly instructional faculty outside of the library, and there is often a lack of understanding of the work of librarians. A portfolio that is legible beyond the library and to a broader audience "provides evidence that an administrator or faculty member outside of the discipline can identify with" (McCallon 2006, 154) because often they "may have incomplete impressions of the different job titles and responsibilities held by librarians, and the extent of similarity between librarians and teaching faculty members in their participation in university scholarship and service" (Mills 2015, 534). This documentation process may increase the confidence of the cohort members for future promotion review actions and foster a sense of belonging with instructional faculty.

A strong example of this institutional alignment to teaching at the college is when library subject liaisons also collaborate on and evaluate new and revised course proposals developed by instructional faculty. At City Tech, library subject liaisons are required to review proposed course materials and accompanying bibliographies as a component of a curriculum proposal according to college governance. Here, the symbiotic relationship between the curriculum and the library is evident. Furthermore, collection development work done in advance of developing new courses has laid the groundwork to include relevant monographs already acquired and emerging subjects in fields for which new courses will be designed. Acquiring monographs, supporting the use and creation of open educational resources by faculty, and maintaining database and digital resource subscriptions supports the intellectual work of students and faculty, with the reserves collection being of particular importance to support instruction and learning objectives with primary course materials.

Conclusion and Future Directions

As technical services, information technology, systems, multimedia, interlibrary loan, access services, and open education resource librarians (some wear more than one hat), the authors' work is often thought of as doing more 'behind the scenes' work than our instructional counterparts in and beyond the library. This portfolio program gave the authors, as participants, a way to creatively proffer examples of how teaching touches many aspects of their jobs and the library, and to embrace a more expansive definition of teaching than is typically represented by the traditional conception of classroom faculty as the 'sage on the stage.'

One aspect to consider is why would a librarian want to create a teaching portfolio in the first place. At City Tech, the teaching portfolio is a useful instrument for "non-instructional" library faculty to not only reflect on their roles as teachers, but is also vital to document and communicate strengths, duties, and positions for the purposes of tenure and promotion. Even if creating a teaching portfolio is not a requirement or a universal experience of academic librarians, it is a useful framework to any professional with impetus to document the evolution of work to further a career trajectory.

A successful teaching portfolio highlights the teaching contributions of academic librarians for a broad audience, connects this work to the college's mission, and should demonstrate to readers that the library is vital to the institution's success through its service to all departments, faculty, and students. In the authors' context, the college level promotion review committee is comprised of instructional faculty who are not librarians. Librarians engaged in faculty promotion actions may encounter a review committee that not only has no librarians but may be comprised of members who have never used the library.

The teaching portfolio can effectively bridge the work of faculty librarians with that of instructional faculty, and assists librarians, and hopefully their peer evaluators, in 'fitting in' at their institution. This in turn may help contextualize the operations of the library as integral to the institution in an environment of ever shifting priorities and budgetary constraints. While a separate teaching portfolio template and structure would be more customized to the duties of an academic librarian, this may cause tension between librarians and instructional faculty, particularly at institutions where academic librarians have faculty status, leading to deeper siloing. Notwithstanding, the default design of teaching portfolio templates in higher education excludes anyone outside of the traditional teaching paradigm.

Since academic librarians, particularly "non-instructional" librarians, are under-represented and are excluded from some overload (over-time) and paid training opportunities, the teaching portfolio is that much more necessary to bolster the relevance of one's work to critical functions of higher education institutions. As scholars across disciplines have argued, the teaching portfolio process has several valuable dimensions that could be relevant to many professionals: it is an opportunity to engage in reflection and self-evaluation and provides a community for formative peer review, in addition to being an integral component of a dossier for external peer evaluation. In the authors' context, the experience also facilitated peer mentorship and collaboration beyond the program's conclusion, as similar collectives have also noted (Sterling et al. 2022). The authors likewise hope that this will

encourage academic librarians at other institutions to think creatively and critically about their own pedagogical work outside of the classroom.

The facilitation of the librarian teaching portfolio workshop series at The New York City College of Technology, CUNY, is intended to be passed on to one of its past participant-alums as this role is an exemplar of how librarians teach in a reciprocal and self-referential method. There are also possibilities for growth in future iterations as new technologies, pedagogical methods, and information literacy frameworks develop.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Cailean Cooney is Associate Professor and OER Librarian at the New York City College of Technology, of the City University of New York (CUNY). Some of her research interests include exploring the political, economic, and social factors related to the OER movement in education.

Wanett Clyde is Assistant Professor and the Collections Management Librarian at CUNY's New York City College of Technology, where in addition to managing the library's collection, she oversees the college archives.

Kel R. Karpinski is Assistant Professor and the IT/ILL Librarian at the New York City College of Technology, CUNY. Outside of LIS, their research focuses on mid-century queer films and novels as they relate to Times Square and how these texts map queer desire onto the city.

Junior Tidal is the Multimedia and Web Services Librarian and Professor at the New York City College of Technology, CUNY. He earned his Master's in Library Science and Master's in Information Science from Indiana University, Bloomington. His research interests include mobile web usability and digital privacy.

Nanette Johnson is the Access Services Librarian at the New York City College of Technology, CUNY, working with her team to support student success.

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