

Death of Evidence Event
York University Libraries
October 21, 2013

Presider's Remarks

Written by: Patti Ryan

Friends, Researchers, Librarians, and Community Members:

We come together today in both celebration, and in remembrance. On this second day of the 6th annual International Open Access Week, which runs until Sunday, we join academic and research communities around the world in celebrating the potential benefits of Open Access. It is a week in which we come together to raise awareness of, and to think critically about, new models of scholarly publishing that enable free, immediate, and online access to the results of research to everyone. This week is also a chance for us to celebrate the revolutionary potential of Open Access as a new norm in research and scientific inquiry.

Harvard scholar and Open Access advocate Peter Suber defines Open Access research literature as that which is "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions." The basic goal of Open Access is simple: to make the results of research available online without price barriers and without most permission barriers. In working together creatively to advance this vision, made possible by the internet and by copyright-holder consent, we can, as articulated by student members of the Right to Research Coalition, begin "to return scholarly publishing to its original purpose: to spread knowledge and allow that knowledge to be built upon."

Yet, during this week, as we celebrate the transformative potential of Open Access and explore the benefits and challenges of enabling "barrier free" access to scholarly evidence, we must

also acknowledge the very real challenges to this vision. Today, our collective joy is tinged with darkness, as we pause to reflect on some of the social, economic and political forces which are anathema to the core values of the Open Access movement: openness, freedom, dedication to the public good and to the public's right to know, and a commitment to the long-term preservation of scholarly evidence. Specifically today, we reflect on the ways in which our federal government has attempted to control and limit access to the collection, dissemination, and preservation of evidence. We come together to mourn these measures, and to consider their implications, not just for our researchers, but for the lives of *all* Canadians.

In particular, we call to mind three casualties of what has been described by some as the government's "War on Evidence." First, we mourn for the fate of **Library and Archives Canada**, whose mandate to preserve the cultural and documentary heritage of our nation has been seriously threatened by recent devastating cuts to staff, services, and programming. Second, we remember and pay homage to the **mandatory long-form census**, eliminated by the Harper government in 2010, prompting the outcry of researchers across the nation and the resignation of our highly respected Chief Statistician. Finally, we grieve for our **Canadian scientists**, many of whom have been frustrated and silenced by the federal government's overhaul of scientific communications policies and cuts to research programs. We join with them in solidarity today and echo the sentiments expressed in a demonstration this past summer on Parliament Hill, which stated: "no science, no evidence, no truth, no democracy."

We begin our service by hearing remembrances from close friends of the deceased. We will then have an opportunity to express our own recollections, or to ask questions about the long and short term consequences of these losses. I invite all of you to listen and reflect carefully on what the Death of Evidence means for Canadians, and to consider ways in which we can, collectively and individually, resist further threats to the long term survival of evidence and the scholarly record in Canada.

Before we begin, I also wish to remind all current York students, staff, and faculty that you have

a bit more time to grieve online by entering our twitter contest, which runs until 2 p.m. Using the hashtag #RIPevidence, you can submit your own eulogy for the Death of Evidence. A winner will be selected randomly and announced at the end of today's service.

Let us begin the remembrances.

Our first eulogist, Janet Friskney, will reflect on the fate of Library and Archives Canada. Janet is a research officer in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York. In her spare time, she undertakes executive duties for the Bibliographic Society of Canada, and has for the past two years, been involved in the dispiriting task of monitoring the decline of the LAC. Please welcome Janet.

Our second eulogist, Dr. Valerie Preston, will offer remembrances on the mandatory long form census. Dr. Preston is a Professor of Geography at York University, and was previously the York Director for CERIS - The Ontario Metropolis Centre. A social geographer, her research examines migration trends and policies with particular attention to questions of exclusion and inclusion for immigrant men and women. Please welcome Dr. Preston.

Our final eulogist is Dr. Dawn Bazely, who will reflect on the muzzling of scientists and scientific research in Canada. Dr. Bazely is a professor in biology at York, and since 2006, has been the Director of York University's Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability, a pan-university research centre, where she has been able to climb out of her laboratory silo and participate in conversations and research related to science policy. She is a long-time friend of Open Access, and we welcome her today.

I would like to thank each of our invited guests today for their gracious and heartfelt reflections. At this time, I invite the community to ask questions of our panelists, or to offer their own recollections.

Closing Remarks

As we end this service of celebration and remembrance, I would like offer a number of thanks on behalf of the library's scholarly communications committee:

to our invited eulogists for their and passionate thoughtful reflections;
to the University Librarian's Office and the York University Bookstore for their generous support of this event;
to the York University Instructional Technology Centre and Library Computing Services for technical support;
and most importantly, to all of you for joining us here today.

We invite you to visit the tables at the back where you can send a postcard to Prime Minister Harper on behalf of our dearly departed Evidence. Let us go forth and continue to work to make Open Access a reality, and to keep the free and open exchange of scholarly literature alive.

Patti Ryan

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