



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

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BY EMAIL: susan.haigh@carl-abrc.ca

Susan Haigh
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Canadian Association of Research Libraries
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Dear Ms. Haigh:

We are writing on behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and its academic librarian and archivist members to provide comments on the draft document produced by the CARL Core Competencies Working Group. The CAUT Librarians' and Archivists' Committee has carefully reviewed the draft and would like to thank CARL for taking the initiative to update the *Core Competencies for the 21st Century CARL Librarians* that was produced in 2010. While we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft, we also would have welcomed and appreciated an invitation to collaborate from the beginning of the review. We look forward to doing so in the future.

As a draft document whose aim is to increase "alignment between aspiration values and knowledge (p.2)," the *Competencies for CARL / ABRC Librarians* (2019) falls short for various reasons, which we briefly describe below. However, before engaging in specific comments, may we simply mention that CAUT represents the interests of non-administrative academic librarians working at CARL institutions. However, CAUT was not consulted with respect to this document. We are disappointed that no such consultation took place, and we therefore seek to provide a counter-balance to the heavy administrative tone and assumptions that are implicit in the draft document.

As the document is intended to apply to thousands of librarians, we would appreciate a statement regarding the positioning of CARL vis à vis academic librarians; that is, that CARL represents administrators. CAUT, on the other hand, openly represents the labour perspectives of academic librarians and archivists. As such, we are concerned with the effects that statements such as the draft competency profile have on the working lives of CAUT members and academic librarians more generally. CAUT provides labour-oriented perspectives in its many policies and advisories that often clash with the CARL draft competencies.

Please note that because we are responding to a draft document, we have not engaged deeply with all of its contents, but instead have offered higher level suggestions and comments that we hope will be considered seriously. We also welcome an opportunity to speak with the members of the Working Group in order to provide more significant and detailed feedback.

Academic Freedom

Rather than proscribe a set of specific skills and mindsets, CAUT's approach to supporting academic librarians and archivists has included a very strong reinforcement of academic freedom. In this, we value unique approaches to our work informed by individual expertise and experience. Academic freedom emphasizes independent, critical thinking and intellectual freedom throughout a career that includes professional duties, academic service, and scholarly activities. Librarians and archivists have the autonomy to decide an ethical, effective, and professional approach to their work. We believe that developing a career guided by principles of academic freedom leads to greater professional competency than simply adapting to external environmental drivers, as the CARL draft document suggests. For example, the draft competencies mention little regarding individual research and scholarly activities and how these contribute to a librarians' or archivists' career development, yet in many if not all CARL institutions such activities are required for promotions to higher ranks.¹

Institutional and Individual Competencies

Throughout the draft document, institutional needs are conflated with individual careers, abilities and aspirations. The document attempts to provide a guideline for "setting both personal and organizational professional goals (p. 1)," but we contend that these are quite different and should be separated in future iterations of this document. Taking an approach that assumes that individuals have little purpose other than to serve the needs of the organization is ignorant of personal goals, creativity, and variations in careers and professional practice. We note that at various points in the document, diversity is mentioned, which should extend to diversities of professional practice, service and scholarly activities. Furthermore, the overemphasis of collaboration gives the impression that the contribution of the individual and personal autonomy are not valued. Librarian and archivist work has value in and of itself, and is not just a means to support the organization or the work of others.

Skills

In a document that purports to outline and describe the "knowledge, skills and mindsets (p. 1)" that define academic librarianship, we are surprised to see how few skills are mentioned. Most of the document focuses on attitudes and approaches rather than skills. While we agree that some of these soft skills are required in our field (as well as most others), it is of concern that CARL continues to emphasize qualities that contribute to the librarian stereotype as being caring, flexible, agreeable, supportive, and of service to others instead of being professionals in our own right. Many – if not most – academic librarian and archivist job descriptions today include requirements such as computer programming, data analysis, data management, analytical skills, and other hard skills. We encourage you to elaborate further the skills required in our profession rather than focusing on the personal qualities of academic librarians.

Collective Agreements, Collegiality, and Governance

One of the most important skills that academic librarians must have is the ability to read and interpret collective agreements. They are the legal contracts guiding relationships between employers and employees. While the existence of collective agreements is acknowledged in the draft document, their importance is understated. Furthermore, the concepts of collegiality and governance are not even mentioned. Many CARL libraries operate – as do their parent institutions – on the principle of 'shared' governance; that is management shares academic decision-making

1. We note that the 2010 version of this same document included two full paragraphs (p. 5, p. 9) on the importance of developing individual research and performing scholarly activities (Library Education Working Group & Building Capacity Subcommittee, 2010).

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with employees. Guidelines regarding employee rights, how to contribute to shared governance, and in what forum to participate are usually outlined in collective agreements (or employment manuals where unions are not present). Understanding shared governance and the principle of collegiality is essential for the majority of academic librarians in Canada. Library administrators accept that academic librarians and archivists have essential expertise to contribute to the management of our institutions, but with different goals and priorities.

As mentioned, because the CARL document is only in a draft version at present, we have not fully elaborated all of the improvements that could be made. Rather we have outlined a few broad issues that we encourage the members of the Working Group to consider in future versions. We also reiterate that we would be willing to provide more detailed feedback so that perspectives beyond administrators may be included, and we hope you will be in touch with us shortly.

Sincerely,



Brenda Austin-Smith
President



David Robinson
Executive Director

c.c. Tim Ribaric, Chair, CAUT Librarians' and Archivists' Committee