
Introduction

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Abstract

Introduction to the CAUT Journal special themed issue on post-secondary information workers in Canada

Keywords librarians; archivists; information workers

Résumé

Présentation du numéro spécial du Journal de l'ACPPU portant sur les travailleuses et travailleurs de l'information dans le monde de l'enseignement postsecondaire

Mots-clés bibliothécaires; archivistes; travailleuses et travailleurs de l'information

This is the first themed issue of the *CAUT Journal*, and I'm aware of how unusual and special it is that it focuses on librarians and archivists. In a chapter I published a decade ago, I traced the evolution of academic librarians in Canada as they matured into full-fledged CAUT members and union activists. In the late 1950s and 1960s, CAUT staff were questioning whether academic librarians could even be members since we were not frequently part of faculty associations. As late as 1975 (when the constitution of CAUT was amended to include librarians), a former president of CAUT continued to argue for the exclusion of librarians from both academic staff associations and CAUT (Dekker, 2014, p. 51). Librarians and archivists have come a long way since then, both within CAUT and within our own faculty associations. This issue is proof of that.

Since the early days of organizing alongside other academic staff, librarians and archivists in Canada have bargained and used other tools to achieve significant improvements to our working conditions and salaries. But as readers of the issue know, this work is long-term and often involves sacrificing time that might be spent otherwise, including on activities more likely to further careers. I reflect often on what keeps librarians and archivists — including myself — engaged in this work in such significant ways.

This issue does not provide a simple answer to that question, but it does offer a range of insights into the value of unions, collective action and solidarity for librarians, archivists and other information workers in Canada's post-secondary sector. Emily Drabinski and Melanie Mills share their experiences as unionized academic librarians who transitioned into administrative roles with no union representation, only to realize how valuable union membership is to their careers, relationships and identities. Theirs is an honest and vulnerable contribution that gives voice to workers we rarely hear from — those with experiences as senior management. Their article illustrates why some administrators conclude that they must leave management despite the perceived opportunity to positively impact institutions.

Carla Graebner and Tim Ribaric explore the reasons that academic librarians do not participate in collective bargaining to the same extent that they participate in other union activities. Based on interviews with librarians who have contributed to collective bargaining, the authors outline positive and negative experiences that contribute to getting involved in their unions in this way. Their insights can help faculty associations identify ways to make negotiations more equitable and attractive to these members.

My own contribution documents the experience of resolving an association grievance in library council rather than through traditional means of grievance

resolution. This article describes a case where collegial governance, labour relations and collective action overlap to achieve a procedure for hiring senior library administrators when the local collective agreement was contravened. Can and should library councils be utilized for grievance resolution when other methods of grievance resolution fail?

Moving away from workplace-based cases, Michelle D'Agostino and Michael McNally document efforts to create solidarity among information workers from different types of institutions and employment situations in the province of Alberta. Though the initiative ultimately failed, it fostered other forms of activism that may hold more promise. If it illustrates certain barriers to solidarity across information work in different employment settings, it also provides insight into new ways of creating space for important labour-oriented discussion and actions.

Finally, Sam Popowich argues that Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents the same challenges to librarianship and to post-secondary institutions as previous technologies and that it need not be regarded as either a mortal threat or a form of salvation. Rather, in understanding academic workers *as workers* — as part of one collective that must act in solidarity — AI offers an opportunity for shared understanding of our labour and opens up fertile ground for collective action.

I hope that you enjoy reading this collection of articles about academic librarians, archivists and other information workers in Canada. I thank the CAUT Editorial committee for guidance and support; I especially thank Robin Whitaker and Tim Ribaric who were instrumental in bringing this issue to life.

References

Dekker, J. (2014). Out of the "library ghetto:" An exploration of CAUT's contributions to the achievements of Canadian Academic Librarians. In J. Dekker & M. Kandiuk (Eds.), *Solidarity: Academic Librarian Labour Activism and Participation in Canada* (pp. 39–60). Library Juice Press.