



December 09 Newsletter



Report of the President



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Classes are now over for another term, and we're all (I hope and expect) looking forward to the solstice/Christmas/Saturnalia/... holidays. It has been a busy term for me and the rest of the ULFA executive, and (as I gather in the halls) for our members too, as usual. The added stress of worry about the financial clouds on our horizon has been a recurrent theme, from the town hall meeting in September to President Cade's recent missive informing us that the administration still has no firm indication of how much money the provincial government will provide for next year.

President Cade's announcement that the senior Administrative team will be forgoing merit and career increments this coming year is certainly a striking declaration. It is somewhat difficult, however, to evaluate its significance without further details on how these compensation packages are structured and what other changes have been, or will be made over the next few years. We will, of course, be discussing these issues carefully and thoroughly in the upcoming negotiations. We heard, in answer to a question at the town hall meeting early in the fall, that the University's financial difficulties would be more or less resolved if all employee groups were to accept such an arrangement (though no doubt this would actually depend on the final figures for next year's grant, and things will be more difficult if the provincial grant is cut rather than frozen). But we do not think it should be solely up to employee groups to solve the financial challenges that the University faces.

On a broader point, I think it is a shame that the government of Alberta has not yet seized this crisis as an opportunity to encourage and support Albertans who wish to improve their education. University registrations are up substantially across the country, as Canadians seek to upgrade their qualifications and improve their prospects while waiting for economic conditions to improve. But Alberta lags badly, as we have for a very long time—too few Albertans pursue post-secondary education. Doubtless this has a lot to do with the availability of high-paying jobs that don't require education beyond high-school. But now that those jobs aren't so easy to come by, the real cost of higher education in Alberta is much lower. Now would be a good time for an increased investment in post-secondary education, to help Albertans improve their skills and expand their horizons.

Difficult times will always be a part of our lives; happily, they also tend to pass. But, especially in difficult times, being able to celebrate and enjoy life is important. So I wish you all the best for holidays: happy days, good food, time with friends and family and lots of whatever it is you like to do best.

Bryson

In this Issue

Page 2

CAUT Workload Study
ULFA General Meeting
Dates for 2010

Page 3

Integra Air UofL
Corporate account

Report on the CAUT
Librarians Conference

Page 5

Interesting Christmas
Facts from around the
World

CAUT WORKLOAD STUDY



How much do University faculty members work, and what exactly is it that they do?

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is hoping to acquire hard national data to answer these questions. On January 24th, 2010 they will email invitations to a sample of more than 10,000 Canadian faculty members asking them to complete their comprehensive online survey.

The results of the study will help CAUT, as the national organization, to articulate the needs and value of the professoriate. The study will also provide the locals and provincials a wealth of comparative data to help with our own advocacy efforts and collective bargaining.

We strongly encourage you to participate should you be invited to do so. Participants will be able to download and read the complete survey in advance of answering any questions. The survey is designed to allow respondents to complete it in stages and to revise previous responses. Surveying will close on March 26th, 2010.

ULFA GENERAL MEETINGS—MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

In an effort to increase attendance at both the Annual and Fall General Meetings, the Executive has passed the following motion:

That on a trial basis for the next two calendar years ULFA set general meeting dates on the first working day after the last day of classes (April Annual General Meeting—noon; December Fall General Meeting—1 p.m.) and that if this is deemed to be successful, the By-Laws will be revised accordingly.

This means that meeting dates will be predictable and unvarying, occurring as an expected part of the academic year. For the next two years, you are looking at the following dates:

2010

AGM, noon, Monday, April 19
FGM, 1:00 p.m., Friday, December 10

2011

AGM, noon, Thursday, April 14
FGM, 1:00 p.m., Monday, December 23



INTEGRA AIR UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE CORPORATE ACCOUNT

For your information, Integra Air will give University of Lethbridge employees a 14% discount when using Integra Air for business travel. When booking a flight let the booking agent know that you wish to use the University of Lethbridge Corporate Account. You will be required to provide your name, department, and phone number.

Financial Services will reconcile the Corporate Account on a monthly basis and will contact the department for the appropriate account (FOAPAL) to charge.



Librarians: Canaries in the University Coal Mine?

Report on the CAUT Librarians Conference (2009 October 23-25)

The CAUT Librarians Committee hosted their biennial conference in Ottawa on the weekend of 2009 October 23-25. The theme of the conference was “Negotiating for Parity: Closing the Librarian/Faculty Gap.” The conference offered perspectives on academic freedom, work environments, workloads, salary disparity and closed with skills building exercises in negotiation and drafting language all in the context of academic librarianship.

The event opened on Thursday evening with a keynote address by Toni Samek (Professor, Library and Information Studies (LIS), University of Alberta and member of the CAUT Academic Freedom and Tenure (AF&T) Committee) who began by surveying the assault on the academy as context for the importance of academic freedom for librarians. This assault is best summarized by the three priorities assigned to the CAUT AF&T Committee: systematic attacks on academic librarianship, civility codes (read “intellectual freedom”) and custody and control of records (read “access to information”) which she observed are not unrelated given the professional role of librarians in academe. She pointed out that librarians are quite protective of the freedoms of speech, expression, and access to information for others but that there is little attention paid regarding the protection of the academic freedom of librarians in the execution of their professional responsibilities beyond that of simply building collections (the traditional focal point for librarians’ academic freedom). She noted that by protecting the academic freedom of librarians, the academic freedom for all academics (professoriate and students alike) is protected (in terms of, for example, their access to controversial materials). In the end, she noted the role of LIS education in furthering this issue in light of the observation that LIS education has evolved to focus less on the values of the profession and more on the needs of the employer and this, in itself, undermines an understanding of academic freedom for librarians. Toni also spoke to the issue of academic freedom as not only a right but as a professional responsibility and the need to educate librarians about how to engage their academic freedom constructively rather than obstructively within the workplace so it is heard and respected. She noted that it is important for academic librarians to include and/or strengthen their collective agreements to stem the erosion of their academic freedom and to seek parity with their faculty counterparts relating to workload definition and salaries.

Jim Turk (Executive Director, CAUT) provided the second keynote address. The published title of his talk was “Academic Librarianship Under Attack: What can we do?” but he re-titled it on-the-fly to “Understanding CARL [Canadian Association of Research Libraries]: From Charles Babbage to Wal-Mart.”

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He began by providing a brief history of the impact of technology on work, the division of labour, and the systematic destruction of artisanal labour (i.e., the separation of the concept of work from the execution of work) with the goal of lowering labour costs and increasing managerial control and with the eventual outcome best exemplified by Wal-Mart staffing and service models and the application of these models to academic libraries. Within this context, he then touched on some examples of the attacks being perpetrated on academic librarians within Canada: abolishment of positions (hence, librarians) whose work was previously and publicly deemed important; national celebration of library support staff (but not librarians); undermining of the academic status of librarians through bifurcated hiring practices, control over the scholarly activities of academic librarians, removal of librarians from university governance committees, and removal of references to the words “academic freedom”, “teaching”, and “mentoring” in the language of the library; current (provincial) labour laws that challenge the inclusion of librarians in a



“community of interest” with faculty so their inclusion in academic staff associations is not automatic but at the pleasure of the university administration; removal of decanal status from university (chief) librarians; reduction and/or closure of library services within universities. What to do? Where to turn? Jim noted that the professional organizations (i.e., CARL, American Library Association, Canadian Library Association) all speak to the issue of intellectual freedom for users but are silent on the same issue as applied to librarians, academic or otherwise. He proposed that since university administrations are unwilling to provide the protections necessary, our best and only hope was to turn to the academic staff associations and ourselves. This is best accomplished by educating our librarian colleagues, our faculty colleagues, and the public about the importance of libraries and the role of librarians and mobilizing these same groups to effect change (salary parity, recognition of academic activity, professional complement (relative to student FTE), etc.) in the collective agreement.

Sylvie Lafortune (Laurentian University), Suzanne O’Neill (Fanshawe College), and Meg Raven (Mount Saint Vincent University) formed the next panel focussed on workload. In all cases, the panellists compared their agreements’ clauses on workload for librarians to those for faculty and noted the differences. Major challenges in negotiating appropriate workload language for librarians include getting the issue to be a negotiation priority given that librarians are a minority group within associations; having faculty understand what is meant by “professional practice” and the variety of responsibilities included as “professional practice” that can lead to inequity in workload; and finally, reconciling the differing perceptions and priorities re: service, scholarship, etc.

Neil Tudiver (Assistant Executive Director, CAUT) provided a summary of salary differentials between librarians and faculty within academic staff associations across Canada preparatory to a hands-on skills-building session regarding the negotiation of librarian salaries with the view to coming up with strategies to address these differentials within our own associations.

Peter Simpson (Assistant Executive Director, CAUT) closed the conference by having small groups draft language for academic freedom, development of criteria for evaluation, and workload. He noted that changes to and in the language of the collective agreement result from those things the language is silent on, grievances, and scheduled maintenance in light of changes in workload and in technology.

Some of the challenges include fear of the legalistic language being used, cross-referencing and the need to know the collective agreement well, responding to and providing counter-proposals, fear of change, and that the process is political. He noted we should strive for language that is simple, clear and enforceable.

The Conference was well attended and the content relevant at any time but made more so by the happenings at McGill (for the last few years now) and McMaster (this last year). In response to Toni Samek's address, I asked the question: How much are librarians on the front line of the assault on academe given that librarianship is a feminized profession? In Toni's opinion, it is not unreasonable to make that link given that librarianship is comprised of a largely female cohort just different enough from faculty for the assault to escape notice by mainstream academe. Canaries, indeed.

Respectfully submitted,

Leona Jacobs,

Professional Librarian



Interesting Christmas Facts from Around the World:

In the Ukraine, if you find a spider web in the house on Christmas morning, it is believed to be a harbinger of good luck! There once lived a woman so poor, says a Ukrainian folk tale, that she could not afford Christmas decorations for her family. One Christmas morning, she awoke to find that spiders had trimmed her children's tree with their webs. When the morning sun shone on them, the webs turned to silver and gold. An artificial spider and web are often included in the decorations on Ukrainian Christmas trees.

At Christmas, it is traditional to exchange kisses beneath the mistletoe tree. In ancient Scandinavia, mistletoe was associated with peace and friendship. That may account for the custom of "kissing beneath the mistletoe".

In many households, part of the fun of eating Christmas pudding is finding a trinket that predicts your fortune for the coming year. For instance, finding a **coin** means you will become wealthy. A **ring** means you will get married; while a **button** predicts bachelorhood. The idea of hiding something in the pudding comes from the tradition in the Middle Ages of hiding a bean in a cake that was served on Twelfth Night. Whoever found the bean became "king" for the rest of the night.

The poinsettia is a traditional Christmas flower. In Mexico (its original birthplace), the poinsettia is known as the "Flower of the Holy Night".

Louis Prang, a Bavarian-born lithographer who came to the USA from Germany in the 19th century, popularized the sending of printed **Christmas cards**. He invented a way of reproducing color oil paintings, the "chromolithograph technique", and created a card with the message "Merry Christmas" as a way of showing it off.

