



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 134-E
Meeting: 109. Management of Library Associations
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

The professionalization of librarians in the Philippines: the role of library associations

Antonio m. Santos

Philippine Librarians Association, Inc. (PLAI)
Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Library education in the Philippines started in 1914 when the University of the Philippines, a state university, offered courses in library science. Since then until 1990, graduates of library science from various schools have not been recognized as professionals by the state. While other callings with lesser training have been certified, librarians remain unqualified according to government standards. Librarianship, as a profession, has not projected a good image and status it rightly deserves. It was only in 1990, after two-decades of a long struggle of the Filipino librarian for identity and recognition, that the Philippine Congress enacted Republic Act No. 6966 entitled "An Act Regulating the Practice of Librarianship and Prescribing the Qualifications of Librarians. Otherwise known as "The Philippine Librarianship Act."

A decade has passed since then. It may be asked, has its implementation contributed to the enhancement of the profession? This paper intends to discuss the context of professionalism and its significance, the rights and responsibilities of membership to professional organizations, the role of library associations in the admission to the practice of the profession, assessment of the implementation of the law and its consequences to the profession's status and image problem and lastly, the strengthening of partnership and linkages between library associations with other professional organizations in the Philippines. Specifically, the writer will briefly present the conceptual framework of the governments regulations of different professions in the Philippines with emphasis on the librarianship profession.

INTRODUCTION

The process of professionalization is an indigenous effort to introduce standards of excellence, rules of behavior, guidelines for recruitment, and instruction along with measures of protection of its members by developing a high sense of dedication and responsibility, thus elevating the particular vocational life to a position of dignity and prestige in society.

In the Philippines library education started in 1914 when the University of the Philippines, a state university, offered courses in library science. Since then, until 1990, graduates of library science from various schools have not been recognized as professionals by the State. The status of librarians to a professional level worthy of their calling had been recognized by the State through the enactment of Republic Act No. 6966, otherwise known as the Philippine Librarianship Act of 1990.

In regulating the practice of librarianship by the State, librarians are now assured of professional status and recognition which is necessary in the performance of their duties and in meeting their responsibilities in providing access to information.

The purpose of this paper is to share the Filipino librarians' experience that led to what they had become – proudly entrenched in the hierarchy of 42 professions regulated by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) under the Office of the President of the Republic of the Philippines. This paper will attempt to discuss the salient features of the law and other implementing resolutions of the Board for Librarians (BFL) in regulating the practice of librarianship in the Philippines. Likewise, enumeration of the important role of the Philippine Librarians Association, Inc. (PLAI) as partner of the State in the implementation of the law and the regulation of the librarianship profession will also be presented.

It is my hope that you will find inspiration in the Philippine experience in securing for yourselves the public recognition that you rightly deserve from your respective governments.

PHILIPPINE LIBRARIANS ASSOCIATION, INC. (PLAI)

PLAI was conceived a little over two decades after America established libraries in the country in 1901. It was founded on October 23, 1923 by Dr. Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera who was then Director of the Philippine Library Museum. It was incorporated originally as Philippine Libraries Association, Inc., as a non-stock corporation on October 9, 1925 and on May 5, 1989, it was renamed Philippine Librarians Association, Inc., for purposes of the Professionalization Law. It has a long list of notable achievements which include the holding of continuing library education through seminars, conferences and congresses; celebration of the National Book week and the Library and Information Services Month every November since its proclamation by Governor Frank Murphy in 1934; affiliation with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) since 1929 ; membership to the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) since 1970; and hosting of the 1980 IFLA General Conference and the 1973 and 1987 CONSAL, among others.

According to Russel Bowden, the primary responsibility to the society of any professional organization is the protection of the quality of services that its members provide to the users of their services. He further stated that a library association's most important

function is the protection of standards of performance of the professionals in its membership. These responsibilities were achieved by PLAI in its struggle for State recognition for the library profession. It has been considered to be the most important achievement of the association and it becomes its crowning glory. The history of the Philippine Librarianship Act had been a long struggle, spanning about two decades, and was delayed by some controversies and political upheavals that marred the country in 1972 and 1986. PLAI has employed many strategies towards the realization of the Filipino librarians' dream of professionalization through State regulation. In the end, librarians were rewarded with a legislation called Republic Act No. 6966, entitled: ***Regulating the Practice of Librarianship and Prescribing the Qualifications of Librarians in the Country***, popularly known as the **Philippine Librarianship Act of 1990**.

PROFESSIONAL REGULATION COMMISSION (PRC)

As mentioned above, the practice of a profession in the Philippines is governed by a professional regulation law which was enacted by the legislative body pursuant to the police power and *parens patriae* of the State as enshrined in the Philippine Constitution, to protect the life, health, property and welfare of the people through the acquisition of an adequate level of knowledge, skills and competence.

The State recognizes the important roles of professionals in nation-building, and towards this end, promotes the sustained development of a reservoir of professionals whose competence has been determined by honest and credible licensure examination and whose standards of professional service and practice are internationally recognized and considered world-class brought about by regulatory measures, programs and activities that foster professional growth and advancement.

The PRC was created by Presidential Decree No. 223 as amended by Presidential Decree No. 657. It is a three-man Commission attached to the Office of the President of the Philippines for general direction and coordination. In 2000, said enabling law was repealed by Republic Act No. 8981, otherwise known as the **PRC Modernization Act of 2000**. Every professional regulatory law, which in the case of librarians, is the Philippine Librarianship Act, has to be administered and enforced by the Professional Regulatory Board (PRB) which, is under the administrative control and supervision of the PRC. The board for the library profession is called Board for Librarians (BFL). It has the power to evaluate the application for registration, give or conduct the licensure examination, register the successful examinees, and regulate their practice within the territorial jurisdiction of the Philippines. Through the respective boards, the PRC is empowered by law to administer, implement and enforce the regulatory policies of the national government with respect to the regulation and licensing of professions and occupations under its jurisdictions, including but not limited to the maintenance of professional and occupational standards and ethics, and the enforcement of regulations relative thereto.

A Chart of State Regulation of Professions is attached as "Appendix A."

BOARD FOR LIBRARIANS (BFL)

As previously mentioned, the BFL is the PRB for the library profession. It is composed of a Chairman and two members who are appointed by the President of the Philippines upon the recommendation of the PRC from among the registered librarians of recognized standing representing the academic, public and special libraries as certified by the Accredited Professional organization (APO) which, at present, is the PLAI. In the selection of nominees to the membership of the BFL, Executive Order No. 496 is strictly adhered to by PLAI. Through its Committee on Nominations to the BFL composed of five immediate past PLAI Presidents, names are submitted to the PRC on the basis of rigid criteria. These names are then selected by the PRC and recommended for the approval of and appointment by the President of the Republic of the Philippines.

The BFL has been created to ensure that only those who pass the appropriate licensure examination for librarians are granted the Certificate of Registration and license to practice as librarians. The issuance of the Certificate and License to a candidate who passes the licensure examination means that he has gained the entry level knowledge, technical skills and competence he needs to practice his profession. Registration by the PRC-BFL also implies that the professional possesses good moral character and the commitment to serve others. Once registered, a librarian is included in the Roster of Registered Librarians.

The functions and duties of the BFL are enumerated in Section 5 of Republic Act No. 6966. The first members of the BFL were Dr. Irene D. Amores, Chairperson, Mrs. Susima L. Gonzales and Mrs. Belen B. Angeles as members. To them is credited the promulgation of the BFL Resolution 01, s. 1992 providing for the rules and regulations implementing the professionalization law for librarians. Pursuant to this implementing guidelines, the BFL's main function is to conduct the annual licensure examination for librarians. The BFL determines and prepares the contents of the examinations, scores and ratings, the examination papers, submits the results to the PRC, and determines the appropriate passing rate if not provided in the law regulating the profession. In the case of the library profession, the rules implementing the Republic Act provides for an average passing grade of 75% for all subjects, without getting below 60% in any one subject. Other pertinent matters regarding examination will be discussed in a separate heading.

In addition, the BFL investigates violations of the law, rules and regulations, suspends, revokes or reissues certificates of registration and adopts such measures as may be necessary for the enhancement of the profession.

As regards term of office, the Chairman and members of the BFL hold office for a term of three years from the date they assume office. No person who has served for two successive terms shall be eligible for reappointment until after the lapse of one year.

LICENSURE EXAMINATION

The PRC's centerpiece program is to give highest priority to the preservation of the integrity, validity, reliability, and credibility of the licensure examinations. This commitment is being observed by all PRBs, including the BFL.

Pursuant to Section 12 of Republic Act No. 6966, the BFL had conducted eleven (11) licensure examinations. The first examination for librarians was held in Manila in December 1992 and the last one was held in November of last year. In all these examinations, there are a total of 2,220 librarians who were licensed because they passed the licensure examination. The statistics of licensed librarians, both through licensure examination and exemption from examination is attached as Appendix "B."

The examination for the practice of librarianship consists of the following subjects: organization and management of libraries and information centers (30%) ; references, bibliography and user services (20%) ; selection and acquisition of library materials (15%) ; cataloging and classification (15%), indexing and abstracting (10%) ; information technology (5%) ; and lastly, laws and practices related to librarianship (5%). The respective relative weight for each subject of examination has been determined in the rules and regulations implementing Republic Act No. 6966.

In order to be admitted to the examination for librarians, an applicant must, at the time of filing the application be a citizen of the Philippines and must at least be twenty (20) years of age. He must also be in good health and of good moral character and a graduate of a school, college, or university recognized by the government with any of the following degrees : Bachelor of Library Science or Information Science ; Bachelor of Science in Library Science or Information Science ; Bachelor of Science in Education Major / Specialization in Library Science or Bachelor of Arts Major in Library Science ; Masters of Library Science or Information Science ; and Master of Arts in Library Science.

To pass the examination, an examinee must obtain an average rating of seventy-five (75%) with no rating below sixty percent (60%) in any subject. The law provides that an examinee who fails three (3) successive Board examinations shall be disqualified from taking the fourth (4th) examination unless he has taken a refresher course from a duly accredited school or its equivalent as determined by the Board. At present, the University of the Philippines Institute of Library and Information Science is the accredited institution offering a refresher course as mandated in the BFL Res. No. 04, series of 2000.

REGISTRATION WITHOUT LICENSURE EXAMINATION

Section 18 of Republic Act No. 6966, which is referred to as the *grandfather clause*, grants registration to applicants provided they meet the requirements specified in the law. It means that a provision in a new law or regulation exempts those already in or are part of the existing system which is being regulated.

The law states that upon application and payment of the required fees, certification of registration as librarian shall be issued without the necessity of licensure examination to qualified applicants, who on the date of the approval of the act, are either of the following : a) librarian and supervising librarian eligibles and are holders of a bachelor's degree ; b) first grade eligibles or their equivalent and are holders of a Bachelor's Degree with at least eighteen (18) units in Library Science and at least five (5) years experience in librarianship, and c) first grade eligibles, or their equivalent, and are holders of a Master's Degree in Library and/ or Information Science. The law further provided that this exception is not automatic. One must apply and they are given three (3) years from the organization of the Board for Librarians (BFL) within which to register and be included in the roster of professionals. Since the BFL was organized on November 8, 1991, three years thereafter is November 8, 1994, which was the period when application for exemption has lapsed or

expired. However, Res. No. 7, s. 1999 extended the period of application to allow registration of librarians under this section of the law.

Many librarians availed of this provision and extension and to date there are approximately 1,586 librarians who were licensed without having to take the licensure examination. Under the present PRC administration, however, applications under this grandfather clause are no longer entertained, the reason being that all professionals should take examination in order to be licensed to add integrity and quality in the admission to the practice of any profession. In the library profession, the librarians in the private sector consider this section of the law as a controversial provision because it has adversely affected them. They claim that the law favors more the librarians in the government service because of the provision, which states that only applicants with first-grade civil service eligibility can apply for registration without examination. Most librarians in the private sector do not possess eligibility requirement, which is a necessary requirement for government employees. This is, therefore, seen by some as a sort of class legislation, which necessarily calls for either amendment or repeal.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR REGISTERED LIBRARIANS

In pursuance of one of its functions and duties, the BFL had approved a Code of Ethics through Resolution No. 2, dated August 14, 1992. It consists of a Preamble and 32 sections grouped into six articles.

The Preamble emphasizes the librarian's mission as a professional. It states in part: **“Librarians are imbued with lofty ideals of service to people through books and other records of knowledge, a service they believe is their best way to serve humanity, enrich people's lives and attain self-actualization.”**

The Code specifies ideal practices and relationships necessary to guide the practitioner in maintaining standards of ethical behavior. More specifically, Article I concerns the librarian's relationship with the state and society; Article II is on his relationship with his clients; Article III pertains to his relationship with professionals and his colleagues; Article IV deals with his relationship with his agency; and Article V specifies the librarian's relationship with himself.

The law specifically provided penalties or imprisonment for violations of any provisions of R.A. No. 6966 and empowered the BFL to conduct administrative investigations adopting the rules of procedures provided in the Rules and Regulations implementing the PRC Modernization Act of 2000.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, I have discussed the recognition accorded by the Philippine government to the role of librarians and information professionals in the social, cultural, economic development of our nation when it promulgated the Professionalization Law for Filipino Librarians. Likewise, I have selectively discussed the salient provisions of the Philippine Librarianship Act as it relates to the enhancement of the librarianship profession. Before the enactment of the law, there was never any inclusion of the librarianship in any list or statistics

of professions despite early library education earlier stated. As a matter of fact, artesians and plumbers were recognized ahead of the librarians. Why? Maybe there is truth to what Tony Leisner said in his article for IFLA on "Should Libraries Engage in Marketing?" He said, "almost everybody knows where the library building is located in their community. But hardly anyone knows a librarian in their community". Contrast this with other professions such as medical, accounting or law where nearly everyone knows the professional even if they do not know where the office is.

I, on my part, call on all professional librarians to give their share. Librarians must strive harder to increase awareness not only among ourselves but also others outside of us in our responsibilities to participate in our respective nation's quest for development and for us to serve the public to the best of our knowledge and expertise. In this manner, we become a major force in our people's betterment and growth.

Statistics on BFL Licensure Examinations for Librarians

Date of Examination	Number of Examinees	Number of Examinees Passed	Number of Examinees Failed	Percentage of Passing
1. Dec. 1992	342	124	218	36.26%
2. Dec. 1993	28	14	14	50.00 %
3. Dec. 1994	200	101	99	50.50 %
4. Dec. 1995	263	136	127	51.71 %
5. Dec. 1996	419	186	233	44.39%
6. Dec. 1997	451	245	206	54.32 %
7. Dec. 1998	431	217	214	50.35%
8. Dec. 1999	536	295	241	55.04%
9. Nov. 2000	621	331	290	53.30%
10. Nov. 2001	688	351	337	51.02%
11. Nov. 2002	656	344	312	52.43%
Total	4293	2220	2073	

Total Registered Librarians through Examination 2220

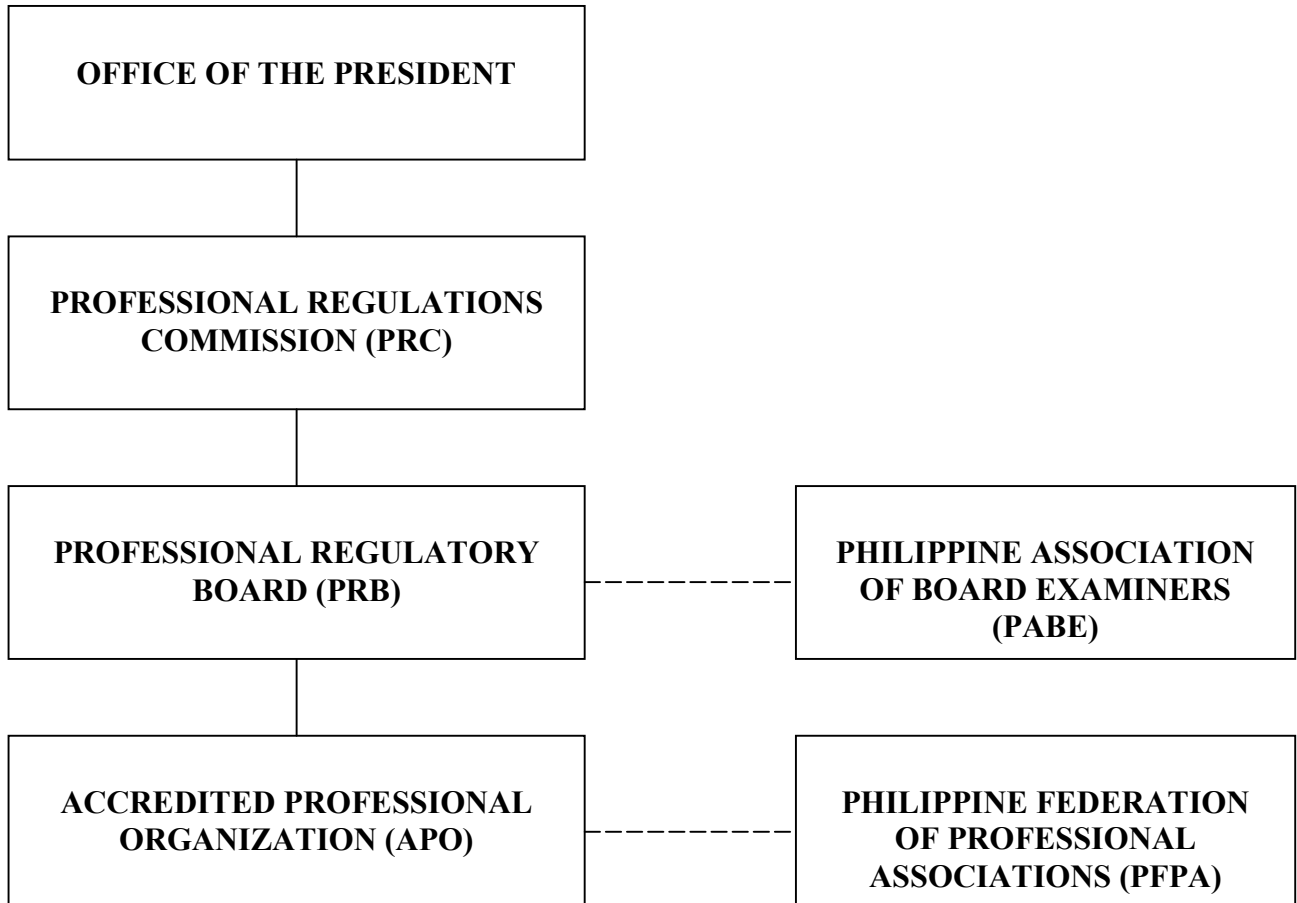
Total Registered Librarians through Exemption 1586

Total Registered Librarians as of Year 2002 (Completed) 3806

Source : BFL Resolutions (1993 – 2001) and Updates

STATE REGULATION OF PROFESSIONS

-- A CHART --



For the Library Profession:

Board for Librarians (BFL) is the PRB

Philippine Librarians Association, Inc. (PLAI) is the APO