The Weight of Excessive Positivity: Do Vocation and Resiliency Narratives Challenge Librarianship?

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The COVID-19 pandemic increased the level of stress on academic library workers already struggling with budget cuts, increased work requirements and responsibilities, and overall campus stresses. Critically examining workplace norms and expectations of service may be perceived as displaying a "negative attitude" by others, turning attention on the individual rather than systems and structures. At what point, we ask, does service to the mission of the organization cross the line into servitude, to the detriment of oneself?

We will share summaries of survey data and interviews with U.S. library workers we are collecting, examining current attitudes and values toward choosing academic library work. These will help us better understand how "vocation" is propagated through positive psychology and resilience narratives, and other examinations of individual character, at the expense of organizational analysis. A discussion of how this is present in our own libraries follows.