Collegial Self-Governance for Professional Librarians: A Look at the Advantages of the Establishment of a Library Council and its Role in the Lives of the Librarians in the Brock University Faculty Association

By Tim Ribaric, Brock University

The ability to perform collegial governance is a cornerstone of modern universities in the United States and Canada. This idea of governance is well practiced among faculty members but is not often practiced to the same extent with librarians in those same institutions. In this chapter, I will look at a popular form of collegial governance called the Library Council. Further, I will examine how the Library Council at Brock University has enabled librarians there to perform meaningful collegial self-governance.

Collegial Governance & the Library Council

Most, if not all, universities and colleges in North America practice some form of collegial self-governance. This is often instantiated though the development of various committee structures that serve to govern the academic function of the institution. In the case of the lives of traditional faculty members, this can include a departmental committee governed by a departmental chair, a faculty committee governed by a dean, or a committee matched to an appropriate organizational unit chaired by an administrator. In cases of unionized work environments these structures are almost always codified in collective agreements and are the result of collective bargaining between the institution’s faculty association and its Administration. 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. For considerations that overlap between the two domains, joint committees are struck. The tradition of bicameralism traces its origins to British universities in the late 19th century and expanded to North America. As pointed out by Andrew M. Boggs, “the principles of bicameralism and lay governance became the norm in university governance across North America.”¹ In the U.S., in 1996, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a formal statement on the importance of the development of shared governance. While not directly addressing the role of librarians in university governance, AAUP’s statement does stress the division of duties amongst the different branches of universities. In particular, the statement stipulates the duties of the ‘Governing Board,’ one important task of which is to ensure “the publication of codified statements that define the overall policies and procedures of the institution under its jurisdiction.”² Contrast this then to what the statement has to say about the role of faculty in governance: “The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process.”³ It is through the cooperation and communication between these two main bodies that the effective university governance is possible. Guiding documents written by the AAUP in collaboration with the American Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) paint a much different set of

¹Boggs, Andrew M. “Understanding the origins, evolution and state of play in UK university governance” The New Collection, 5 (2010): 5.
³Ibid., 139.
criteria for American academic librarians. These documents, originally endorsed in 1972 with the most recent revisions coming in 2013, place a different emphasis on the role of librarians in the governance of colleges or universities. In the AAUP & ACRL Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians it is stressed that librarians play a pivotal role in the development of the institution’s educational policy but that this can only be accomplished by being granted faculty status and participating in committee structures in the exact way as do faculty members. Once full parity with faculty is achieved, governance comes as a next step:

With respect to library governance, it is to be presumed that the governing board, the administrative officers, the library faculty, and representatives of the general faculty will share in the determination of library policies that affect the general interests of the institution and its educational program. In matters of internal governance, the library will operate like other academic units with respect to decisions relating to appointments, promotions, tenure, and conditions of service.4

It is unfortunate that no particular guidance is given to what this library governance would look like from the perspective of AAUP and the ACRL. This leaves an even more heterogeneous landscape amongst American academic libraries. In this American context it in entirely possible for an institution to have nothing referred to as a ‘Library Council’ but instead a Faculty Council for the library or some other similarly named committee.

In Canada, the parallel national organization advocating for shared governance is the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). It has published several discussion papers and policy statements on the topic of governance including CAUT Policy on Governance: Where Have We Been and Where Should We Go: A Discussion Paper (2004). CAUT’s position is that “academic staff should play a decisive role in making education decisions and setting educational policy.”5 CAUT believes that “final authority for administrative and financial matters should be the responsibility of the Board of Governors” and that “educational decisions and setting of educational policy should be the responsibility of a senior academic body.”6 CAUT has also directly addressed the topic of collegial governance and librarians in its Discussion Paper on Governance and Librarians, approved by CAUT Council in 2000. The CAUT statement stresses that “librarians must also be able to participate fully in academic affairs and, to that end, must be eligible for membership on all governing bodies of the university.”7 The CAUT statement then adds additional carriage as compared to the AAUP statement in that it clearly states that librarian members should be included specifically in the bicameral decision-making process.

This process of collegial governance has been well exercised by faculty members but is less commonly exercised by professional librarians. In fact, the complicated interplay of the working conditions and faculty status of professional librarians vary from institution to institution, which directly impacts collegial governance. The role of professional librarians in the academy is influenced by many factors,

---

4American Association of University Teachers “Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians”, 2.
6Ibid.
7Canadian Association of University Teachers. CAUT Librarians’ Committee Discussion Paper on Governance and Librarians, 2000, 1.
such as relationship with the faculty, traditions of the institution, and inclusion in the faculty association/union, to name but a few, which serves to complicate the participation of librarians in governance activities.

However, similar to faculty there is a body that creates a collegial governance structure for the librarians at academic institutions—a 'Library Council,' not unlike the Faculty Councils that exists at many universities. In the most basic formulation the Library Council is a committee run by and comprised of the librarians (both administrative and non-administrative) of the institution. Depending on the rules used to govern the Council, its charge is to provide high level direction, including planning and policy-making, and discussion of the affairs of the library. In some instantiations (in particular in the United States) it is also the parallel to the departmental/faculty committee. There is a wide spectrum of differences in how Library Councils conduct their affairs. An attempt to normalize the definition and structure of the Library Council is therefore important. In the Canadian context, this is seen in the policy statements that are written and endorsed by CAUT. CAUT maintains a series of policy statements, endorsed by their Council, that outline best practices for a number of topics. Of particular note is *Academic Status and Governance for Librarians at Canadian Universities and Colleges*. It stipulates in section 3.1: "As academic staff, librarians have both a right and a duty to participate in collegial governance of the academic institution" and further in section 3.3:

> 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.

CAUT also offers a more specific pronouncement within a policy document entitled, "Library Councils." Therein it is stressed that: "The Library Council shall be mandated as a planning and policy-making body, not merely as an information-sharing committee. Discussion at the council shall include any issue which has an impact on the librarians, the library, or the post-secondary educational institution as a whole." The CAUT position paper also makes a series of recommendations concerning the operation of the ideal Library Council: it should be a policy-making body, the membership should include all librarians (both administrative and not) as peers, and the composition and function of the Library Council should become enshrined in the Collective Agreement. Further consideration should also be given to what status the University Librarian has in relation to the Library Council. Two main distinctions include having the University Librarian attend meetings as guest, or having the University Librarian attend as an *ex-officio* member of the committee. In the latter case, it is stressed that the University Librarian sits as a peer and, according to the CAUT statement, can either be a voting or non-voting member. It is also cautioned that the University Librarian should sit as a peer and not Chair the Library Council, as this would have the effect of stifling the collegial nature of the committee.

---

8Ibid., 3.
10Ibid.
11Canadian Association of University Teachers, *Governance*, 2.
A Look at the Structure and Function of Library Councils

Little in the way of published material is available that studies the structure and function of Library Councils. Most literature is devoted to the evaluation of job satisfaction of librarians, including the analysis of faculty status and the ability to participate in committee work. An unpublished report about a survey conducted by Leona Jacobs of Canadian academic librarians in 2007 sheds light on the Canadian context. The author presents the results of a survey conducted through two email lists: the CAUT Librarian list, and the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL). The data collected represents 28 responses from 25 Canadian academic libraries and attempts to explore characteristics of Library Councils in Canadian universities to examine their perceived effectiveness (Jacobs, 2008). While some of the data is inconclusive, a reliable conclusion that can be made is that most respondents did not perceive the Library Council to be an effective body. Reasons behind this were dependent on a few key factors: the relationship between the Council and the University Librarian, the railroading of meetings by members, and most tellingly the general notion that there was a lack of support for the validity of the body itself and the decisions being made.¹²

Case Study: the Library Council at Brock University

To understand how a Library Council functions in practice, it is worth looking at a well-established example of such a body. Enter Brock University and its Library Council, which has as its roots the certification of faculty members and librarians and the drafting of the first Collective Agreement. Right from the outset, librarians at Brock were involved in all activities relating to inclusion in the bargaining unit, defining terms of work, as well as negotiating the Collective Agreement. From the beginning, Brock’s librarians were treated as colleagues and equal partners with faculty, which placed them in a position of strength. Instead of the librarians having to demonstrate their work as comparable to that of faculty, they were able to band together with faculty and demonstrate their value to the Administration during the process of negotiating a Collective Agreement. Furthermore, Brock’s Library Council is enshrined in the Collective Agreement and in language that describes its function and structure in a manner that very closely adheres to the best practices outlined by the previously mentioned CAUT policy documents. The Brock University Library Council includes all librarians at the University as members; as well, the University Librarian is included on the Council as an ex-officio voting member. The Brock instantiation of Library Council does not have representation from any other staff group within or external to the Library. The CAUT policy documents are silent on whether there should be inclusion of any members external to the librarian complement of the institution as member of the Council. However, survey respondents found that inclusion of external members had the effect of “frustrating full and open discussion of the issues brought before the council.”¹³ Brock’s Library Council, then, is intended to function as a policy-making body, at least prima facie although not always in practice.

Keeping these two considerations in mind—the strong historical connection of librarians at Brock to faculty members and the close correspondence of the Library Council to suggested guidelines from CAUT—the effectiveness and the impact of the Library Council has had on the working lives of librarians at Brock University will be examined.

---

¹³Ibid., 5.
The Formation of the Brock University Faculty Association

On November 26, 1996 faculty members at Brock University voted in favour of unionization. At this unionization vote alongside the group of faculty members stood Brock’s professional librarians, who were also casting ballots. In fact, on that important day faculty members voted 64 percent in favour of unionization while the librarian contingent present voted 75 percent in favour. This demonstrates that even from the very early days of the Brock University Faculty Association (BUFA), librarians had been actively involved in its activities. This spirit of inclusion was seen during the lead up to this certification vote. In literature produced by BUFA to build the case for certification three important points were repeated: "1. The administration must bargain; 2. Librarians can be defined as part of the bargaining unit; and 3. Members will have the protection of the law."15

The history of Brock University is relatively short when compared to other schools. It was founded in 1964. The year after its founding an Agreement on the Terms and Conditions of Employment for Faculty between the Brock University Faculty Association and Brock University; 13 September 1990 - 30 June 1997, the document was a 57 page handbook of suggested practices. It included: processes for assessing workload, salary details, and promotion and tenure guidelines. The major problem with this agreement, at least from the perspective of librarians, was that it didn’t stipulate any similar rights and responsibilities for librarians. In fact, the first article in the Agreement specified explicitly that its contents are meant for faculty members only.16

The quasi-legal status of the document was also a significant impediment to its fair implementation. The Administration was not legally bound to honour it.

Librarian Self-governance is Recognized at Brock University through the Establishment of the Library Council

During the mid to late 90s, an interesting tension was being created. Faculty colleagues were prepared to recognize the work of librarians as similar (in some sense) to their own as demonstrated by the promotional material surrounding certification and yet the Administration did not make the same realization. This situation could have led to future difficulties for the librarian complement, however, as circumstances played out librarians at Brock University were in a position to negotiate their Collective Agreement alongside their faculty colleagues. Within a year of that November certification vote the first Collective Agreement was ratified. In that Collective Agreement, there was an article, number 17, entitled, Library Council. A mere half page in length, it laid out the prerequisites of what would become one of the few methods, obtained through collective bargaining, of collegial self-governance professional librarians at Brock University would have. It consisted of only four sections:

16Brock University. An Agreement on the Terms and Conditions of Employment For Faculty between the Brock University Faculty Association and Brock University, 13 September 1990 - 30 June 1997. St. Catharines, Ontario Canada: Brock University, 1990, 1.
17.01 - There shall be a Library Council which shall establish its own rule of procedure, a copy of which shall be furnished to each member of the Council and to the Union.

17.02 - The Library Council shall be composed of:

   a. All professional Librarian members of the Bargaining Unit.
   b. The University Librarian and the Associate University Librarian(s) as ex officio members.

17.03 - The members of the Council will elect a chair and a secretary at the first meeting of Council in the fall term and the terms of those offices shall be for one (1) year.

17.04 - Library Council shall meet at least once in each Fall and Winter Term:
   (a) to establish the Appointments and Promotion committee which shall consist of the Associate University Librarian and (3) professional librarians of the Council for staggered three (3) year terms ...
   (b) to consider any matters it deems relevant to the administration and policies of the Library.\footnote{Collective Agreement between Brock University and the Brock University Faculty Association, July 1, 1997 to June 30, 2000. St. Catharines, Ontario Canada: Brock University, 1997, 21.}

In a few words, section 17.04 enshrined two important mechanisms for the professional librarians of BUFA. It established an Appointments and Promotion Committee and secondly it explicitly stated that the Library Council would become the body where matters relating to the Administration of the library were to be discussed. While the rest of the Collective Agreement created stipulations on the difference between work responsibilities of faculty and librarians, it provided the first legally binding indication that faculty and librarian work is at least parallel in purpose. That is to say the Collective Agreement did not (at this point in time) mention the term ‘Research/Scholarly Activity’ or ‘Sabbatical,’ in reference to librarian members. Being officially allowed to conduct scholarly activity was negotiated into the Collective Agreement in 2006\footnote{Brock University. Collective Agreement between Brock University and the Brock University Faculty Association BUFA, July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2008. St. Catharines, Ontario Canada: Brock University, 2006, 137.} as the culmination of discussions initiated through Library Council. Similarly, librarians were first able to enjoy ‘sabbatical leaves’ instead of ‘professional leaves’ after the negotiation of the 2011 Collective Agreement. Once again, this gain was a direct result of Library Council making efforts to increase the capacity of librarians at the University. Nevertheless, the 1997 Collective Agreement represented a very significant accomplishment for librarians at Brock University for many reasons but particularly owing to the establishment of a recognized Library Council. As such, the librarians at Brock University had explicitly created a mechanism for collegial self-governance that closely resembles suggested best practices outlined by CAUT. A further positive aspect of the composition of Library Council was that it was empowered to create its own rules of procedure to suit its own needs. Also of interest is that other sections of the Collective Agreement specifically called upon the Library Council to render verdicts in the adjudication of Library matters. This is seen particularly in article 25, “Workload for Professional Librarian Members”\footnote{Brock University. Collective Agreement, 1997, 57.} and will be examined later in this chapter. It should be noted that, while composition and function of departmental/centre committees were specified, there were no provisions in the BUFA Collective Agreement for faculty councils which do not, and have never, existed at Brock. The inclusion of language for a Library Council can be perceived as
recognition of the need for a specific structure for collegial governance in the library, which was understood in other parts of the University.

The Impact of Library Council on Librarians at Brock University

Many themes rise and ebb when investigating the trajectory of BUFA librarians as they interact on Library Council. One dominant theme that re-occurs without fail, however, is the open and constructive exercise of collective discussions of staffing which involve formulating job descriptions/positions that reflect the changing environments in which libraries and librarians find themselves. This comes hand-in-hand with another observed theme, that of collegial review. Year after year the conduct and activities of Library Council demonstrate a strict adherence to policy regarding 'special meetings' of Council to discuss colleagues being reviewed for permanence or promotion as well as the discussion of candidates who have been brought in to interview for vacancies. What can be inferred from the existence of these discussions is that every librarian on staff has had some form of input into the professional progression of all of their colleagues from the point they are hired by Brock Library. This supports what has been previously alluded to as one of the tenets of collegial governance. If the librarians are to be regarded as part of the faculty side of the bicameral governance structure, then they have the purview of being able to perform some form of assessment of their colleagues, without administrative interference, as faculty members can do. The duty of Library Council to perform reviews of appointments appears to be a unique characteristic not seen in other instantiations of Council. In fact, comparing this function to results from the Jacobs survey, it would appear that Brock’s Library Council is the only body that makes such determinations. There is a certain amount of gravitas with these recommendations as well. In the case of appointments, the procedures stipulate that the members of the Appointments and Promotion Committee conduct the interview process and with written feedback from the remaining non ex-officio members of Library Council make a final recommendation to the University Librarian. The University Librarian then takes the recommendation and either agrees to it or, if not, must specifically communicate back to the Appointments and Promotion Committee articulating concerns with the proposed appointment. If a resolution cannot be researched in this back-and-forth, the resolution must be determined through consultation with the Provost. Members of Library Council, then, have certain weight in the appointment process—one that echoes very strongly of the faculty model of appointments; that is to say, the bulk of the appointment is made upon the work of collegial determination. A similar situation occurs when a librarian member is applying for promotion. The Appointments and Promotion Committee, with input from the rest of the Library Council, makes a final recommendation to the University Librarian and a parallel process of accepting or denying the recommendation commences, as is seen with the appointment process.
The number of Library Council meetings held each year has been volatile. The waxing and waning of meeting frequency can be seen as both problematic and a sign of success. The more cynical would state that, outside of special meetings for appointment and promotion related issues, the Library Council has ceased to be an effective body where real decisions and procedures develop. Much of the business first seen as being within the jurisdiction of Library Council has moved slowly to ad hoc working groups struck to complete individual projects. These working groups have membership that extends beyond Library Council members and typically includes staff from all departments within the Library. Indeed if only factoring in the years when the ‘Special Meeting’ was an option, the distribution of special to regular meetings is over 50%. The more enthusiastic would say that Library Council is successful as demonstrated by its lack of need for frequent meetings. As the role of the professional librarian at Brock began to expand through subsequent Collective Agreements so too did the opportunity to participate in other University-wide planning committees outside of Library Council. It might be suggested that these other committees have been assigned mandates that have slowly eroded some of what initially had been Library Council business. Librarians serving on those committees would be contributing to the planning of Library and University activities in different forums instead of through official Library Council business. For example, librarians had a nebulous presence on the University Senate in the early days. They could serve as staff representatives but definitely were not counted as members of the ‘teaching faculty,’ which Senate rules stipulate must be the bulk of the membership. Recently in 2013 Senate rules were changed to officially provision a seat for a librarian member. Here specifically an option is created for a librarian to be included on the most influential governance body within the institution. In a similar vein, the BUFA Executive Committee created the position of Professional Librarian Representative in 2009, thus allowing a librarian to always be a member of the BUFA Executive Committee. In a sense there has been a slow erosion of the governance function of Library Council that has been made up for by other opportunities across campus.

In early years, the lion's share of Library Council time was spent creating equitable procedures relating the logistical function and structure of Council proceedings to satisfy article 17.01, as seen above. This is understandable, of course, as formalizing collegiality requires some give-and-take between the Administration and librarians. However, once these rules of procedure became second nature, Library
Council could focus its attention on professional issues and the pursuit of parity with the faculty side of the house. As alluded to earlier, librarians were not officially enabled to conduct research and scholarly activity under the auspices of the Collective Agreement until 2006. This allowance for scholarly pursuit was very rigidly defined in what was referred to as a ‘release day’. In this scenario, a librarian would need to apply ahead of time to garner the permission to conduct other business not relating directly to professional practice. Library Council conducted several discussions on the efficacy of such a system and how difficult it was to articulate when the situation called for a ‘release day’. Through the insistence of these discussions the ‘release day’ was removed from the Collective Agreement in the 2008 round of bargaining. This hard fought effort might be all for naught when compared to the larger picture. Studies have indicated that the presence of a Library Council or formal library planning group do not greatly contribute to perceived job satisfaction of the typical academic librarian. In the Brock environment, the consensus seems to be that Library Council is a necessary entity but could be one that could be more effective. Returning to this idea of assessing job satisfaction, there is evidence in both American and Canadian contexts to support this claim. In fact, both of these studies accumulated evidence that reveals that participation in library/university planning has only a mild positive correlation to perceived job satisfaction. One of the strongest measures of satisfaction amongst academic librarians surveyed in both studies is academic status and its impact on other responsibilities, i.e., working conditions and opportunities for professional participation. In fact, the opportunity to participate in university/library planning is not a significant indicator of satisfaction amongst academic librarians. This is consistent with the experience of Library Council at Brock University. The bulk of business conducted by Library Council is not participation in library planning but that of collegial review. The largest portion of the activities of Library Council at Brock is devoted to considering applications for permanent placement, and assessing potential new hires. This supports the results found in the two previously mentioned studies. It is interesting to note that the frequency of meetings held by Library Council over the years is primarily influenced by hiring practices. In the anomalous years of 2005 and 2008, this is clearly seen. In 2005, there was a flurry of hiring activity that necessitated Library Council meetings. That year, two librarians and one Associate University Librarian were added to the staff complement. Similarly, in 2008, a slew of meetings were necessary to determine the successful candidate for a newly created position, that of head of Liaison Services. No other single activity besides the discussion of potential candidates creates so many occasions for Library Council to meet.

Not so surprising as what is in the history of Library Council meetings is what is not. The answer to the obvious question of where some important decisions get made if not Library Council is difficult to articulate. The most concise answer is that these decisions are made directly by the Administration in cases of high level considerations. For example, seen in the course of the history of Brock’s Library Council is a more opaque treatment of the collection and acquisition budgets. In fact, no specific details or figures have been presented on this topic to the body of Library Council at any time, thus giving the impression that these matters are instead within the sole purview of the Administration. This stands in contrast to CAUT’s suggested guidelines for the function and structure of Library Councils, in particular, section 2.1: “While not limited to the following, Library Councils shall consider and vote on issues and policies affecting librarians and the library, including: ... library budget proposals, prior to submission to

---

23Ibid., 37.
senior administration. Indeed, however, the actions of Library Council as instantiated at Brock University never had in its mandate any specific mention of dealing with the acquisitions budget as articulated in the previously described article 17 of the Collective Agreement.

That is not to say that the Library Council has never been able to participate in meaningful conversation on high level considerations such as planning. In fact, the current Library – Strategic Plan found on the Provost’s website found its genesis in numerous meetings of the Library Council and drew much of its scope and detail from deliberations conducted by the Council.

As the years have progressed, the text of the Collective Agreement regarding the Library Council has changed but not in any substantive way. Through this text and through activities conducted during meetings of Library Council, librarians at Brock continue to exercise a form of collegial self-governance that has a strong emphasis on peer evaluation. Even if the Library Council at Brock fails to demonstrate a tradition of positively affecting general library policy, the gains it has achieved in the realm of collegial self-governance are notable in and of themselves.

Bibliography


Brock University. An Agreement on the Terms and Conditions of Employment For Faculty between the Brock University Faculty Association and Brock University, 13 September 1990 - 30 June 1997. St. Catharines, Ontario Canada: Brock University, 1990.


