

Negotiating for Parity: Closing the Librarian/Faculty Gap

Report on the CAUT Librarians Conference, October 23-25, 2009 – Ottawa Marriott Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario

Submitted by Michael Hohner, UWFA Librarian

Conference Theme: Academic freedom allows librarians to vigorously oppose efforts to censor, filter or divert information. It also allows librarians to critique workplace mechanisms and structures that interfere with the exercise of their duties. It is therefore essential that academic freedom parity exists between academic librarians and faculty in respect to collective agreement language. It is equally important that librarians elevate the exercise of academic freedom to a central place in the culture of their workplaces, as faculty have done.

Report: Toni Samek, Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta opened the conference with a keynote address. In her presentation, she made a connection to the school library situation. While some regions are affected more than others, many school libraries throughout Canada have been replacing full-time school librarians with part-time teacher librarians, library technicians, or not at all. The Ontario Library Association commissioned an independent study a few years ago showed a marked impact with schools supported by professional librarians versus those who were not.

In the morning keynote presentation, James Turk, CAUT Executive Director echoed many of the remarks made by Samek. Turk identified Babbage as the first capitalist to breakdown jobs and assign tasks requiring less skill to those who he could pay much less. Turk noted the trend of deskilling of labour and how this industrialized approach has been more recently taken with education.

The panel session on workload provided a dramatic perspective. Suzanne O'Neill, Public Services Librarian, Fanshawe College, provided the situation at colleges throughout Ontario. While Meg Raven, Coordinator of Public Services, Mount Saint Vincent University Library, presented the situation that is typical for most universities across Canada, Sylvie Lafortune, Government Information and Data Librarian, Laurentian University, presented a much more enviable workload situation for Laurentian. At Laurentian, librarians have had parity with faculty since 1979.

In the next session, Neil Tudiver, Assistant Executive Director, CAUT, provided a picture of the salary situation for librarians versus faculty at many universities throughout Canada. While universities like Trent or Windsor show some parity at certain levels between librarians and faculty of similar rank, Laurentian is the only university in Canada to enjoy complete parity. Research institutions showed quite a large gap between faculty and librarian salaries, while the gap tended to be less significant at smaller, more teaching focused universities. Generally, Tudiver thought it would likely be easier for less research-focused universities to close the gap.

Tudiver's session was followed by a hands-on exercise for negotiating salary. We were divided into 12 teams and half were bargaining for the management side and half for the labour side during the simulation. Strangely, the salary table that was used by all in the exercise for Great Canadian University, was the 2009-2010 salary table from the University of Winnipeg Collective Agreement. Tudiver commented that as salary tables go, it has several challenges, especially with the incongruous steps between the librarian and professor ranks. Also, any salary table that provides a second tier of half increments is also problematic. Although UWFA made some progress with achieving some parallels for floors and ceilings in the salary table with our last round of bargaining, the librarians still remain a full rank below professors. Even with a smaller cohort of librarians in proportion to faculty, our attempt to close even a seemingly small gap was a challenge for all in the bargaining exercise given all the other budget and negotiating priorities. Though not particularly reassuring that we can ever close the salary gap, it seemed to be at least a realistic exercise.

The final breakout session for the day was a recap of what had covered so far in terms of principles driving librarian/faculty parity, the degree of differentiation between librarian/faculty terms and conditions at each institution, and steps taken by our various faculty associations so far to close the gap. We remained in our breakout groups for the salary negotiation exercise and then had one person from the group report back the next day to the conference. Though we were grouped with similar-sized universities for our negotiation exercise, there were quite dramatic differences. While U of Winnipeg has the same academic freedom clause for librarians and faculty, some had different clauses for each group at their respective university. There was also difference in hours worked, nature of work, governance and reporting, and research days. While we have made some progress in the last round of bargaining at U of Winnipeg for achieving parity with librarians and faculty on TPDA and started some work at realigning the salary tables for librarians and faculty (to have a common salary table), we still have a long way to go. However, while some of the struggles are greater than others, it was somewhat reassuring to see that we are all still struggling.

The session on clause drafting on Sunday morning provided a practical hands-on exercise along with some good coaching from Peter Simpson on what to look for and some sage advice on the pitfalls to avoid. Overall, it was a good, practical session on building better clauses into our collective agreements.

Overall, I thought the conference was very worthwhile. It was good to meet with colleagues across Canada to understand their struggles. I believe I am better prepared to council UWFA and my colleagues at U of Winnipeg. As with our previous bargaining work, it will be good to discuss the trends in more detail and to review our priorities as we continue to move forward together.

In Solidarity,

Michael Hohner