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**Opening the Book :
Labour Relations
Issues of
Post-Secondary
Librarians and
Counsellors**

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he purpose of this document is to assist Faculty Associations in their efforts to represent their librarian and counsellor members by outlining the labour relations issues that are especially important to their librarian and counsellor members.

While librarians and counsellors share many of the interests and concerns of their faculty colleagues, the differences in their professional responsibilities create a set of distinct issues and interests. It is important for Faculty Associations and the Federation to consciously take the time necessary to understand how and why the needs of members who are not in the majority may differ at times.

This document is a compilation of information gathered through a variety of sources and initiatives. Many librarians and counsellors throughout the system were consulted, including through the use of surveys and discussion groups conducted in preparation for the last number of collective bargaining rounds.

The concerns and opinions expressed by librarians and counsellors are outlined below, and fall within the following categories:

- FTE Targets and Institutional Allocation of Resources

- Non-Bargaining Unit Members Replacing Faculty
- Increasing Workloads
- Information and Educational Technology
- Teaching and Information Literacy
- Scholarly Activity
- Defining Librarians' responsibility, to distinguish from technicians
- Short-Term Thinking
- Student / Faculty Ratios

FTE Targets and Institutional Allocation of Resources

As a result of increased pressure on institutions by the Ministry of Advanced Education to meet or exceed funded student FTE enrolments, administrators are viewing their non-FTE programs as luxuries. Institutions are cutting back on activities, programs and staff

in areas that are not immediately reflected in student FTEs - Human Rights/ Harassment Advisors, Safer Campus initiatives, First Nations Advisors, Counselling, and Libraries.

The ability of institutions to direct resources away from areas not directly related to immediate FTE counts was increased when the block funding formula was adopted. Block funding has given institutions more “flexibility” to cut back on the “non-teaching” areas.

Consequently, many libraries and counselling departments have suffered staff reductions over the past number of years. Some cuts have been implemented directly through layoffs. Most are accomplished through attrition, by not replacing faculty when they depart. This may become even more of a problem as the retirement rate increases.

Examples of this are found throughout the system. The College of the Rockies lost one of their two librarians. At the Vancouver Community College, the number of replacement hires is less than the retirement attrition rate. Northern Lights College closed the Counselling Department and laid off the staff. Selkirk College lost 20% of their professional librarian staff through attrition, while at the same time adding on a new campus. On the other hand, Langara College a few years ago, chose to increase their professional library staff by an additional full time position.

Non-Bargaining Unit Members Replacing Faculty

Many institutions are cutting costs by increasing the role and complement of non-faculty members, such as Library Technicians and Academic Advisors. At the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design for instance, the libraries’ reference service is staffed by Faculty Librarians for only sixteen and half hours out of sixty five hours a week. An excluded Director provides six hours, and a full forty-two and a half are provided by members of the Support Staff.

While Support Staff members are dedicated, hard working and skilled, their expertise does not match those of faculty. Reducing student access to professional librarians and counsellors reduces the degree of support provided.

Increasing Workloads

The workload and responsibilities for librarians and counsellors have been increasing over the past number of years.

Both counsellors and librarians have reported that replacement and temporary staff are normally not brought in to cover for their absences, whether it is for vacation, scholarly activity, and even disability leaves. The result is that when one member of the staff is away, the work that has to be covered is done by the remaining staff.

The rest is left to pile up for the absent member's return.

Counsellors are increasingly being asked to act as facilitators and problem solvers in problem areas without corresponding increases in resources. For instance, in one reported example, when an institution's Human Rights Officer's position was reduced, the Counselling Department had to take over the coordination and involvement in post-traumatic stress issues. In another example, counsellors were asked to intervene in cases of disruptive students, either to provide one on one service, or workshops on communication skills, dealing with disruptive students etc.

The workload for librarians and counsellors is increasing as a result of initiatives to increase student access and options. These initiatives include: shifting from two - four month semesters to year-round schooling; adding more evening and weekend classes; offering a wider range of programs, and opening (in some cases) new campuses. While improving student access is an important goal, these changes are often being implemented without corresponding increases in counsellor or librarian resources or staff. The increase in students inevitably places heavier demands upon institutional services, including the library and counselling. Summer enrolment also removes the "down time" that they once relied upon to do long term projects, scholarly activity or take cumulated vacation time.

Information and Educational Technology

Librarians are eager to make available and stay current with new technologies, new resource formats, new means of providing reference and research.

Unfortunately, and contrary to many predictions, the introduction of technology has increased the workload for the librarians and libraries in general. Each of the different modes of new research methods (i.e.: on-site, off-site, print, electronic), require the development of support mechanisms and instruction from the library. Many of the FPSE Librarians expressed some frustration with the constant need to keep up with the technology, but having less time to do it. As the CAUT "Discussion Paper on Librarians' Workload" describes it, while technology is assumed to be labour saving, within libraries it is not, because:

"...Librarians are not the manual equivalent of a system, but are rather the intermediaries between system and user. Quite contrary to such an assumption of labour savings, it is increasingly necessary for librarians to be able to master a broad diversity of systems in order to convey their advantages to the rest of the academic community. This is more work, not less, as systems increase in diversity and complexity. New information technologies tend not to replace those already in use, but rather to add dimensions of availability and complexity, and to increase the

quantity of information to which there is access.” (2)

Online and distance education is blurring the connection between student numbers and student use of library and counselling services. Students from around the province can enrol in a distance education program at an institution in a different part of the province, but still use the library or counselling service in their own particular region.

One suggestion to try and deal with the impact of technology on workload is to approach the issue at the bargaining table as an issue of technological change. Language about the impacts of tech change on teaching workloads has been bargained in the past on behalf of faculty, resulting in a recognition of the impact of new technologies and a reduction in regular teaching loads to accommodate the move to online teaching, for e.g., and including specific wording for the provision of adequate support (human and technological).

Teaching and Information Literacy

Counsellors and librarians are often referred to as “non-instructional faculty”, which is a misnomer, because both counsellors and librarians have significant instructional responsibilities. Information literacy is a critical component of post-secondary learning. To meet this need, librarians work with faculty to develop classroom instruction

specific to the discipline, and librarians teach the information literacy classes. At many institutions, librarians will teach classes with all first year English students, and then will meet those students in their other disciplines to instruct in information seeking strategies and discipline-specific resources. As an example, at Selkirk, the librarians teach for up to 6 hours in the Psychology 201 Research Methods course. This is work not recognized by the collective agreement, or by the administrations at our institutions. The administration often lacks an appreciation or understanding of the important instructional role of librarians and counsellors and its positive impact on teaching and learning at the institution and in student success.

The teaching responsibilities of librarians and counsellors needs to be described in collective agreements with appropriate workload measurements. This may be accomplished by explicitly naming and including them in language that already exists, language like that which describes teaching workloads of classroom faculty. The description needs to include recognition of course preparation and marking time, or, whatever is the term or standard used to describe how traditional classroom faculty’s work is measured.

Scholarly Activity and Professional Development

Scholarly activity and professional development are major issues for librarians and counsellors.

Faculty, including librarians and counsellors, are required as part of their employment responsibilities, to maintain currency in their area of expertise by engaging in scholarly activity.

Unfortunately, unlike “instructional” faculty, librarians and counsellors are normally not provided with scheduled time for scholarly activity. Many Collective Agreements provide “instructional” faculty with “non-instructional time” (normally one month per year) to engage in professional development and scholarly activity. Librarians and counsellors however, are not included in the definition of “instructional faculty” and thus do not get a scheduled break from their normal duties. Without similarly scheduled time devoted to scholarly activity, many librarians and counsellors find it difficult to engage in scholarly activity. The ability to engage in scholarly activity is also affected by the increasing workload pressures librarians and counsellors are under, as outlined above.

The difficulty for counsellors and librarians to access opportunities for scholarly activity activities is illustrated in the recent work of Leona Jacobs, librarian at the University of Lethbridge. Ms, Jacobs work reviewed when and if librarians took sabbatical leave. Although the number of respondents in her study was small, it was apparent that even when access to sabbatical leave is written in the collective agreement, few librarians take advantage of it. This is due to the lack of support for the leave from

their managers, the fact that their work would not necessarily be covered by a “substitute” librarian but would be parceled out to existing librarians, and lastly, due to the difficulty of finding funding for research.

To rightfully take their place as full faculty, the sabbatical leave and scholarly activity and professional development provisions for librarians and counsellors need to be reviewed and upgraded to create parity with other faculty.

Defining Librarians’ responsibility to distinguish from technicians

The introduction of chat reference (DEFINE) has resulted in grievance(s) from library technicians who consider such technical work as theirs, yet the service is quintessentially professional reference service. Ask Away is a provincial post-secondary virtual reference service / chat reference service, introduced in January 2006, and is intended for all students, faculty and staff at all publicly-funded, post-secondary institutions in BC. The service is intended primarily to assist with course related research, like the reference provided face-to-face at the reference desk, but is conducted through online conversation (typing back & forth). Language needs to be developed that will distinguish librarian work from those of our tech colleagues. The new language needs to be inclusive of all the work librarians are responsible for, but needs to be flexible enough not to create a strongbox out of which

faculty cannot move. Working with our tech colleagues to secure their support for this language will likely go a long way to advancing this understanding at the bargaining table.

Short-Term Thinking

The cutbacks and increased workloads of the librarians and counsellors as outlined above, which are primarily a result of the focus on immediate student FTE targets, is a clear example of short term thinking. These changes are made despite strong evidence that institutional success is closely associated with well supported libraries and counselling services. In the case of counselling, research conducted by a 1998 report on professional counselling in B.C.(1), found that professional counselling is “an integral component of student success related to academic, personal and career issues.” Some FPSE faculty librarians and counsellors have expressed concern that we may no longer have the ability to offer the comprehensive services necessary to fulfill their institutional mandates. It is not difficult to imagine that the long term impact of such short term thinking will be a degradation of student recruitment, retention and completion rates.

Student / Faculty Ratios

One obvious contractual approach to the problems outlined above is to bargain standard student-counsellor,

student-librarian ratios. For instance, the B.C. Colleges and Institutes Counsellors’ Association (CICA) in their “Standards and Guidelines for Counselling Services” has endorsed the concept that each institution should have at least one counsellor, with increases above that based on the ratio of no more than 550 enrolled students per counsellor.

However, the implementation of a system-wide student-counsellor/ librarian ratio is complicated by the lack of a sectoral set of standards. Each institution has traditionally operated independently and in line with their institutions’ needs. As the Preamble to the CICA Standards and Guidelines documents describes the situation:

“Within British Columbia the diversity of post-secondary institutions is considerable. Colleges, institutes, and, since 1989, university-colleges serve communities ranging from the densely populated, urban landscapes of the lower mainland at one extreme, to isolated small towns in sparsely populated northern areas at the other. The post-secondary institutions have a variety of programmes, including adult basic education, career/ technology, vocational, university, international student programmes, and community-based continuing education programmes and courses. Institutions also vary as to whether they operate from several campuses or from one centralized facility.

Historically, each institution has undertaken to provide counselling

services for students and prospective students as a part of fulfilling its educational mandate. Thus, the amount and type of counselling service in a given institution is determined by the perceived needs within that particular institution. Province-wide standards by which to guide the development and practice of such services have never been articulated, leaving the decision about what constitutes an adequate level of service to the discretion of individual institutions.

Establishing standards which apply to the broad range of counselling services provided within post-secondary institutions is difficult, because the unique circumstances of each institution and its particular community setting substantially affect the kind and quantity of services required of its counselling professionals. Nevertheless, comprehensive statements of standards for counselling services have been developed both by the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programmes in the U.S. (1988), and by the University Counselling Association in Canada (1992).” (2)

Of the FPSE Counsellors who participated in the informal survey for this discussion paper, a number expressed some agreement with the CICA’s description of the system’s diversity. Some stated that a system wide ratio would be undesirable because it would be unable to accurately reflect the differences between the institutions. Others expressed a concern that any

negotiated ratio would become the maximum over which the employer would resist exceeding. As well, the measurement of FTE ratios doesn’t truly account for the breadth of a librarian’s responsibilities. Some work such as collections (in the case of librarians), departmental liaison work, staff supervision and training, and other committee work, etc. doesn’t diminish when there are fewer students.

Others spoke in support of ratios. While institutions may have some variations in needs that may impact upon an appropriate ratio, a minimum would ensure a standard by which the institution could not go below. They further argued that if an institution currently has a relatively strong student-librarian/counsellor ratio, it does not mean that they will automatically reduce the complement—the institution made a decision to support those areas prior to any ratio without any external pressure. Additionally, while such a standard clearly would benefit those institutions with poor ratios, it would also in the long run be a benefit to all locals as it will provide a level of protection from future budget cuts or changes in an institution’s administration and priorities.

One suggestion is to use a comparative analysis of staffing ratios from various institutions across BC and other provinces which may provide useful information to support a demand at the bargaining table for more professional librarians and counsellors.

Conclusion

Reducing resources and the complement of faculty in libraries and counselling areas, is a short sighted response to a larger funding problem.

The lack of adequate institutional support for the librarian and counsellor faculty impacts upon the workload of all faculty. Department Heads at one institution have recently attributed

the increased time they are spending counselling students (without an MA in counselling) about financial issues, academic concerns etc, to their institution's reduced number of counsellors.

The first step in trying to find solutions is the identification of issues through continuing to engage in a conversation with librarians and counsellors and colleagues throughout the sector. This paper is part of that conversation.

References

- 1) Liz Ball, CAUT Presentation Professional Counselling in the B.C. College, University College and Institute System, Joe Beales, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, and the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, 1998
- 2) "Discussion Paper on Librarians' Workload", Approved by the Librarians Committee, December 1999: received and approved by the CAUT Council, November 2000.
- 3) "Standards and Guidelines for Counselling Services in the Colleges, Institutes and University-Colleges of British Columbia", Adopted at the BCCICA Annual General Meeting, October 18, 1995, Amended October, 1997.