

Academic Librarianship in Flux
*The Dynamics of Negotiating Professional
Jurisdiction*

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UNIVERSITY OF BORÅS

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Abstract

This study aims to better understand the dynamics of negotiating professional jurisdiction within research from the perspective of academic librarians who develop library services for researchers. This qualitative case study consists of 24 semi-structured interviews, 32 recorded non-participant observations, and seven official university library documents collected at one Swedish university library with three division libraries during 2016.

The analytical frame is based on Abbott's (1988) system of professions approach and focuses on changes in professional work. It is assumed that all professions have strong or weak control of jurisdictions, which are described as a profession's exclusive rights to a task area, including the right to define tasks and relevant professional knowledge. The assumption is that jurisdictions change and are under constant negotiation at the workplace until settled. The settlements range from strong to weak control of jurisdiction. The analytical frame also identifies disturbances in negotiating jurisdiction that can be internal or external to a profession, e.g., new knowledge, organization, and technology.

The results show that developing library services for researchers is an ambiguous and complicated task. It is influenced by several constraints and addressed differently by academic librarians. Constraints are related to the task description, organization, management support, communication, academic librarians' skills and competencies, as well as level of ambition. The results showed that academic librarians can claim jurisdiction within research, although disciplinary differences emerged. Academic librarians at a science and medical library seemed to have more apparent opportunities than academic librarians in humanities and art history or social science libraries to claim jurisdiction within research. The study confirms that access jurisdiction is an acknowledged jurisdiction for academic librarians and is strengthened by new and emerging tasks related to access, e.g., digitization. Access jurisdiction seems to act as a springboard to claim and negotiate jurisdiction within research. The study reveals active push and passive pull dynamics related to negotiating jurisdictions and highlighted communication and information dissemination as an organizational disturbance not previously considered in Abbott's (1988) system of professions approach. In addition, the thesis clarified a need to analyze the work and needs of the profession itself.

Keywords: academic librarianship, librarians, profession, occupation jurisdiction, Abbott, negotiations
Universitetsbibliotekarier, bibliotekarier, professioner, yrke, jurisdiktioner, Abbott, förhandlingar

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