

## **Brief Analysis of Professional Development Fund Survey Conducted with UC Librarians (Unit 17) in November 2008**

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In November 2008, the UC-AFT conducted an on-line survey of Unit 17 librarians with respect to the impacts of professional development funding at UC. In a week, we received 187 responses, or about a 45% response rate. Such a high response rate in such a short time is highly unusual in survey research and typically indicates a strong concern about the issues addressed in a survey. There are few surprises in the results.

Of those responding, almost three-quarters (73%) said they had spent money out of pocket to support attendance at professional meetings or for other professional development activities. Several commented that this was difficult, since the relatively low pay of UC librarians made such commitments a real burden. Among those responding in the negative to the question of spending their own money for professional development activities (27%), several members made it clear that either they simply didn't go to activities if they had to pay themselves, or that they had been fortunate that the event or events they attended were local and that, consequently, they only had to pay registration fees and not travel or hotel expenses.

Thus, it is clear that a very large percentage of Unit 17 librarians take money of their own pockets to pay for their professional development. In effect, UC librarians are subsidizing UC by shouldering the burden of their own continuing education and professional development. This would be bad enough if making such expenditures were only a question of supporting an employment benefit or "perk"; however, librarians are *required* to engage in the kind of professional development that professional development funds are intended to support in order to advance in their careers. There is no question that UC and the constituencies it serves benefit from the librarians' expanded expertise.

It should also be noted that this situation has an even more adverse impact on early- and mid-career librarians, who have inadequate support and must self-fund professional activities while being dramatically underpaid. At least a few of the librarians responding to the survey mentioned that they think it is an outrage that UC offers so little support to early-career people in light of poor salaries and the expectation that people have to build up their portfolio to attain career status.

Of those responding, almost two-thirds (64%) said they had decided not to attend otherwise important or appropriate conferences or not to pursue other job-related professional development opportunities because of the lack of available and sufficient professional development funding. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of those responding in the affirmative to this question gave concrete examples of the

opportunities for professional development they had eschewed for lack of funding. This represents about half of the UC librarians in Unit 17.

A small number of respondents (fewer than 5%), especially from UCSD, explained that they had sufficient access to professional development funding. Another small group of respondents (also fewer than 5%) explained that while lack of funding was a factor in their decision not to pursue professional development opportunities, other factors such as the need to care for children, or the lack of adequate staff coverage at their library made attendance at conferences difficult or impossible.

Two respondents explained that although the professional development funds available from their campus were not sufficient for their needs, they were and/or are able to access funds from other sources to support their professional development needs.

In sum, the vast majority of those responding (about half of all UC Unit 17 librarians) explained in some detail how the lack of adequate professional development funds was limiting their access to appropriate professional meetings and other professional development opportunities. Some of the consequences of this situation include reducing the participation of UC librarians on committees of the American Library Association, the Association of College & Research Libraries, and other important professional organizations for librarians. This is certain to have a negative impact on the reputation and standing of UC campus libraries.

Others expressed concern that their own personal professional development and their ability to advance at UC and in their profession were being negatively affected by the lack of adequate professional development funding. Many explicitly commented that the lack of ability to attend appropriate professional conferences in their major area of work resulted in their being less able to keep up with the latest developments in their field and thus, less able to serve the needs of their primary users, such as faculty in a particular research area.

We have attached the raw data on which this analysis is based (redacting individual names and contact information) because there is nothing to hide here. The individual responses are instructive and they support the contention of the UC-AFT that inadequate provision of professional development funds has resulted in a clearly demonstrable negative impact on the professional development needs of UC librarians and a concomitant reduction in the quality of service that the UC libraries provide to their users. The impact is not uniform across the campuses; however, no campus is untouched by the negative impact of this problem.

Upon reading the actual responses, it is noteworthy how reasonable the expectations of the librarians are with respect to funding for their professional

development. Several of the responses make it very clear that most librarians are willing to spend time and energy seeking the least expensive travel and sleeping arrangements, that they are most concerned about missing not exotic and inappropriate conferences but, more commonly, conferences to which they have been invited to make presentations, conferences important to the services they provide in their major area of responsibility at their libraries, and conferences that are essential to their future as librarians.

Perhaps of greatest concern is the observation by several of the librarians responding that the amount of money available to them for professional development from their library would not fund the travel and registration costs of a single important conference outside of their local area. Needless to say, only a very few UC librarians can afford to attend conferences outside the United States. In a world focused increasingly on global realities, this fact represents a serious dilemma for the UC libraries and the faculty, students, and public they serve.

Finally, several of the comments raise particularly disturbing concerns about the long-term impact of inadequate professional development funding in the UC libraries. When significant numbers of UC librarians have curtailed professional development activities because they believe that it is unlikely they will be funded by their employer, UC may be in danger of developing a culture in which UC librarians, and the libraries and users they serve, will become increasingly isolated from the wider world of research and new initiatives. This danger is certainly reinforced when librarians are limited to attending only conferences that they can afford to pay for without relying on their own meager salaries.

A situation that limits librarians to attending a single conference (or *perhaps* two if they are both local) per year is untenable if UC librarians are to have an impact in professional organizations and their committees. The best librarians will seek employment elsewhere, in institutions that do provide better support for the professional development needs of their employees, or offer salaries that better allow for self-funding of professional development. Others will simply acquiesce to the perception that their positions at UC are really more parochial and that participation in professional development activities that connect them with the wider world of academic librarianship is a "frill" they cannot expect to incorporate into their work for UC. That would be the real tragedy if more reasonable levels of professional development support are not provided at UC libraries.