

Crossing the Academic Divide, Or "Is This the Road to Tenure?"

By: Cheryl L. Blevens

Last summer, I embarked on a second career. I accepted the job as Head of Circulation at Indiana State University's Cunningham Memorial Library and I found myself on the road to an opportunity I never considered, let alone imagined. In the second half of my professional life, I now find myself on tenure track, a term I've quickly learned means, "and what's in your digital measures today?"

I worked in public libraries for 34 years (actually 36, if you count my job as a page at the Brazil Public Library). My responsibilities included clerking in the Circulation Department at a main library, managing a branch library, and heading Children's Services. I ended my service as head of Adult & Reference Services. My last two positions were located an hour's drive from home and after seven years of setting my car's cruise control, popping in a book on tape, and heading off to work, I finally came to the conclusion that being a commuter had lost its charm, gas prices were not likely to drop any time soon, and frankly, I was tired of being blinded by the sun in the morning and in the evening too. I'd reached the age of PERF's majority and decided then and there to apply for retirement. I started the paperwork and within two months was a retiree.

Around this time I moved back into my house after it had undergone extensive renovations. Since I'd put everything in storage for over a year, I now had the time to nest—spending the next two months unpacking boxes, rearranging furniture, setting up the kitchen, filling closets, and hanging drapes. With that done, I realized I was going to be bored very quickly. I started looking around for something new to stifle my growing boredom. Habit found me cruising the State Library's job openings web page, which led to a light bulb moment of looking to Indiana State University for

employment opportunities. I found one! There was an opening for the Head of Circulation at Cunningham Memorial Library. I submitted my application and after going through interviews, accepted the job offer and on July 1, became one of the library's newest faculty members, with my feet planted firmly on the tenure track.

At this point, I had a hazy idea of what tenure track meant, but four months into the job and three months of twice-weekly New Faculty Orientation sessions, made the picture much clearer. Tenure track means documenting every single thing I do in the name of my job by using a software package called "Digital Measures." Committee work, volunteering, writing summary articles for in-house and campus publications; all of these tasks are part of the documentation required for proof of my eligibility for a tenure appointment. My day-to-day duties are now documented with an eye toward "T&P," the acronym for "tenure and promotion."

I am frequently asked what it's like to be at an academic library after being at a public library for so long. Most people, i.e., librarians, assume there is quite a difference in an academic setting. I've found for me, that's not necessarily true. Actually, the truth is I find that this job has enough similarities to my positions in public libraries that I'm comfortable, where the differences constantly challenge me. In public libraries, I kept track of legislative happenings and local property tax issues because they affected the day-to-day operations of the library. In academic libraries, I keep track of the university community's happenings for the same reason. Public libraries serve all ages of users. Academic libraries (or at least state supported ones) serve all ages, frequently including Indiana residents who are not affiliated with Indiana State University but who receive a library card and use it to check out materials. And, although I

thought I'd miss seeing babies and toddlers excited about coming to story time, I'm pleased to note the increasing appearance of moms with strollers and dads with baby backpacks, making use of the University's library.

Public libraries decorate for holidays. So do academic libraries. Public library employees dress up for Halloween. At Cunningham, a reference librarian organizes a lunch hour "Pumpkin Caroling" in front of the library where we sing classic "It's The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown!" carols.

Both institutions check materials out to people. Students let materials run overdue just as patrons of public libraries. People in both settings complain about overdue fines and plead for forgiveness. As a public library employee I was evaluated yearly, based on past performance. I was asked to set personal and professional goals for the coming year; tenure track academic librarians are evaluated on past performance. In my "new" profession, I also set goals by keeping in mind the all-important milestones of yearly T&P reviews. I already know that the third year is half way through the tenure cycle and is considered to be a watershed year. By that magic third year, in addition to my teaching duties, I should be actively engaged in research (with published results an added bonus) and have demonstrated proof of being actively involved in service to the University, the community and the profession (aka serving on committees), all the while balancing a home life.

A major difference I have discovered in the operation of public versus academic libraries is the number of hours they serve the public. Cunningham's hours are geared to student needs: seven days a week, usually 10 to 18 hours a day. Thank goodness I have staff and students who are willing to work that 2 a.m. shift. I'm too old to pull an all-nighter! And, something new this year; we will not close during the first two days of fall finals week in December. Students studying in the library will be served snacks and a 5 a.m. "Dean's Breakfast" (compliments of the deans of the schools on campus) to keep them going. I can hardly wait to see who shows up in their jammies!

As a tenure track faculty member at Indiana State
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University, I've ordered my regalia and will march in my first faculty parade when Dr. Daniel Bradley is installed as President of Indiana State University. (Regalia: ok, another term new to me since I didn't participate in my IU graduation for my MLS and I can't remember what went on at my bachelor's ceremony since that was 35 years ago.) I'm also planning some road trips to other academic libraries' circulation departments to see how they do things and how I can adapt some of their best practices to my own staff. I can use all the help I can get so if readers of this article have any suggestions, just send them along because I plan to be here until my next retirement age (Medicare?) at 65!

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