

# Exhibits as Scholarship: Strategies for Acceptance, Documentation, and Evaluation in Academic Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

Producing exhibits is an important form of scholarly and creative activity for academic librarians, archivists, and curators. While other forms of scholarship such as publishing a book or a peer-reviewed journal article are unquestionably accepted, exhibits are typically viewed as less intellectually rigorous. Through a literature review and a review of appointment, promotion, and tenure policies of selected Association of Research Libraries institutions with faculty status, this study seeks to uphold the creation of exhibits as a critical scholarly endeavor in the academic library and to provide guidance in evaluating exhibits as scholarship for library faculty, especially those working in archives and special collections. An overview of strategies for documentation and evaluation of exhibits as noteworthy scholarly communication is included. The recommendations provided can also assist nonacademic library and archival institutions to create high-quality exhibits of enduring value. Exhibits, digital humanities projects, and other forms of scholarship and creativity should be considered for promotion and tenure if presented in a compelling way to review communities.

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## KEY WORDS

Academic archivists, Academic libraries, Exhibits, Faculty status, Promotion and tenure

Exhibits remain an undervalued form of scholarly communication for academic librarians, archivists, and curators.<sup>1</sup> While other forms of scholarship such as publishing a book or a peer-reviewed journal article are accepted without question, it is typical for evaluators to view exhibits as less intellectually rigorous, even though enormous amounts of time, talent, research, writing, and presentation go into planning and staging academic library exhibits.<sup>2</sup> At each review cycle, academic librarians are asked to justify such scholarly communications to their library colleagues and other faculty who possess little or no knowledge about the intellectual work required to create exhibits. Through a literature review and a review of policies of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institutions with faculty status, this study seeks to uphold the creation of exhibits as a critical scholarly endeavor in the academic library and to provide guidance in evaluating exhibits as scholarship for faculty librarians, especially those working in archives and special collections.

Academic library exhibits can exist in many forms, but this article will focus specifically on larger-scale gallery exhibits most often found within special collections departments.<sup>3</sup> This does not imply that smaller exhibits such as the single display case or lobby panel displays are not important to the outreach strategies of academic libraries, but that gallery exhibits require effort and dedication on a scale comparable to that of an article published in a scholarly journal. Successful gallery exhibits demand significant effort and resources, as well as extensive study and contextualization of a wide array of primary source materials. In addition, a large-scale exhibit must be based on in-depth research and be an accessible counterpart to other forms of scholarship on the research topic.

This article will review the literature previously published on the topic of exhibits in academic libraries, including literature focused on the subject of librarians with faculty status, and will seek to reinforce an expanded definition of “scholarship.” In addition, this study will look toward the literature in the digital humanities, history, and museum studies to provide a broader perspective on recognizing exhibits as scholarship. Using the literature review as a foundation, this study will examine the appointment, promotion, and tenure (APT) policies for faculty librarians at selected ARL institutions to discover how they perceive exhibits and if/how faculty librarians can submit exhibits as evidence of scholarship.<sup>4</sup> We will also highlight the inconsistencies and limitations in current practices in defining dossiers for academic librarians. Finally, an overview of strategies for documentation and evaluation of exhibits as scholarly communication is included. Such strategies for documentation and evaluation are at the core of making exhibits an accepted component of a faculty librarian’s promotion and tenure dossier. Overall, the hope is to encourage broader recognition of the creation of library exhibits as a worthwhile scholarly endeavor both

within academia and for any cultural institution with a focus on public history and public engagement.

## Literature Review

Within academia, a long-standing debate continues about whether or not librarians qualify for faculty status and if librarians' criteria for faculty status should be comparable in rigor to those of instructional faculty. If universities adopt proposed changes to definitions of scholarship, these debates may become superfluous. However, some academic librarians "apparently believe that research, although central to the university's mission, is only to be supported by librarians, and not done by them."<sup>5</sup> This attitude about scholarship among academic library colleagues and in the academy itself needs to change. Fortunately for archivists and other academic librarians, the definition of "scholarship" is now evolving within the academy, albeit slowly. Academia is experiencing a push for alternative definitions and evaluations of scholarly output, and some institutions are beginning at least to consider changes to their APT policies. The recent rise of "altmetrics" indicates this development. As defined by Elizabeth Joan Kelly, altmetrics are "an alternative to traditional measurement of the impact of published resources," including a greater reliance on references within various social media platforms.<sup>6</sup> Kelly proposed that archivists seek ways to apply altmetrics to measure the impact of finding aids, digital projects, exhibitions, and other scholarly communications. This development suggests academia's limitations for evaluating scholarship from discipline to discipline (including academic archives) and reveals that the time is right to reconsider a place for exhibitions in the APT dossier.

Eugene Rice, Ernest Boyer, and others have, since the late 1980s, "proposed that colleges and universities move beyond the debate of teaching versus research and that the definition of scholarship be expanded to include not only original research but the synthesizing and reintegration of knowledge, professional practice, and the transformation of knowledge through teaching."<sup>7</sup> According to this definition, scholarship has four distinct, yet interrelated categories: the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching. Exhibits certainly fall into this definition of scholarship, in particular "the synthesizing and reintegration of knowledge." Other authors have argued for a more integrated view of the traditional three-tiered performance review criteria of librarianship, service, and scholarship. William K. Black and Joan M. Leysen argued that "It is easy to view the cataloging or reference work that librarians do as the primary job to the exclusion of other facets or responsibilities . . . There should be a real continuity between professional practice, research, and service, and we need to appreciate the benefits inherent in this relationship."<sup>8</sup> This view

then does not limit exhibits to the performance criteria of librarianship, but extends them into the scholarly realm of an academic librarian's efforts. Black and Leysen also noted that exhibits warrant consideration as creative activities and complementary research, though not necessarily original research.<sup>9</sup> While exhibits may not always present original research (but often do), the research is nonetheless important and academically rigorous.

Although the topic of exhibits within academic libraries has been investigated to some extent, the focus of previous research has been on "how-to" manuals and descriptions of specific exhibits. A noticeable lack exists in the academic library and archival literature relating to "the intellectual and creative process of producing an exhibit" and the relationship of exhibits to scholarly research.<sup>10</sup> Although a recently published monograph on managing academic archives and special collections encouragingly states that archivists, as faculty librarians, need to maintain an active research agenda and strive to stay up-to-date on various trends in research, higher education, and technology, it makes no mention of exhibits or other forms of scholarship beyond peer-reviewed books and journal articles.<sup>11</sup> In fact, only one article speaks directly to the issue of scholarly exhibits in academic libraries. In 1993, Laurel G. Bowen and Peter J. Roberts published "Exhibits: Illegitimate Children of Academic Libraries?" in *College & Research Libraries*. To demonstrate that exhibits are a legitimate form of scholarship, Bowen and Roberts compared the details of the process of writing a scholarly article to those of planning, researching, and creating an exhibit. The authors argued that "A new interpretation of information or presentation of ideas that leads to a new understanding is just as necessary in advancing knowledge as is the discovery of new facts."<sup>12</sup> In regard to academic librarian dossiers, Black and Leysen summed things up well: "The full picture of the candidate's expertise in the area of scholarship should be drawn from the range of contributions presented. Each activity that reflects research has a place in the scholarship assessment. Activities should be judged individually on their own merits and then brought together to form a cohesive picture of the candidate's professional competence."<sup>13</sup> Scholarly accomplishments, therefore, encompass a wide range of activities, including exhibits. Finally, a recent examination on the topic of special collections exhibits published by the Society of American Archivists notes that exhibits can demonstrate how faculty librarians are not just experts in technical work, but are also well versed in subject-area expertise and interpretation of materials. The author emphasized, "Exhibition curatorship is scholarship."<sup>14</sup>

The digital humanities (DH) are also grappling with similar issues in making the case for their projects as scholarship in the APT arena. According to J. Matthew Huculak and Lisa Goddard, digital humanists, much like academic archivists, also face impeding and outmoded APT models that discourage

collaboration, in particular for developing and envisioning access to digital scholarship.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as they “operate within departmental structures that have traditionally prioritized individual achievement and monograph production” in APT, digital humanists are put on the defensive to qualify their scholarly communication.<sup>16</sup> Yet, while in academic humanities programs coauthoring or codeveloping projects is sometimes viewed as a “liability,” academic libraries and archives place greater value on collaboration. Information professionals are “rewarded for developing solutions by consultation and collaboration . . . for producing initiatives that have demonstrable reach and impact for the larger library or university community.” In defining impact and reach, archivists can do more to make the case for exhibitions as scholarship. Yet, much like exhibits, DH projects, which may feature interpretive content, are not always “intended to last forever.”<sup>17</sup> However, while exhibit catalogs offer one potential solution for exhibit reach and longevity, digital humanists are still formulating applicable solutions. And, arguments exist against creating such traditional publications in place of the original DH project (or exhibit for that matter). Should not the original project be enough to satisfy the APT process? Odell and Pollock noted that “This discourages further work on the digital project, creating a culture in which the project need only be good enough to describe in an article. It also punishes the digital humanist by doubling up on their efforts to meet the bar of P&T” (promotion and tenure).<sup>18</sup>

Beyond the academic library literature, museum curators and historians have more widely accepted exhibits as scholarly communications in their own standards and literature.<sup>19</sup> Museum curators have established guidelines for exhibits, one example being “The Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence” developed by the Standing Professional Committees Council of the American Alliance of Museums. These standards provide some general guidelines to follow for exhibits, including qualities related to content and intellectual value. In addition, the standards should be viewed as suggestive rather than prescriptive by stating, “We should always allow for purposeful—and often brilliant—deviation from the norm.”<sup>20</sup> This perspective shows strong linkages to accepting exhibits created by both scholarly and creative processes. Museum curators also recognize that peer review can play a role in exhibits, including those online. One museum curator turned faculty member argued for peer review of digital exhibits, noting that:

While they help identify and assess important work, scholarly reviews also play a related role within the professional lives of scholars, whether they work in museums, archives, higher education, government, or grassroots community organizations. Individually and collectively, we are judged by the work that we produce; thus rigorous and independent assessments of our efforts by knowledgeable peers are a useful service.<sup>21</sup>

Peer review of exhibitions can not only assist in the promotion and tenure process, but can demonstrate the exhibitions value to the general public, granting agencies, donors, and other stakeholders at an archival or cultural institution.<sup>22</sup>

Historians, too, have recognized exhibits as examples of successful public history scholarship. The Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and the National Council on Public History together produced a 2010 report on evaluating the work of the “Publicly Engaged Academic Historian.”<sup>23</sup> The report argues that scholarly work in public history, which would include researching and creating exhibits, “is too often overlooked in a tenure process that emphasizes single-authored monographs and articles at the expense of other types of scholarly production.” The report notes that “public history scholarship, like all good historical scholarship, is peer reviewed, but that review includes a broader and more diverse group of peers, many from outside traditional academic departments, working in museums, historic sites, and other sites of mediation between scholars and the public.” Finally, the report emphasizes the need for recognition among scholars that community engagement is a vital part of faculty dossiers.<sup>24</sup> Jacques Berlinerblau wrote for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that humanists, especially, need to engage more with broader audiences, noting, “tomorrow’s humanist will be outward bound . . . less isolate and microspecialist, more conversationalist, generalist, and even . . . a conscientious popularizer.”<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of the humanities, exhibits represent a distinct form of scholarly and community engagement, whose informational content sparks conversations accessible to a broad audience.

## Methodology

For this study, we chose to collect and perform a textual analysis of the appointment, promotion, and tenure policies for academic librarians at institutions with membership in the Association of Research Libraries and whose librarians also had faculty status with tenure. We chose ARL membership as one of the selection criterion because the ideal profile for an ARL member institution includes supporting a special collections program, where exhibits typically flourish within the academic library.<sup>26</sup> The ARL benefits of membership state that member libraries must have “distinctive research-oriented collections and resources of national or international significance in a variety of media that result in shared or collective collections that support global research and core and specialized services to the scholarly community of faculty, students, and visiting scholars.” In addition, member institutions must be involved in the “preservation and archiving of research resources to ensure their availability for

future scholars.”<sup>27</sup> Beginning in 2010, ARL also designated special collections as “a priority for ARL attention.”<sup>28</sup>

There are currently 124 member institutions in ARL, so we further narrowed the survey to include only those academic library institutions granting faculty status and tenure to librarians. This qualification remained challenging to determine as academic libraries have varying degrees of professional statuses and tenure. Some academic librarians are considered faculty, but do not have tenure; some are considered staff; some libraries use a mixed model with both faculty and staff librarians; and degrees of other combinations and models vary. To identify those ARL academic libraries with faculty status and tenure, we referred to two online sources that have compiled information about professional statuses for academic librarians. After cross-referencing these sources, we had a more concentrated list of institutions to review.<sup>29</sup>

We began by searching for library APT policies available online. However, since APT policies are not always available online to the public, we also obtained APT policies through direct contact with peer librarians at several institutions as well as with library human resources personnel. Institutions that fit the above criteria whose APT policies were not readily available online or were not obtainable with reasonable requests were excluded from this study.

One other challenge also complicated this study: academic institutions often have policies governing the APT process at the institutional and the departmental levels. Whenever possible, we attempted to locate policies at the departmental or library level as these more-detailed policies are more specific to faculty librarians. On occasion, we only found (or the library faculty only used) the overarching institutional policy, and we consulted this policy instead as our basis of study. Whenever possible, we referenced the most up-to-date policy, but since policies are perpetually revised, this also proved challenging over the course of the study.

Finally, the most limiting challenge to this study was that policy documents do not always represent the nuances of how policies are actually implemented for individuals within an institution. Candidates, APT committees, and individual faculty members can interpret policies in a number of ways, and that interpretation can change over time as new insights develop about the policy documents. Future studies should perhaps include faculty interviews, responses, or case studies at particular institutions, keeping in mind that the APT process is often fraught with sensitive information and emotional experiences.

After all these considerations, the final sample group totaled 28 institutions (see Table 1).

We examined scholarship requirements in the APT policies for each institution beginning in academic year 2012–2013 and ending in 2015–2016. While searching for the terms “exhibit” or “exhibition” within each APT policy document proved essential to the review, we considered how scholarship was defined and



Table 1. Academic Libraries Surveyed

1	University of Albany, SUNY, Libraries
2	University of Arizona Libraries
3	Auburn University Libraries
4	University at Buffalo, SUNY, Libraries
5	University of Cincinnati Libraries
6	University of Colorado Boulder Libraries
7	Colorado State University Libraries
8	University of Florida Libraries
9	University of Georgia Libraries
10	University of Illinois at Chicago Library
11	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
12	Indiana University Libraries Bloomington
13	Iowa State University Library
14	Louisiana State University Libraries
15	University of Louisville Libraries
16	University of Maryland Libraries
17	McGill University Library (Canada)
18	University of New Mexico Libraries
19	University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries
20	Ohio State University Libraries
21	Pennsylvania State University Libraries
22	Rutgers University Libraries
23	Stony Brook University, SUNY, Libraries
24	University of South Carolina Libraries
25	University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Libraries
26	Texas A&M University Libraries
27	Virginia Tech Libraries
28	Washington State University Libraries

the degree of flexibility permitted in this area of the dossier supporting promotion with tenure. We also examined APT policies to determine if curating exhibits was considered a job responsibility and thereby tied to librarianship, or if policies allowed the inclusion of exhibits as scholarly endeavors.

Discussion

As is appropriate, the majority of academic libraries continue to value peer-reviewed or refereed work the most highly in the promotion and tenure



process. The Association for College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) guidelines for faculty status directly support this approach.<sup>30</sup> Many APT policies directly support this preference with statements such as that found in the University of Buffalo Libraries, SUNY policy: "There are two critical elements in evaluating research and creative activity: publication and peer review."<sup>31</sup> Pennsylvania State University Libraries also strongly emphasizes peer-reviewed publications in its guidelines: "The University Libraries highly value products of scholarship that have undergone an independent evaluation and selection process, such as peer review, rigorous editorial selection, or competitive juried selection."<sup>32</sup> While academic libraries have broadened their definition of scholarship, often by using the terms "scholarly" and "creative works" to recognize the variety of activities in which librarians engage, a preference clearly remains for traditional scholarship in the form of peer-reviewed publications. Ohio State University Libraries notes, however, "No single type of publication/creative work is invariably a more significant component of a research program than another. Nevertheless, a body of work, which is cumulative in nature and reflects the highest academic standards, is required."<sup>33</sup> For exhibits to attain recognition as another form of scholarship and creativity in an academic librarian's dossier, the faculty librarian needs to make the case for them as quality, peer-reviewed work.

As Table 2 indicates, of those institutions surveyed, 18 universities mentioned exhibits within the scholarship/research sections of their APT policies. Exhibits are at least acknowledged as some sort of scholarship or creative activity at most of the institutions surveyed. These institutions commonly provide examples of scholarly and creative activities in their APT guidelines, usually listed in order of importance. Alas, exhibits are generally found near the bottom of the list. The University of Maryland, College Park, for example, lists exhibits in conjunction with "performances, demonstrations, and other creative activities," while the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's university-wide APT policy groups creative works as a subgroup under publications and creative works.<sup>34</sup> The policy notes that creative works on the curriculum vitae include

**Table 2. "Exhibits" Mentioned in APT Policies**

Number of institutions surveyed (policies found or provided)	28
Number of institutions that specifically mention "exhibit" or "exhibition" in APT policies (either university or library)	18
Number of institutions that use the term "exhibit" or "exhibition" within the scholarly and creative activities section of their APT policies (either university or library)	17
Number of institutions that use the term "exhibit" or "exhibition" within the librarianship or service sections of their APT policies (either university or library)	2
Number of institutions that do not mention "exhibits" or "exhibition" within their APT policies (either university or library)	10

“exhibitions, commissions, competitions, performances, designs, and art or architecture executed.”<sup>35</sup>

Two of the APT policies mention exhibits, but do not categorize them as scholarship, instead identifying them as librarianship or service. The University of Georgia Libraries places exhibits under service to the university or the libraries. Its policy states that “examples of university, faculty, or library projects include preparation of exhibits, participation in the planning of staff development workshops or other education programs, editing in-house newsletters, reports, or other publications.”<sup>36</sup> Other institutions such as the University of Arizona simply do not recognize exhibits as scholarship or service, but class them exclusively as librarianship or part of day-to-day job responsibilities. The University of Arizona Libraries’ policy states:

Written materials (including electronic or paper research guides, finding aids, and similar materials) and/or oral presentations (including lectures, panel discussions, and other invited presentations) and/or exhibitions which were developed as part of assigned library work and that are focused on a campus audience or affiliates, should be listed in the Position Effectiveness section of the CV.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, some institutions categorize exhibits in more than one area of evaluation for promotion. The University of Buffalo Libraries, SUNY, for example, lists exhibits, both physical and virtual, under examples of scholarly activities as well as under “contributions to the libraries” or librarianship. In the reference to exhibits under “contributions to the libraries,” it recognizes the research involved in this type of effort, stating that “When a librarian’s work generates library guides, media productions, exhibits, electronic media, or other practice-related matter, such materials are evaluated by colleagues and, whenever possible, by appropriate evaluators from outside the University. These resources can involve research and creative efforts comparable to that required for articles in refereed journals.”<sup>38</sup>

Several academic institutions support or are at least open to some of the unique activities that archivists, curators, and special collections librarians can perform through the scholarly work of creating exhibits. At the University of Maryland, faculty librarians evaluate candidates using an APT process separate from that of the teaching faculty. Other faculty librarians, external evaluators from the field, the dean of libraries, and the provost evaluate faculty librarians. Teaching faculty do not currently participate in the process, and academic librarians have their own set of guidelines that include examples of what types of work constitute scholarship and creativity. The University of Maryland Libraries APT Guidelines for how to organize a curriculum vita groups exhibits with “performances, demonstrations, and other creative activities”<sup>39</sup> a little over halfway down the list of acceptable activities. While deemed creative, nothing

indicates that exhibits are necessarily considered scholarly endeavors. In addition, exhibits clearly rank lower on the spectrum of scholarship and creativity than do monographs and peer-reviewed articles. However, in the APT policy itself, scholarship and creativity are broadly defined, leaving room for a more open interpretation of where exhibits might fall on the spectrum. Under “scholarship and creativity” the policy reads:

The candidate for promotion to higher rank shall demonstrate sustained and effective engagement in scholarship and creativity. These contributions must be of high quality and significance to the field of librarianship or another discipline related or complementary to the candidate’s area of responsibility. A library faculty member’s scholarship and creativity will be judged for its contribution to library effectiveness and expansion of the librarian’s relationship to knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

Other academic libraries take a similar stance in supporting exhibits as scholarship and rank peer-reviewed work higher on the spectrum of scholarship. The APT policy of Auburn University notes, “Research and creative work ordinarily can be documented by a candidate’s publications or performances/exhibits. Publication subjected to critical review by other scholars as a condition of publication should carry more weight than publication that is not refereed.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Colorado State University Libraries includes exhibits in its APT policy and appears open to forms of scholarship and creativity beyond the monograph and the journal article. The policy states, “Activities encompassed by the term ‘Research and Creative Activity’ include, but are not limited to . . . producing creative work related to the discipline or specialty, such as films, tapes, exhibits, reports, compositions, audiovisual material, computer programs, and/or web pages.” In addition, the policy explains, “Because librarianship does not exist in isolation from the community, which it serves, but rather co-exists with and contributes to all disciplines, scholarly endeavors of Libraries faculty reflect this symbiosis, and often cross-disciplinary boundaries.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, the Iowa State University Libraries APT policy serves as another example of accepting exhibits as scholarly endeavors for faculty librarians. Its policy states:

The nature of scholarly work at a diverse university necessarily varies. In the promotion and tenure review process, however, evidence that a significant portion of a faculty member’s scholarship has been documented (i.e., communicated to and validated by peers beyond the university) is required of all. In the library field, refereed journals and monographs are the traditional media for documenting scholarship; in some areas of librarianship, exhibitions are an additional appropriate form. Emerging technologies are creating (and will continue to create) entirely new media which may be used by librarians. Finally, scholarship may be validated and communicated through conference presentations and invited lectures.<sup>43</sup>

Many APT policies, like that of the Iowa State University Libraries, are beginning to recognize new forms of scholarship and creativity that benefit the academic community.

Of the 10 institutions that do not specifically mention exhibits in their APT policies, it is entirely possible that exhibits qualify as research or scholarly activity—silence does not indicate omission. As definitions of scholarship expand, academic institutions must be open to considering exhibits and other forms of scholarship as library faculty apply for tenure. The Pennsylvania State University Libraries policy, for example, does not mention exhibits, but it does note that “Evidence of the impact of the candidate’s research and creative accomplishments, and of the candidate’s reputation in the discipline, are also valued.”<sup>44</sup> If exhibits are not mentioned specifically in an institution’s APT policy, this absence likely signals that faculty applicants will have to make a compelling case for any exhibit or other creative work to earn recognition as scholarship.

### **Conclusion: Strategies for Acceptance, Documentation, and Evaluation of Exhibits**

Definitions of scholarship and creativity differ widely among ARL institutions and in academic libraries in general, in part because no agreement exists on APT policies for academic librarians. Some institutions cannot even decide whether librarians should have faculty status. This variance renders justifying and documenting the value of nontraditional modes of scholarship, such as exhibits, a challenging proposition. W. Bede Mitchell and Bruce Morton suggested various reasons why library faculty differ so much from teaching faculty. One possible answer includes “substantive differences” in graduate library education, which may leave some librarians unprepared or uncomfortable with faculty status.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, faculty status is not guaranteed for librarians and archivists at all institutions of higher learning. Some information professionals may have had faculty status for quite some time, while others may have just received faculty status in the last ten to twenty years. Academic library faculty still have some catching up to streamline more standard APT policies similar to those of teaching faculty specializations. Without more standard metrics and policies, academic librarians changing positions across institutions have a higher learning curve as to acceptable APT requirements than do teaching faculty. Part of the challenge in creating an APT dossier is the ability to describe the scholarly value and the impact of one’s work. With peer-reviewed articles and books a framework exists for describing this that includes the review process, acceptance rates, and impact factors. Nothing similar currently exists to evaluate the impact of exhibits or other more creative forms of scholarship.

To address this APT policy issue for faculty librarians, we have two recommendations:

- In the near term, library faculty at academic institutions should update APT policies to include scholarly exhibits in the criteria for scholarship.
- ARL and ACRL should include scholarly exhibits as a recommended form of scholarship in their next publications addressing faculty promotion and tenure.<sup>46</sup>

Beyond these policy changes in the profession as a whole, many ways exist for individual faculty members to present exhibits so that they can provide evidence of scholarly communications long after the exhibits are physically taken down. We recommend that exhibits feature the following characteristics to make a solid argument to APT committees and the broader academic community. These recommendations can also assist nonacademic library and archival institutions in creating high-quality exhibits of enduring value.

- **Demonstrated in-depth research comparable to a published article.** The research process can be demonstrated not only by the quality of the exhibit text, but with proper citations, bibliographies, and primary source transcriptions and interpretations. These materials along with the main text, images, and other exhibit graphics can be submitted as examples of scholarly communication in the promotion and tenure dossier.
- **Enduring products.** Long after an exhibit is physically on display, curators must provide evidence of an exhibit's enduring value. One of the best ways to accomplish this is a professionally published exhibit catalog. However, publication costs can be prohibitively expensive, and not all institutions will support the creation of such a catalog. Other ways to create enduring products include hosting a digital version of, or companion to, the exhibit on the institution's website or, where available, within an open access digital repository for campus scholarship. In addition, photographs, audio, and/or video documenting the exhibit and any special events are vital for the tenure and promotion dossier, as are published event programs, invitations, agendas, syllabi, or other publications produced for special events and instruction sessions.
- **Outreach and special events.** Outreach and special events consist of symposia, alumni events, donor recognition events, general public programming, book signings, or any activities that will engage the academic community and the general public. These include collaborating with teaching faculty to use the exhibit in undergraduate or graduate instruction or workshops. In addition to hosting events at

the exhibiting institution or in the gallery, faculty librarians can also present their work on an exhibit at outside scholarly conferences or community venues.

- **Peer review and collaboration.** Library colleagues, the campus community, and outside experts can provide peer review of exhibits in various ways. Peer review can occur during production or after completion of the exhibit or as part of in-depth scholarly collaboration. Collaboration can be especially fruitful at larger academic institutions with multiple curators responsible for creating exhibits and where teaching faculty are stakeholders in the exhibit outcome. It is also important to engage historians or other scholars who are knowledgeable about an exhibit's topic early in the research and planning stages. Collaborators or reviewers can provide feedback during the research and writing process and can write evaluative statements to accompany the promotion and tenure dossier. In addition, learning from and collaborating with other professional groups, such as the National Association of Museum Exhibitions, may assist in establishing better standards and a peer-review process for library or special collections exhibits.<sup>47</sup>
- **Assessment, impact, and engagement.** The ability to measure impact on the targeted audience is an important part of any exhibit. For online components of exhibits, analytics software is essential. Jessica Lacher-Feldman's book on exhibits in special collections provides some brief guidance at evaluating exhibits, including using assessment tools such as focus groups, virtual comment boxes, and online surveys.<sup>48</sup> In addition, visiting groups and individuals can be surveyed or asked to provide comments in the tried-and-true physical comment box or registration book. Coverage in the media is another important way to measure impact and engagement and also to advertise the exhibit to increase impact, as are social media tools. Impact can be measured in a more traditional way by tracking citations of an exhibit catalog in journal articles and other publications. Finally, the museum profession has many resources and tools adaptable for use in assessing and evaluating academic library exhibits.<sup>49</sup> Some of these tools may be excessive for academic libraries, but they do provide a good place to start. The results that these assessment tools provide can be submitted with an individual's promotion dossier to demonstrate impact and engagement.

These strategies for acceptance, documentation, and evaluation of exhibits are at the core of making exhibits an accepted component of a faculty archivist's promotion and tenure dossier. Library faculty are often encouraged

to use day-to-day work to inspire scholarly research projects, and this can be an exciting proposition. Inside and outside the academic institution, it is important to create “an environment of shared ownership and pride, which can only produce greater success.”<sup>50</sup> However, those who insist on the seemingly more permanent nature of monographs and peer-reviewed articles continue to consider the nature of exhibits ephemeral and difficult to grasp. Perhaps the ongoing dialog on the acceptance of digital humanities scholarship in the tenure process can also influence this discussion, especially since many physical exhibits also have online components and spark digital projects.<sup>51</sup> While exhibits may have a different audience and impact than typical peer-reviewed journal articles, they are no less important to the scholarly endeavor. Exhibits often have the ability to produce a broad impact on a more public, but no less important, audience than does an article in a peer-reviewed journal written for a small group of specialized scholars. Archivists, curators, and librarians need to take this advice to heart to produce exhibits and other collaborative, innovative scholarly projects that engage with students, teaching faculty, and the general public.

## NOTES

Some information in this article was presented at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) on October 26, 2012, in Richmond, Virginia, by Elizabeth A. Novara as “Exhibits as Scholarship: Strategies for Acceptance, Documentation, and Evaluation in Academic Libraries,” for a panel session entitled *Archivists as Academics: Meeting Scholarship and Creativity Requirements*.

<sup>1</sup> For this study we will use the term “librarian” to denote any information professional holding the faculty appointment of librarian. We hope that this study will prove most useful to library faculty who frequently have exhibit creation as a core responsibility, which includes archivists, curators, rare book librarians, and special collections librarians. However, our findings and recommendations should prove helpful to the profession at large.

<sup>2</sup> Other forms of scholarship often considered atypical include artwork, theatrical and musical performances, and digital humanities projects, although perspectives on these types of projects as scholarly work are evolving.

<sup>3</sup> An ARL survey of special collections repositories identified a “widespread emphasis on exhibits” and further “that the majority of respondents have a physical space within the library designated for this activity.” Indeed, 43 of 78 ARL survey respondents specified that they mount exhibits in a gallery space, a substantive exhibiting hall, or a partnering museum. See Adam Berenbak et al., *Special Collections Engagement*, SPEC Kit 317 (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2010), 11–12, 25–30.

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of clarity, in this article we will refer to all policies pertaining to appointment, promotion, and tenure, continuing appointment, or permanent status as “APT” or “tenure” policies.

<sup>5</sup> W. Bede Mitchell and Bruce Morton, “On Becoming Faculty Librarians: Acculturation Problems and Remedies,” *College & Research Libraries* 53, no. 5 (1992): 385.

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