

**“This Is Our Time:”
Towards a Library Council at York University Libraries**

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Recent History

The notion of establishing a formal library council at York University Libraries is not new,¹ but has resurfaced in recent years. Discussion of the renewed need for a library council began at Librarians’ Group (LG) in April 2012. The minutes of that meeting note that LG was “in favour of exploring this concept.”² In discussion, LG members expressed the need for: a regular forum to discuss and advise on uniquely academic matters; a more formalized reporting structure through Senate; and closer alignment of our governance practices with those of faculties. A working group was formed that included University Librarian Cynthia Archer, and three librarians: William Denton, Michael Moir and Tom Scott. At the next LG meeting on June 4, 2012, this group reported on its meeting of May 28, and provided information to LG members on how faculty councils operate.³ They noted that faculty councils were creatures of Senate, and distributed examples of documentation from various councils on campus. In discussion, LG members raised questions about the relationship between a proposed library council and Senate. Members of the council working group agreed that this would be given particular attention as its work progressed.

One year later, Lisa Sloniowski, who had since joined the (re-comprised) working group with Cynthia Archer, William Denton, John Dupuis, and Tom Scott, reported on the group’s progress at the 2013 LG Annual General Meeting. The minutes note that Lisa discussed a “proposed mandate, terms of reference, membership and sub-committees”⁴ for a council. In discussion, Cynthia Archer suggested soliciting additional input “from the wider York University community, including Senate.” The group agreed that the exploration of the concept of a council was finished and that we should move on to actually forming one and establishing its relationship to Senate. A separate group was formed to do this work, consisting of Cynthia Archer, John

¹ The Council of the York University Libraries existed from 1976–1983, and was established by a recommendation in the *Report of the Professional Committee on Professional Librarians*, April 8, 1976.

² Minutes of the Librarians’ Group Meeting, April 12, 2012.

³ Minutes of the Librarians’ Group Annual General Meeting, June 4, 2012.

⁴ Minutes of the Librarians’ Group Annual General Meeting, June 10, 2013.

Dupuis, Patti Ryan and Tom Scott. As then Chair of LG, Lisa Sloniowski agreed to serve as an ex-officio member of this group, but did not formally participate in the meetings.

This particular group met several times throughout the 2013–2014 academic year and prepared a *Draft Terms of Reference for a Library Council* (see Appendix A). The group then began to draft rules and procedures, and to tentatively map areas of academic library policy to proposed subcommittees of a council, in keeping with the approach taken by faculty councils. At this point in the committee’s work, Cynthia indicated that she had strong misgivings about trying to map policy areas with proposed subcommittees, and suggested that the group work with existing library committees to determine how they might feed into a council structure. The other group members did not support this direction, believing that it would simply replicate the existing governance structure. Although the group met several times after this impasse to achieve consensus on the best way to proceed with plans for a council, this was not accomplished before Cynthia’s departure in June 2014.

While there has been no formal activity on this front since then, the need for a council continues to be expressed as a key priority for many librarians, both in Librarians’ Group and in YUFA Library Chapter discussions. It has also, along with calls for organizational restructuring across the Libraries, been repeatedly raised in various strategic planning discussions at YUL over the last year, but no progress has been made.

Why a Library Council?

A council is among the most important mechanisms for the enactment of collegial self-governance, a key principle in the functioning of the University. In his essay on the origins of a library council at Brock University, Tim Ribaric explains that “the basic concept behind collegial governance is that the fundamental functions of the academic institution are split into a bicameral division where the management function of the institution rests in the hands of the administration, while matters involving the academic function fall in the hands of the faculty.”⁵

Although the entrenchment of collegial governance in academic affairs in the Libraries is made more complicated by the hybrid nature of our academic and administrative functions, it does not diminish its importance. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) enshrines the importance of collegial governance in its policy statement entitled *Academic Status and Governance for Librarians at Canadian Universities and Colleges*. Section 3.3 states:

⁵ Tim Ribaric, “Collegial Self-Governance for Professional Librarians: The Establishment and Evolution of a Library Council at Brock University,” in *In Solidarity: Academic Librarian Labour Activism and Union Activity in Canada*, eds. Mary Kandiuk and Jennifer (Sacramento: Library Juice Press, 2014), p. 277.

All librarians should be members of a library council. The library council should have the responsibility for the development of policies and procedures for the operation of the library. As with faculty councils, discussion at the library council should include any issue which has an impact on librarians, the library, or the academic institution as a whole. The library council should be empowered to make recommendations on such issues to the relevant body. The library council should be responsible in turn to the institution's senior academic body or its equivalent. The mandate and structure of the library council should be negotiated and defined in relevant collective agreements.⁶

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) adopts a similar position. Section 2 of ACRL's *Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians* states: "College and university librarians should adopt an academic form of governance similar in manner and structure to other faculties on the campus."⁷

The Importance of Collegial Governance: The Duff-Berdahl Commission, 1966

The importance of collegial governance over academic matters was underscored forcefully in 1966, when James Duff and Robert Berdahl were commissioned by CAUT and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada to undertake "a dispassionate examination and evaluation of the present structure and practices of the government of both the English and French-language universities of Canada."⁸ Their influential report, commonly known as the Duff-Berdahl Commission, reaffirmed the importance of bicameral governance, and the primacy of Senate as the central educational forum. The Commission concluded that Senate, along with its subsidiary councils, "should be a deliberative body, not a mass meeting" and should have "substantial powers [delegated] to it from both above and from below."⁹

Of particular relevance to the present discussion is the Commission's recommendations regarding the relationship between the Senate and the University Library. The authors note:

We were dismayed to find how often the control of the library and of library policies seemed to be regarded as merely an administrative matter. It is not; it is an essential part of the academic work of the university and as such should be closely co-ordinated with the development of educational policy, both short and long term. We recommend that library policy should evolve from the advice given by a strong committee of the Senate, representative of many disciplines and working in close liaison with the educational

⁶ <http://www.caut.ca/about-us/caut-policy/lists/caut-policy-statements/policy-statement-on-academic-status-and-governance-for-librarians-at-canadian-universities-and-colleges>, Accessed May 11, 2015.

⁷ <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardsfaculty>, Accessed May 11, 2015.

⁸ James Duff and Robert Berdahl, *University Government in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

policy committees.¹⁰

Currently, the Libraries are represented on Senate by the University Librarian, and two elected senators who serve three-year terms. Librarians also have standing representation on several Senate subcommittees, including the Academic Policy, Planning and Research Committee (APPRC), the Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee (ASCPC), and the Senate Committee on Awards. At one time, library interests were represented at Senate through the work of the Senate Committee on Libraries and Information Technology, but this subcommittee was dissolved in 2008 as per the recommendations outlined in the *Consultation Paper on Senate Reform*.¹¹ When this consultation paper was released to the York community, librarians expressed a number of concerns about the proposals that were succinctly captured in a response paper prepared by Mary Kandiuk and Toni Olshen in September 2008. This report highlighted concerns about librarian representation on the proposed subcommittees, and emphasized the need to ensure that “York University Libraries input and issues [were] incorporated into Senate activities.”¹² Interestingly, the *Consultation Paper on Senate Reform* made reference to plans for a Library Advisory Group that would report to Senate, but this was ultimately not adopted as part of the Senate reform package.

The response paper prepared by Kandiuk and Olshen was an important intervention in the Senate reform process, and its clear articulation of “the integral role librarians and the Libraries play with respect to research and teaching”¹³ was instrumental in ensuring adequate and permanent representation from the Libraries on Senate and its key subcommittees. While representation on these bodies has proved critically important for library advocacy and input on academic matters, and serves a valuable communication function, it does not address the equally important issue of how academic policies are established *within* York University Libraries. Similarly, with the dissolution of the Senate Library and Information Technology Committee in 2008, the relationship between Senate and the formulation of academic policies in the Libraries has become less certain. The creation of a council would help to rectify an organizational anomaly by bringing the Libraries in line with other faculty councils, which are prescribed by and

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

¹¹ Working Group on Senate Reform (Senate Executive), York University, “*Consultation Paper on Senate Reform*,” September 18, 2008.

¹² Mary Kandiuk and Toni Olshen, “*YUL Response to the Consultation Paper on Senate Reform*,” January 15, 2009. p. 1.

¹³ Ibid.

described in Section VII (3) of the York University Senate Handbook:

- a) Each Faculty of York University shall have a council which is responsible for academic governance in areas defined by Senate.
- b) Faculty Councils are established by Senate by means of statutes.
- c) Rules governing the membership of Faculty Councils are formally approved by Senate, and membership lists are approved by the Executive Committee of Senate on an annual basis.
- d) Changes to the rules and procedures of Councils shall be reviewed by the Executive Committee to ensure their compliance with recognized principles and practices.
- e) Faculty Councils may cite Senate's rules and procedures for disposition of an issue not adequately addressed in their own rules and procedures.

What about Library Forum? Isn't that a Council?

It has become increasingly common, within YUL and on the campus, to conceptualize and describe Library Forum (LF) as the Libraries' council. While this may serve a semantic function, this body has neither the mandate nor the structure of a council, and its role within the Libraries is not truly analogous to a faculty council. LF is not prescribed by Senate and thus, is not bound or regulated by Senate Handbook policies in this regard. In practice, it operates very differently than a faculty council. Although academic matters are discussed, the forum does not routinely adhere to established rules of order, formal votes are not normally taken or recorded, membership of this body has changed over the years in the absence of consent or consultation with the larger group and the UL or designate has consistent responsibility for finalizing the agenda and chairing every meeting. Unlike a faculty council, there are no formal subcommittees of LF, although standing and ad-hoc committees frequently report on their activities in this forum.

Although LF provides a useful opportunity for information sharing and learning about the important work of colleagues and about developments in the broader library community, it has generally not served as a meaningful chamber of debate and discussion of academic matters, particularly in recent years. Attendance at LF is sporadic, and the agenda is primarily comprised of updates on initiatives that are already underway. Moreover, there is widespread sense, intensified in recent years, that LF is not a decision-making body, and its formal role in advising on academic matters in the Libraries has become increasingly unclear. Similarly, the role of

Library Management Committee is not widely understood.

Renewing and formalizing the mandate of our key governance bodies would be a concrete first step in a much larger process of organizational renewal within YUL, and would do much to restore trust and confidence in our internal governance mechanisms. Establishing a library council would also provide a logical focal point for re-organizing library committees to better support the advancement of strategic priorities that have been identified in recent years (e.g. Research, Collections and Digital Culture, Space and Student Experience, etc). Perhaps most importantly, a well-functioning council with a defined membership and formal rules and procedures would help to ensure that all constituencies in YUL are adequately represented in the formulation of our academic policies. This would better position library staff at all levels to deal constructively and creatively with the fiscal realities before us, and to work collegially to sustain the high quality of YUL's services and contributions to the York community amid these pressures.

Council of the York University Libraries, 1976 - 1983

The notion of a library council at YUL is not without precedent. The *Council of the York University Libraries* was established in 1976 and operated until 1983, the same year that Ellen Hoffman was appointed as University Librarian. Establishing a council was the primary recommendation of the *Report of the Presidential Committee on the Status of Professional Librarians at York University*, which was commissioned by the Senate Task Force on the Status of Women at York University in 1975. The Presidential Committee, charged with examining problems and suggesting solutions related to the status of professional librarians at York, conducted a thorough examination of several organizational models and ultimately recommended that “in a university community a more collegial form of organization would be suitable for librarians in their need for freedom to determine their own policies and in order to promote academic creativity in the library.”¹⁴ The report recommended a structure that was “analogous to a faculty but with adaptations suitable for a university library” and proposed “a collegial formulation which would transform the York Library into an important and creative centre for the York University Community.” A detailed proposal outlining the purpose, membership and structure of a library council was the centerpiece of the report, which was received and accepted by York University President Ian Macdonald in 1976. As we approach the fortieth anniversary of

¹⁴ *Report of the Presidential Committee on the Status of Professional Librarians at York University*, April 8, 1976, p. iii.

this landmark report, its recommendations for ensuring that the work of the Libraries is firmly integrated into academic policy planning on the campus remain remarkably salient.

In moving forward with a re-establishment of a library council, it would be prudent to examine documentation from this period more closely in order to identify the successes and challenges associated with this model. Evidence of the effectiveness of the Council of York University Libraries has to date been largely anecdotal, with some librarians suggesting that although effective in its early years, the Council was ultimately disbanded due to a gradual erosion of a clear mandate and membership, and a disproportionate attention to non-academic matters. This experience underscores the need for a serious and sustained commitment to ensuring that both the mandate and structure of a council are carefully conceived and implemented.

Conclusion

The appointment of a new University Librarian affords an important opportunity for collective renewal of our collegial governance mechanisms, with an eye to ensuring that all library staff are well positioned and better prepared to make meaningful and sustained contributions to the development of YUL's academic priorities. Robust discussions about the need for a council have been ongoing for three years, and concrete steps towards its establishment have already been undertaken. As noted in the *York University Libraries' Strategic Response Report*, "to realize the vision set forth in [that] document and within the context of this evolutionary transformation, the Libraries need to realign and/or significantly revise internal systems and processes."¹⁵ The renewal of our collegial governance framework is a critically important element of this realignment, and should be undertaken as a high priority.

¹⁵ *York University Libraries' Strategic Response Report*, March 2, 2015. Available at: http://www.library.yorku.ca/cms/staff/download/YUL_StrategicDirectionsResponse_2015.pdf

Appendix A:
Draft Terms of Reference for a Library Council

Library Council has responsibility for the academic policies and programs of YUL. In fulfilling this Responsibility, Council shall be guided by the mission of the University:

The mission of York University is the pursuit, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. We promise excellence in research and teaching in pure, applied and professional fields. We test the boundaries and structures of knowledge. We cultivate the critical intellect.

York University is part of Toronto: we are dynamic, metropolitan and multicultural. York University is part of Canada: we encourage bilingual study, we value diversity. York University is open to the world: we explore global concerns.

A community of faculty, students and staff committed to academic freedom, social justice, accessible education, and collegial self-governance, York University makes innovation its tradition. [*The Senate Handbook*, September 2012, pp.6-7.]

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