

Report of Attendance at the CAUT Librarians' and Archivists' Conference

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The theme of this year's CAUT Librarians' and Archivists' Conference was *Navigating the Reorganization*. The keynote speaker was Dr. Larry Savage, Professor, Labour Studies, Brock University. His keynote speech focused on neoliberalism and its impact upon higher education. He talked about the driving forces behind neoliberal restructuring, and how best can academic librarians and archivists assert their interests in the process.

Dr. Savage stated that there are three characteristics of the neoliberal university. Firstly, the use of market-based practices, criteria and cultural norms to organize the university and judge the success of its components. Secondly, administrative bloat and redistribution of resources to non-academic functions. Thirdly, external funding is reorganized to put more of the burden on students versus government grants. The neoliberal university as a place to work is characterized by what seems to be constant restructuring, chronic underfunding, greater contract-based appointments, turn to concession bargaining, and divide and conquer management strategies to exploit inequalities between workers. The driving forces of neoliberal reorganization are university administrations, government, and the corporate sector.

Professor Savage urges worker and union responses to focus around unionization framed as a struggle against de-professionalization and to preserve professional autonomy, heightened conflict with management, and a shift towards campaign-based collective bargaining. It is important to negotiate stronger protections, strategic grievance handling, and building alliances and seizing opportunities.

The rest of the first day composed of panel and breakout discussions around the theme of the neoliberal context in universities and how librarians and archivists can resist neoliberal reorganization. Hearing from librarians at other institutions was enlightening. Libraries and librarians tend to jump on the latest bandwagons, and 'functional teams' seem to be the latest fad of library restructuring. However, the experience of those at the conference who had undergone such reorganization reported many drawbacks, including departmental or specialized libraries losing librarians dedicated to serving their needs. There were stories of cutback through attrition via retirements, and in some cases those being left going on stress leave. There were stories from librarians of how to combat the negatives of reorganization, including actively promoting the interests of librarians within faculty and other associations, and being strong advocates for the library on boards of governors and other university bodies.

The second day of the conference involved a librarians' council exercise. We were provided a scenario at the Great Northern University (GNU) whereby the University Librarian announced major reorganizational changes. We were provided background information on the reorganization and were given time to discuss in small groups the impact of the reorganization and how to best react if we were librarians/archivists at GNU, and then report back our discussion to the whole. This was followed up

with time to prepare in small groups for a mock librarians' council. In this mock council we were librarians/archivists at GNU asking questions of the University Librarian and pushing back against the reorganization.

The closing keynote speaker, JP Hornick, OPSEU, College Academic Division CAAT-A / SEFPO talked about social movement unionism and how their union approached 2017 negotiations, which focused on issues around full-time positions, precarious labour, academic freedom and collegial governance. She stressed the impact of reaching out to others outside academia to build allies with social movements against precarious labour. They had a fairly successful campaign that increased solidarity within their membership and created allies with others, and she stressed the importance of maintaining such ties.

Overall, the conference was very useful as a means of networking with librarians/archivists from across the country to compare our workplaces, gain knowledge from the experiences of others, and to bring back to our member institutions new ideas to further advance the role of libraries/archives and librarians/archivists.