

**CAUT Librarians' Committee Discussion Paper
on
Governance and Librarians**

*This paper is to promote discussion within the Canadian Association of University Teachers
and does not necessarily reflect the views of CAUT*

One of the defining qualities of the university is the right that all academic staff have to participate collegially in the governance of their institution and to make decisions which affect their own future as well as the future of the university as a whole. Collegiality is entrenched in the academic structure worldwide, and the UNESCO recommendation regarding the rights and freedoms of higher-education teaching personnel, passed at the General Conference in 1997, reaffirms this. "The principles of collegiality include academic freedom, shared responsibility, the policy of participation of all concerned in internal decision-making structures and practices and the development of consultative mechanisms. Collegial decision-making should encompass decisions regarding administration and determination of policies of higher education, curriculum, research, extension work, allocation of resources and other related activities, in order to improve academic excellence and quality for the benefit of society at large." (Paragraph 32)

This right to participate in decision-making applies to governance issues throughout the entire academy, from the governing board at the broadest level down to the individual academic departments. CAUT has always espoused as a fundamental principle the notion of collegiality within the university structure. This philosophy echoes throughout all the CAUT documents, and it is the basic underlying assumption in all the recommended policies and procedures for governance of the university.

Librarians and Collegiality

CAUT policy states clearly that librarians should be as involved in university governance as the other members of the academic staff. The "Policy Statement on Workload and Governance for Academic Librarians at Canadian Universities" states: "Librarians must also be able to participate fully in academic affairs and, to that end, must be eligible for membership on all governing bodies of the university." (Clause 3) The "Policy Guidelines on Cutbacks and Retrenchment In Universities and Their Effects on Librarians" echoes this position: "Opportunities should be available for librarians to be actively involved in planning and decision-making efforts both within their libraries and on university-wide governing bodies." (Clause 1)

While these statements reflect CAUT policy and outline the ideal situation, librarians often find themselves working in an environment over which they have little or no control. Although librarians may be nominally recognized as academics and partners with the faculty in the educational and research process, their participation in decision-making is often marginal or at the whim of the administration. Librarians report that decisions are sometimes made by people who have little or no knowledge of library issues yet have the authority to impose change and to set policy. These decisions -- regarding funding, staffing levels, equipment, etc -- are often made with virtually no consultation with the librarians and the library staff by administrators who work outside the library.

The Climate of Retrenchment In Universities

Moreover, the current climate in universities does not support the librarians' desire to have increased control over their working environment and more influence within the university at large. It is unlikely that librarians will be able to increase their influence in the university at a time when administrations are striving to impose their own autonomous control. The collegial system is under attack at many levels, and the push is towards a more managerial style as administrators try to exercise more and more influence over university governance. This attack on collegiality threatens to undermine the very essence of the academy.

Yet, ironically, in times of retrenchment, a collegial approach may well serve the needs of the institution better than a managerial approach. As Cynthia Hardy points out in The Politics of Collegiality, "When moved by collegiality, individuals are willing to sacrifice personal or group interests in favour of an overarching identification to the institution. This loyalty makes interest groups willing to accept decisions that do not necessarily have any individual benefit but do have some institutional payoff. It also makes groups more understanding and receptive to the different circumstances experienced by other groups, avoids time-consuming conflict; and builds institutional loyalty.... It has been found, for example, that recovery from decline is mainly the result of agreement around the institutional mission rather than of specific turnaround strategies." (P.199) The inherent nature of collegiality demands that the participants focus on the important issues facing the collectivity and not concentrate on individual power structures and personal gain.

Current Situation with Librarians

The current situation regarding librarian representation on governing bodies varies widely across Canada. In some institutions the librarians are viewed as the equal of faculty and have the same collegial rights and responsibilities. In other universities the librarians are viewed as little more than staff employees with few or no decision-making responsibilities at all.

Various models are possible for the type of representation that librarians can exercise in their institutions. These models are now in place in various institutions and have both advantages and disadvantages. In one model, librarians are elected to governance committees from the faculty group which includes them as colleagues. Librarians sit on committees in the same capacity as faculty members and have the same rights and responsibilities. The first type of representation is positive in that it affirms the notion that librarians and faculty are equal partners in the university structure. Librarians enjoy all the same representation rights and can be elected to the board of governors or the academic senate in the same capacity as faculty. However, since the librarians usually represent such a small number within the academic staff group, they may find it difficult to get elected. This means that although they have the right to sit on governance committees, in reality this rarely occurs.

In another model the representatives are elected to committees from the librarians' group as a separate constituency. While this type of representation guarantees a librarian presence on various committees it divides the librarians from the faculty group and increases the impression that they are different from faculty. This model also encourages the belief that if the chief librarian is on a committee then the library and the librarians have sufficient representation. However, while the chief librarian should sit *ex officio* on certain committees, his or her presence does not necessarily mean that the views of the librarians are being expressed. As an administrator, the chief librarian

may have very different opinions from the rank and file librarians and may find him or herself in a conflict of interest situation especially if required to represent differing views.

A third model, that exists in a few institutions, adheres to the CAUT policy that the library should be administratively structured like an academic division. As the information paper on librarians image and role in the mission of the university states: "Faculty and librarians are involved in the running of individual departments, programs and the library, in the determination of the academic direction of the university as a whole and also in the broader academic community. Collegiality provides faculty and librarians the opportunity to be involved in the setting of academic policy at the departmental and library levels as well as in the university as a whole, through the democratic process of discussion and, ultimately, decision-making." (Clause 1.1)

When this structure is in place, the librarians are eligible for election to committees as equal colleagues from the faculty group as a whole. However, as with faculty, they are also able to elect members separately from the library when the various faculty constituencies are represented as discrete groups. For example, sometimes Senate members are elected from both the individual academic divisions and from the faculty council. In this case, the librarians can elect members from their academic division, the library, but can also participate in electing representatives from the faculty council. The library is an academic division or department, and the chief librarian holds a position parallel to a dean. This system of elected representation extends throughout the entire institution and allows for librarian participation at all levels. At the university-wide level, librarians have representatives on both the board of governors and on the senate and are eligible to sit on any standing or ad-hoc committees that are attached to the board or the senate.

The Library Council

An integral part of university governance is the library council which is composed of all the professional librarians, including the administrators, and charged with making recommendations on policy. The "CAUT Policy Statement on University Governance" defines this role: "the library council should consider and vote on issues and policies affecting librarians and the library, including the budget proposals of the library for its budget prior to submission to the senior administration and to the Senate Finance committee." (Clause 4.12) It is this body which elects librarians to the other university governance bodies and hold them accountable for their representation.

Librarians as Full Partners

To be full participants in the collegial system of governance librarians must take advantage of all the opportunities which are available to them. If the system allows for election from the faculty group, they must ensure that they become elected. If other avenues for committee membership are possible then they should make use of them. Librarians should become visible within the university at large and make contributions whenever possible. Only when their contributions come to be perceived as positive, valuable, and essential will the prevailing mentality in universities change.

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