Library Councils in Canadian Academic Libraries: Scanning the Literature

<1. TITLE SLIDE>

Despite the forty year history of library councils in Canadian academic libraries the scholarly literature on library governance in Canadian university libraries is sparse. Nevertheless there is evidence of a disenfranchisement of librarians from significant decisions impacting their libraries.[1] Where they do exist, library councils function primarily as information sharing forums rather than the decision-making bodies they were originally intentioned.

<2. COLLEGIAL GOVERNANCE SLIDE >

For librarians collegial governance is measured by the level of input we have into the priorities, planning and policies of the library, and participation in broader institutional committees and policy development.[2] Library councils are governance bodies paralleling faculty councils, which typically consist of all full-time academic staff members of the faculty and have powers and duties defined by provincial and/or university statutes. In sharp contrast, the vast majority of library councils today appear to exist at the discretion and benevolence of the University Librarian. An examination of the historical context and evolution of library councils reveals that their establishment, once considered an inevitable outgrowth of librarians' achieved academic status, is marked by "fits and starts," sexism, and administrative hesitance.

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[1] (Jacobs, 2007; Granfield, Kandiuk & Sonne de Torrens, 2011; Petter, 2012; Ribaric, 2014)
[2] For a more detailed discussion regarding collegiality in the academic library and its relationship to governance see, Freedman, S. (2009).

As academic status, and its concomitant benefits were developed and debated in the 1960s, the topic of collegial governance structures for librarians began to enter the discourse as well, but not until around the mid-1970s. **<3. CAUT BULLETIN SLIDE >** By scanning the *CAUT Bulletin* from its inaugural issue in 1953, an interesting story emerges in which library councils are recommended as the ideal collegial governance bodies for academic librarians. Collegial governance for librarians enters the discourse around the mid-1970s. An article appeared in the December 1975 *Bulletin*, which reported that as a result of collective bargaining, the librarians at Carleton established a University Library Committee charged with library governance and peer review.[3]

<4. CAUT/CACUL GUIDELINES SLIDE >

The development of the *CAUT/CACUL Guidelines on Academic Status for University Librarians*, published in the March 1976 issue of the *Bulletin*, brought collegial governance to the forefront. The guidelines confirmed the importance of library councils for academic librarians' academic status. Significantly, they linked the library council to the senate, and this rooted the library and librarians into the academic arm of the university, and within collegial governance structures. Furthermore, this emphasized the role of librarians as academics which MacPherson noted**<5. MACPHERSON SLIDE >**, furthered our role as a **quote** "…integral part of the educational process" **end quote**.[4] When the guidelines were released, they had their fair share of critics.

[3] "Carleton Ratifies first collective agreement," vol. 24, no. 3).
[4] (Lillian MacPherson, "Rank or Classification for Librarians?" vol. 26 no. 4,10)

To this day, the idea that an academic library should be governed analogously to a teaching faculty is controversial, and one's side on the issue may in part reveal the distinction that Leona Jacobs makes in her 2008 survey of Canadian library councils **<6. JACOBS SLIDE >**, of **quote** "those of us wishing to be academic LIBRARIANS and those of us wishing to be ACADEMIC librarians and those of us wishing to be, simply, academic librarians" **end quote**.[5] It is perhaps not a surprise then, that when the guidelines were released, they had their share of critics from the 'librarian first, academic second' camp.

Beckman argued that the similarities between academic librarians and teaching faculty were outweighed by their differences, because of the 'production line' nature of the library, and the need for decision making power by chief librarians in dire times. **<7. BECKMAN SLIDE >** The development of library policies via a library council, would **quote** "lead to anarchy" **end quote**.[6] Beckman recommended an alternative governance model between the hierarchical and the collegial, which she called 'participatory'. In the participatory model, librarian involvement in decision-making is achieved through their participation in committees that ultimately report to the Chief Librarian via some sort of senior management committee. Although the participatory management model, which many Canadian academic librarians may find themselves working under today, has some attractive features, it misses the mark in providing academic librarians with one of the cornerstones of academic status--true collegial

[5] (Jacobs, 2008:15).
[6] (Margaret Beckman, "Library Governance" vol 24, no. 5 1976, 22)

governance, where rank and file librarians and library administration participate in decision-making as peers and share the collective responsibility for the organizational welfare.

<8. EADIE SLIDE >

Eadie argued that the 1960s Canadian post-secondary education boom created an oversupply of librarians, forcing libraries to hire more competitively. This resulted in librarians having more affiliation with faculty than the previous generation due to their higher academic qualifications.[7] Rather than using this fact to argue in *favour* of collegial governance, instead, Eadie claimed that it would not work in a library context, due to the 4:1 ratio of support staff to librarians in libraries at the time. The majority of librarians needed to be managers, so they did not have time for collegial governance. Eadie also suggested that librarians were required to function like a team in a way that faculty rarely were.[8] Eadie's was just one in a string of arguments against library councils that hinged on the "libraries are different" argument.

Aside from the detractors of collegial governance for academic librarians following the adoption of the *CAUT/CACUL Guidelines*, there were also some supporters, and evidence of functioning library councils. By 1977, York and Laurentian had functioning Library Councils. **<9. LIBRARY COUNCILS SLIDE >**York's library council was more administrative than a faculty council,[9] and its functions were to

[7] (Eadie, 1978: 14).
[8] (Eadie, 1978: 14).
[9] (Monty, 1977: 10).

deliberate on library policy, advise the Director of Libraries, and legislate committee policies and procedures.[10] Laurentian's Librarians' Council made recommendations on the affairs of the library, and the Chief Librarian was an ex officio member of Council who generally accepted Council's recommendations.[11] York's Library Council has since been disbanded but we have recently learned that York is working towards reviving it. Laurentian's Library Council exists to this day and its functions are confirmed in their collective agreement.

At a 1979 Western regional meeting of CAUT in Edmonton discussion revolved around the challenges of obtaining academic status, sabbatical leaves, commensurate pay to faculty, and library governance. It was noted that librarians may have secured a seat in University level governance, but little progress was made in advancing collegial decision making processes within the academic library, **<10. REGIONAL MEETING SLIDE > quote** "…Chief Librarians still maintain great autonomy and Library Councils analogous to Faculty Councils have been slow to develop" **end quote**.[12] It appears that in 36 years not much has changed.

By the late 1970s, the contributors to the Bulletin had really only scratched the surface of the idea of the library council--its strengths and weaknesses, and its place among existing university governance structures. It was not until Ellis' article "Putting Policy in the Stacks" that appeared in the September 1980 issue of the *Bulletin* that a

[10] (Monty, 1977: 10).
[11] (Thompson, 1977:11).
[12] .(Victor Sim, Librarians Discuss Advancement Difficulties at Western Conference," vol. 26, no. 6, 6)

fulsome discussion on the scope and role of library councils appeared. **<11. ELLIS SLIDE >**, Ellis recommended that: 1) a library council constituted of all academic librarians on staff consider all matters of academic policy and develop policies to be considered by senate; 2), the senate's library committee be modified to work more like other senate committees, and is charged with ensuring that proposed academic policies are in line with existing ones; 3) increased presence of rank and file librarians to senate would further embed the library into wider university governance structures.[13] Ellis admitted that a major challenge would be determining which policies affect academic matters. We argue that the distinction between "academic matters" and other matters is a false dichotomy that serves to strengthen managerial reach at the expense of professional expertise and autonomy.

After the flurry of articles written between 1975 and 1980, it appeared that the dust settled until 1988, when CAUT conducted a survey on library councils to determine where they existed, and if/how well they were working. The results were not promising, or surprising. Of the ten responding institutions, the author noted that it appeared that library councils offered a **quote** **<12. MOORE SLIDE >** "weak form of collegiality or of governance by rank and file librarians" **end quote**.[14] Again, not much seems to have changed since then. This prompted some more debate on the issue, with some key issues regarding library councils being discussed, including Rita Vine's article on the internal dispute resolution process via the University of Calgary Library's Committee on

[13] (Ellis, 10)
[14] (Moore, 18)

Professional Conditions, a subcommittee of their library council, and Suzanne St. Jacques' article on the importance of a clearly articulated library council mandate in the collective agreement.[15] Governance continued to be a topic discussed by the CAUT Librarians committee in the Bulletin throughout the late 80s and early 1990s, often alongside bigger picture discussions of academic status.

CAUT's 1993 report of the Independent Study Group on University Governance (ISGUG) prompted renewed interest in library governance. **<13. ISGUG SLIDE >** The report reiterated that library councils should function like faculty councils, and that the chief librarian occupy the role of a dean. It also clarified that the library council is the venue where budget proposals are first discussed and debated, and reaffirmed the notion that the library council is not merely an advisory body. A troubling point raised in the report was that libraries are one of the areas of the University where a high proportion of academic staff are women, and that lack of collegial governance could be seen as a form of discrimination **<14. ISGUG WOMEN SLIDE >** **quote** "It is not, therefore, surprising that some of them see this attitude as a form of discrimination against women. University libraries should be operated in a fair and constitutional manner, just as faculties ought to be" **end quote**.[16] The patriarchal nature of academic

[15] Rita Vine, "Using an internal library committee for dispute resolution / Library Governance." 35 no 9
[16] (ISGUG, 49)

library management today[17] is a cause for concern, and something that could perhaps in part be remedied by properly constituted library councils.

The ISGUG, and anecdotal evidence of library councils functioning poorly, sparked a series of five vignettes on specific library council circumstances in various Canadian academic libraries in a June 1997 *Bulletin* issue.[18] The 5 case studies reported varying levels of participation in wider university governance, none of which seemed satisfactory, and none of which reported strong library councils with decision making powers.[19] Ruth Sheeran advocated for stronger library councils via the CAUT Librarians Committee, and drafted an information paper on governance and librarians, as well as a draft model clause on library councils[20], which became CAUT official policy in 1999. Sheeran reminds us that if **<15. SHEERAN SLIDE > quote** "the library council does not function productively as a collegial governance body within the library, then the librarians should work to change it" **end quote.**[21]

In recent years, CAUT has kept up on the issue of library councils, and wrote a discussion paper in 2007 (a revised version of Sheeran's paper), which reviewed the history of library councils in Canadian academic libraries, and echoed the characteristics of the ideal library council first introduced in the *CAUT/CACUL Guidelines*. The discussion paper also provided some clarity on yet another 'sticking

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[17] In 2014, 44% of men were in supervisory, middle management or senior administrative positions compared to 46% of women in the same positions in CARL member libraries. See, *8Rs Redux: CARL Libraries Human Resource Study. However, according to the CAUT Librarian Salary and Academic Status Survey Part I, 2010-2011/2011-2012, men compromise only 27% of academic librarians.*

[18] https://archive.org/stream/cautbulletin44_6#page/12/mode/2up/search/library

[19] (University Governance and the Recognition of Academic Librarians" 44 no 6)

[20] (Diane Peters, "The Librarians' Committee Today" 46, no. 6 suppl. pg. 2)

[21] (Ruth Sheeran, "An Active Role for Librarians" 45 no 5)

point' preventing library councils from functioning as intended. The paper warned readers that the library council should not be confused with a management body, and that **quote** **<15. CAUT DISCUSSION SLIDE >** "A failure to distinguish between the two functions can result in problems if the administrators fear that the library council will encroach on their managerial responsibilities" **end quote**.[22] Perhaps the reluctance of senior library administration to accept a collegial governance model in their libraries is a conflation of management with governance?

More recently, Jacobs' 2008 survey of Canadian library councils is helpful in identifying which libraries have councils, their composition, and lessons to be learned. **<16. JACOBS SLIDE >** Jacobs received responses from 25 academic libraries, 13 of which had library councils or like bodies. Her survey revealed that institutions with a more flat, as opposed to hierarchical management structure, were more likely to have library councils, and that the majority of library councils are chaired by the University/Chief Librarian, as recommended by CAUT. Some respondents understandably felt that this was problematic. Sadly, only 5 of the responding institutions' library councils reported directly to their senate or equivalent. Jacobs also asks some key questions at the close of her study. She writes, **<17. JACOBS QUOTE SLIDE >** **quote** "is the idea behind the concept of a library council about the emulation of faculty structures so that they will accept us as academic staff? OR is it about a structure that truly has merit for determining and accomplishing the goals of the library?

[22] (CAUT Discussion Paper, 4).

Can it be both?" **end quote**.[23] We believe that it can be both. Further study into the functioning of Canadian library councils is a necessary next step, one in which we intend to take.

So why do so few of our libraries in 2015 have properly functioning library councils? To understand this paradox Eva will use institutional theory to critically discuss systemic barriers to collegial governance is academic libraries.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory attempts to explain why organizations in a field tend to look and act the same (Miles, 2012). An organizational field is the services offered, the key suppliers, the regulatory agencies etc. that an organization shares with similar organizations (Gates, 1997; DiMaggio & Powell, 1993). Institutional contexts can strongly influence the development or adoption of hierarchies or management models by organizations. In the classic article, "The Iron Cage Revisited," DiMaggion and Powell (1983) posit that over time organizational practices, became stabilizing components and a threshold is reached when their adoption by other organizations provide legitimacy without necessarily improving effectiveness.

DiMaggio and Powell posit that the conformity among organizations is the result of *isomorphism* or pressure that "forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1993, p. 149). They identify three pressures: (1) *coercive* isomorphism is the pressure exerted by

[23] Jacobs, 15.

governments, laws or other organizations (2) *mimetic* isomorphism is when organizations, model themselves after others perceived more successful, (3) *normative* isomorphism stems from the networks, standards and established practices of professional groups. Within the context of the academic library all three pressures are at play however perhaps the most concerning is the professionalization of administration. Within academic libraries senior administrative appointments are achieved career goals with no pretense of professional practice,stepping back into faculty ranksis almost unheard of (Ridley, 2014) As such, senior administrative positions are more aligned with practices of corporate management than enshrined academic values of collegial governance. DiMaggio and Powell explain that the *filtering of personnel* which occurs through the hiring from like organizations, using like promotional practices and desiring like skills, renders many top professional administrators virtually indistinguishable as they are " . . .filtered by a common set of attributes, they will tend to view problems in a similar fashion, see the same policies, procedures and structures as normatively sanctioned and legitimated, and approach decisions in much the same way (p. 153). Historical and anecdotal evidence suggests that administrative resistance is a continued and key obstacle to the democratization of decision making processed in academic libraries.

Collegial Governance: Is It Effective and Does It Matter?

Collegial governance processes are mocked as petty and criticized as unnecessary delays caused by extended debate,. Administrators argue for the need for flexibility, and timely response to shifting external demands. Rank and file faculty are accused of territoriality, lacking in business acumen, of being too busy, disinterested or preoccupied with self-serving research agendas,. While no doubt these sentiments may ring true for some the notion that deliberative bodies cannot make tough decision is unfounded. Within an 18-month period the University of Maryland lost 20% or its budget. The faculty participated in every key decision eliminating twenty-nine programs, seven departments and one college proving they are capable of bleeding their own ranks for the sake of institutional welfare (Griffith, 1993). A study reviewing the effectiveness of Canadian senates makes the point that the efficiency of deliberative bodies in dealing with budgetary matters has not been tested because many are simply not given the opportunity to deal with the issue. (Jones, Shanahan and Goyan; 2001)

Indeed well-established collegial and democratic decision making processes are evident in some of the world's most prestigious establishments. The 123 members of the Berlin Philharmonic, arguably the most acclaimed orchestra in the world, have input in to how the Philharmonic is managed and vote to select new musicians and chief conductor. (No news, 2015; Slater, 2015). Harvard and Yaleare both recognized for their strong faculty governance structures.[24] On a broader scale the tradition of employees giving input into business decisions is enshrined in German law in form of

[24] Both Yale and Harvard were early adaptors of bicameral governance granting faculty a role in institutional decision-making in 1817 and 1826 respectively. *See* Gerber (2014).

workcouncils. Mueller found that firms with work councils, are on average 6.4% more productive; however evidence exists that this figure is underestimated

Ironically we continue to question the value of democratized and collegial decision-making but not the effectiveness or impact of centralized, top-down directives. There is evidence that strengthened governance processes and the fostering of collegiality, are important in attracting and retaining top academic talent (Johnstrucd & Rosser, 2002, Meyer & Evans, 2003;), are more important than dissatisfaction with salary (Olsen, 1993), and are positively correlated with institutional financial performance (Cunningham, 2008). In an extensive review of the literature focused on leadership effectiveness in higher education, Bryman (2007) makes the point that managing professionals is not the same as managing other groups of employees. Professionals have a need for independence and appreciate protection and support, but an integral and distinctive expectation of academic staff is respect for autonomy and democratic decision-making. Bryman's (2008) research also reveals that in academia the key issue is not what leaders should do but what they should avoid, ". . . leadership may sometimes be as significant (if not more significant) for the damage it causes as for the benefits it brings in its wake" (Bryman, 707). In other words, academic environments, likely benefit less from effective leadership than other environments, and the actions of leaders may be more notable for their adverse effects than the intended result.

Academics librarians expect a degree of professional autonomy and the rights and responsibilities of academic freedom and collegial governance. Centralized decision-making processes undermine the fundamental needs and values of highly skilled and educated professionals, and their negative potential must be recognized. Senior leadership cannot expect engaged, much less instantaneous support, for directives developed in administrative isolation. Successful implementation and optimal results are dependent on the commitment of rank and file librarians. Collective ownership of decisions is particularly important during times of change or retrenchment when moving forward is dependent on mutual consideration for organizational welfare and one's ability to move beyond individual priorities. Today, it is no longer possible for any one individual or small group to be the profession's or academic library expert, and robust decisions require insight and varying points of view. Scholars assert that the deliberation and debate characteristic of collegial governance has the potential find the *empty space* in discourse thus highlighting that what is not being said (Bradshaw & Fredette, 2015), to illuminate issues and give rise to potential solutions that could otherwise be missed (Meyer, 2007). Joan Wallach Scott (2015), a one time chair of AAUP's Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, makes the point that including faculty members in governance rests on the acknowledgement of their expertise and it is this very expertise that legitimates critical scholarship and practice. In the case of librarians it is argued that professional expertise allows for the distinction between good and bad (effective and ineffective) services and discernment when boundaries of good

professional practice have been breached. Wallach Scott concludes that, “The faculty’s role in governance . …is the foundation for academic freedom,” (p. 42).

Conclusion

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) defined collegiality as the “participation of academic staff in governance structures” and determined that academic governance must a) allow for the expression of a diversity of views and opinions, b) protect participants so that no individual is given inappropriate advantage (, and c) ensure inclusiveness so that all who should be participating are provided the opportunity to do so (CAUT, 2005). An examination of the nearly forty-year history of library councils in Canadian academic libraries suggests that collegial governance is the exception rather than the rule for the majority of academic librarians. Institutional theory which examines the relationships between the environment of an organization, the actual organization and the employees within helps us understand why this may be the case. Institutional theory assumes that organizations change or conform to gain legitimacy without necessarily improving performance or efficiency. Established practices are repeated and reinforced for the sake of acceptance and fit. Despite inefficiencies and problems associated with collegial governance, scholars insist that it is the critical check and balance that cross-examines the relevance of the leadership vision (Bradshaw & Fredette, 2015). What is the role of a librarians’ council and what are the characteristics of an effective council? Research suggests that governance should be about the big picture, transparency, reflective and generative thinking,

focusing on critical rather than operational issues, and asking tough questions to meet increasing complex challenges (Jones, 2012; Brandshaw & Fredette, 2015). Ironically, as Meyer (2007) observes, excluding professionals from tough fiscal realities and decisions has the potential to adversely impact the professional's understanding and decision-making capacity to meet future challenges. Collegial governance and management are not mutually exclusive but it is the degree to which each is emphasized that is problematic (Kogan, 480). It is imperative that librarians assume both professional and intellectual leadership as well as managerial responsibility when required. That they contribute to initiative development and not just its implementation. That they be agents of change rather than its victims.

Thank you.

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Eva Revitt is the Communication Studies and Political Science librarian at MacEwan University, Edmonton. She is a doctoral student in Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta. Her research interests include governance structures in PSE