

Library Councils in Canadian Academic Libraries: A summary of responses

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Introduction:

In October, and again in November, 2007, I sent a request to both CAUTLIB and CACUL-L asking the libraries represented by the membership of these two lists whether they had a library council, similar in spirit to that described in the document on [Library Councils](#) currently under review by the CAUT Librarians Committee. I made this inquiry at the request of our VP Academic. At the University of Lethbridge, we are considering the establishment of such a body and, as the VPA put it, he did not want to be building a “three-cornered wheel.” Thank you to everyone who took those few minutes to respond.

The purpose of this request was:

- 1) To get a sense of the extent to which library councils are a wide-spread phenomenon in Canadian academic libraries,
- 2) To determine how other libraries have structured and staffed this body, and
- 3) To learn from those libraries with a library council what lessons they were willing to share.

There were 28 responses to this request representing 25 academic libraries. Respondents from 13 of these 25 libraries described their “library councils” and I will use these 13 descriptions in this summary. One respondent described the management team of the library in some detail but indicated that this was not a library council in her opinion nor, did it fit my idea of what I was looking for so her description of the management team is not included here.

I received two responses from the University of Winnipeg, one more detailed than the other. I chose to use the more descriptive submission. I did, however, choose to include both sets of opinions about what each considered the “library council” regardless of not being quite sure that they were talking about the same body.

In two of the 13 libraries with something akin to a library council, it was the opinion of the respondents from these two libraries that the “library council” was, to put it politely, in abeyance. Respondents from the remaining 11 libraries expressed mixed opinion as to their library council’s usefulness and effectiveness.

Finally, in response to my query, a summary was provided to me of responses to a similar question put to the university librarians within the Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries. However, I chose not to incorporate this summary because it did not distinguish between a library council or equivalent (as described by the CAUT discussion paper) and a Senate/GFC Library Committee (or equivalent). It also did not go into the level of detail that I was looking for. However, it was an interesting read

especially since in some cases, I received in response to my own postings quite different opinions about the existence or not of a library council! It does appear that we lack common understanding as to what constitutes a library council versus a Senate/GFC¹ library committee.

Demographics:

It is important to keep in mind that this was a casual survey and the respondents responded from their own perspective of their local situation. Assuming that responses from library administrators (ULs and AULs) may well be different from those of rank-and-file librarians, respondents were requested to categorize their role in their library. Not everyone did so but of the 28 respondents, I categorized 17 either through their direct response or, if possible, from their signature files:

- UL/AUL (=5),
- middle-management with staff of some sort reporting to them (=5), and
- rank-and-file librarians with no staff reporting to them (=7).

I had requested that respondents provide institutional demographic information in the form of FTE students, just to get a sense of the size and whether this possibly influenced the existence of a library council. This information was not provided consistently so a follow-up of the institutional websites was made to ascertain (or confirm) this information². Based on the results, institutions were then very arbitrarily categorized according to student enrolment as summarized in Table 1. Of these, 13 of the libraries/institutions represented in the survey do have something the respondents described as approximating “library council” for the purposes of this survey.³

Size by FTE student enrolments	#	Number with a library council or something similar	Number without a library council or anything similar
very small = < 5000	8	4	4
small = 5000-10,000	3	1	2
medium = 10,000 - 15,000	3	2	1
large = 15,000 - 20,000	4	3	1
very large = > 20,000	7	3	4
<i>TOTAL libraries/institutions</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>12</i>

Table 1: The size of Institution as measured by student FTE relative to the existence of a library council (or close approximation).

¹ In Alberta, the General Faculties Council, or GFC, has a role equivalent to the academic Senate in other provinces.

² This was a lesson on usability of websites ... and, perhaps the transparency of the institution. As well, it was interesting to note that FTE (or FLE in Alberta) students is not always reported as such; some estimations had to be made to approximate FTE. Hence, the comparison of sizes is more approximate than absolute.

³ Unfortunately, the CAUT paper on Library Councils (see: http://caut.ca/uploads/dp_librarycouncils.pdf; most recently accessed 2008-01-07) was unavailable for reference during the period of the survey.

As is evidenced by Table 1, size of institution does not seem to be a factor in the presence or absence of a library council.

Another variable I wanted to account for was the type of organizational structure in place within the represented libraries: either “flat” where all librarians reported directly to the UL or “hierarchical” where there is one or more layers between the lowest ranked librarian and the UL. Respondents from 14 libraries gave definitive opinions about their organizational structure. Table 2 summarizes these responses as they relate to the presence or absence of a “library council.”

Organizational Structure	Number with a library council or something similar	Number without a library council or anything similar
Heirarchial	3	3
Flat	7	1
n/a or ambiguous response	3	8
<i>Totals</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>12</i>

Table 2: Organizational structure relative to the existence of a library council (or close approximation).

Table 2 hints at the possible relationship of the flat organizational structure and the presence of a “library council” but more investigation would be required to confirm this relationship.

A final variable that I was curious about was the number of librarians and whether this had some impact on the presence or absence of a “library council.” Responses to this question are summarized in Table 3. There appears to be no relationship between the number of professional librarians and the presence or absence of a “library council.”

# of FTE professional librarians INCL. ULs/AULs	Number with a library council or something similar	Number without a library council or anything similar
1-10	5	4
11-20	2	
21-30	1	1
31-40	1	
>40	2	1
n/a	2	6
<i>Totals</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>12</i>

Table 3: Number FTE professional librarians relative to the existence of a library council (or close approximation).

Library councils (or the closest approximation of such) from the following 13 institutions will be described and discussed in this summary:

Simon Fraser University (SFU)	Library Council
Ryerson University	Library Council
University of Regina (U.Regina)	Librarians Council
Mount Allison University (MTA)	Library Council
University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)	Library Council
Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU)	Library Council
University of Winnipeg (U.Winnipeg)	Senate Advisory Subcommittee on the Library
University of Ottawa (U.Ottawa)	Library Council
Bishop's University	Library Council
St. Thomas-More (St.TM)	Library Committee
University of Manitoba (U.Manitoba)	Librarians Council
Memorial University of Newfoundland & Labrador (MUN)	Academic Council of the University Libraries (aka "Library Academic Council")
University of Calgary (U.Calgary)	Library & Cultural Resources Academic Council

Table 4: Do you have a library council and how is it referenced?

Experience:

Table 5 outlines the years of experience that the various institutions had with a library council as reported by the respondent. Sometimes, the respondent really did not know exactly when the council had its beginning and simply approximated the timeframe. In some cases, there were existing bodies that morphed, for whatever reason, into the latest version described to me as the council.

Approximate years of experience w/ library council	Institution
0-5	UPEI
6-10	SFU; U.Winnipeg
11-15	U.Regina; St. Thomas-More
16-20	Mount Allison; Wilfrid Laurier
>20	U.Calgary; Memorial
Not sure or didn't answer	Ryerson; U.Ottawa; U.Manitoba; Bishop's

Table 5: How long have you had this "thing" called a library council?

According to the CAUT discussion paper on library councils, the idea of a library council composed of all academic librarians and chaired by the Chief Librarian has been around since 1979. It would seem that in this sample, Memorial and University of Calgary were the early adopters .

Staffing the library council:

The CAUT discussion paper on library councils quotes the 1979 Joint CAUT-CACUL *Guidelines on Academic Status* as saying “all librarians should be members of a Library Council which is chaired by the Chief Librarian.” As noted above, respondents from 13 libraries described what they considered to be a “library council” within their library. Table 6 provides a simplified view of these “flavours” of library councils in terms of staffing. 12 of the 13 councils described included all the academic staff of the library (i.e., the professional librarians). The respondent from SFU chose to describe one of a couple of committee options, neither of which conformed specifically to the ideal configuration of a library council. Hence, the particular committee reported on does not include all the academic librarians but rather a subset of them.

Additional variation comes in whether the non-academic library staff (i.e., support staff) are included (other than for administrative support) and whether there is external-to-the-library representation (i.e., university administration, faculty, student, other constituencies) included in an official capacity. The CAUT discussion paper provides no guidance on whether or not to include representation from other constituencies, leaving it to be a local decision. The only advice is that there is some mechanism in place to ensure that the decisions do not remain “within the enclosed library governance system.”

UL	UL	UL	UL	UL
AUL (if applicable)	AUL (if applicable)	AUL (if applicable)	AUL (if applicable)	AUL (if applicable)
SOME academic (librarian) staff--elected	ALL academic (librarian) staff	ALL academic (librarian) staff	ALL academic (librarian) staff	ALL academic (librarian) staff
SOME non-academic library staff rep--elected	NO non-academic library staff	SOME non-academic library staff rep (in some cases as approved)	NO non-academic library staff rep	SOME non-academic library staff rep (in some cases as approved)
NO external-to-library rep	NO external-to-library rep	NO external-to-library rep	SOME external-to-library rep	SOME external-to-library rep
SFU	U.Regina Bishop’s U.Manitoba	Ryerson Mount Allison U.Ottawa	U.Winnipeg St. Thomas-More Memorial	UPEI Wilfrid Laurier U.Calgary

Table 6: How is your library council staffed?

As you will see later, however, some of the respondents cautioned against the inclusion of support staff and external-to-the-library members because it was felt that it frustrated full and open discussion of the issues brought before the library council.

As mentioned, it has been recommended that the Chief Librarian chair the library council. Table 7 illustrates that is not always the case. While some respondents felt that having the university librarian chair prevented that person's disengagement, others felt that it presented a conflict of interest in the feedback being solicited.

University Librarian	Other librarian	Non-librarian	"n/a" or not clearly stated
SFU Mount Allison UPEI Wilfrid Laurier U.Ottawa Memorial U.Calgary	Ryerson (chair rotates), U.Regina (elected by Council),	U.Winnipeg (Chaired by faculty member elected by Senate) St. Thomas-More (selected by Committee but usually UL)	Bishop's U.Manitoba

Table 7: Who chairs library councils?

Reporting relationships:

Although the CAUT discussion paper gives no guidance on reporting relationships, it does, as mentioned earlier, advise that there is some mechanism in place to ensure that the decisions of a library council does not remain "within the enclosed library governance system." Table 8 outlines the reporting relationships of the 13 library councils to the university (chief) librarian, the Senate/GFC library committee, and the Senate/GFC itself. Unfortunately, I did not think to ask specifically about the existence of or relationship to the Senate/GFC Library Committee where the library council reports directly to Senate/GFC.

Reports/Advisory to UL	Reports/Advisory to Senate/GFC Library Committee	Reports/Advisory to Senate/GFC (i.e., main academic governing body)	Not clear
SFU Ryerson U.Regina UPEI U.Ottawa	U.Winnipeg Bishop's	Mount Allison Wilfrid Laurier St. Thomas More Memorial University of Calgary	U.Manitoba

Table 8: What is the library council's reporting relationship?

Logistics:

Who organizes the meetings? Only two of the library councils, Memorial and the University of Manitoba, reported having an executive committee to organize the agenda and logistics of council meetings. The University of Calgary did not have an executive committee but did have an agenda committee, chaired by the Secretary to the council (elected position), that oversaw this responsibility. Other councils did not have an executive committee (or did not report on its existence).

Yes	No	N/A
U.Manitoba Memorial U.Calgary (Agenda Committee)	SFU Ryerson U.Regina Mount Allison UPEI U.Winnipeg St. Thomas More U.Ottawa	Wilfrid Laurier Bishop's

Table 9: Is there an executive committee to the Library Council?

Another logistical issue is how frequently the library council meets. Table 10 outlines the frequency of reported in this survey.

Monthly (~12 times per year)	Bi-monthly (~6 times per year)	Quarterly (~4 times per year)	Academic semester (~ 3 times per year)	Semi-annually (~2 times per year)	Infrequently
SFU Ryerson U.Regina Mount Allison UPEI U.Ottawa Memorial	U.Winnipeg	U.Manitoba U.Calgary	Wilfrid Laurier (Sep/Oct, Jan, Apr)	St. Thomas More	Bishop's

Table 10: How frequently does the Library Council meet?

Tables 11-15 (really just one huge table that goes on for five!) summarize each library council's respective mandate, the respondents' opinions about what is positive regarding a library council, what doesn't work so well, their perception of the effectiveness of a library council in terms of governance and any advice they wished to share.

Institution	Mandate	Positives	Negatives	Perception of effectiveness & why	Advice
SFU	Provide library-wide perspective to UL on, for example, hours, training, project in progress, policy, service issues, communications, issues raised by staff ID need for task groups	1) broadly based representation from all types of library staff 2) both ex-officio and elected members 3) very good venue for discussion/communication	1) increased input from other library staff as Council does not drum up much input	Effective as a communication/discussion body that provides a venue for staff to provide their perspective within a library-wide body	Consider the role of council (or equivalent) in context of the mandates of other library committees when evaluating effectiveness in what is ideal versus what is achieved. Is your goal being achieved through the combination of committees?
Ryerson	"...responsible for making recommendations to Chief Librarian regarding mission, goals, policies, operations, and development of the Library." Functions: 1) support UL 2) forum for discussion re: planning, policy, development, operations 3) avoid matters of detail in management of individual units 4) review budget and budget amendments and make recommendations 5) provide channel for carrying forward recommendations of LC to University 6) establish standing or adhoc committees as necessary	1) provides a forum for discussion (the only positive)	1) reduce the size of the membership; growth in staffing has made Council "unwieldy" 2) greater clarity with agenda items and function of Council (sense that some stuff could be handled in other ways) 3) greater involvement from those present--tends to be dominated by a few.	NOT effective because: 1) many items coming before Council are pre-determined 2) if item does not affect you, then likely to just adopt recommendation coming forward issues raising a variety of opinions can't find resolution -- when there is contention, tendency is to avoid making a decision.	None offered

Table 11: Summary of mandate, positive/negative points, perception of effectiveness and advice offered.

Institution	Mandate	Positives	Negatives	Perception of effectiveness & why	Advice
U.Regina	Not provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) brings librarians together to discuss library and professional issues 2) forces UL to deal with issues in open forum (to some extent) 3) creates community among librarians (who might otherwise drown in large pool of support staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Council doesn't work that well 2) Library Administration tends not to bring "big" issues to Council 3) Meetings can be tense and even divisive. 	NOT effective because: effectiveness is dependent on relationship between particular library administrations and the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) fight for the right kind of Council 2) keep non-librarians off Council--you cannot discuss some issues with support staff there, especially if they are in a different union.
Mount Allison	"The objectives of the Council shall be to consider and make recommendations to the appropriate bodies and officials of the Employer on matters relating to the general welfare and operation of the Library."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) exists in collective agreement demonstrating "librarians worthy of a collegial workplace" 2) appropriate that UL chairs to prevent disengagement and to hold UL accountable 3) appropriate to have monthly meetings to facilitate consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) ensure the collegial aspect of Council is understood by all 2) strengthen decision making aspect of Council 3) education for membership re: rights and responsibilities as Council members 	NOT Effective because of the relationship between library administration and the Council; also missing consultation with faculty/students	It would be a shame to let the ideal of a Council die due to the leadership style of a UL. Work hard to maintain the collegiality Library Councils were intended to enshrine.
UPEI	"...to discuss issues in a collegial setting and to make recommendations on the formulation of Library policy, operations, long-term planning, and future directions ..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) UL can no longer pick and choose whom they consult with 2) ensures regular communications 3) provides librarians with a body akin to Dean's Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) librarians only 2) should not serve only in an advisory capacity 3) currently handles operational issues; make it focus on long-term planning 	To be determined (Council is newly implemented) but expectation is that having a Council inclusive of all librarians is better than the lack of inclusivity that preceded it.	It is difficult to find students to serve on such groups. If Council is inclusive of support staff and/or students, then elections of key positions should be by librarian members only.
Wilfrid Laurier University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) consider and make recommendations to UL & Senate on library policy 2) receive reports on activities of various library departments 3) hear reports on developments in the library environment 4) consider future directions of library service and operations 5) consider other matters Council deems relevant to administration and policies of the Library 	NOTE: conflict of opinion about the usefulness of the Library Council. Should perhaps be reviewed to make it more relevant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) reconstitute w/ fewer librarians and make it's focus more as a faculty/student advisory group so faculty/students have opportunity for input before final decisions are made 2) have someone other than UL chair to remove any conflict of interest in soliciting feedback 	<p>Not Effective: "meaningless," lots of informational stuff, decisions pretty much pre-determined, token effort to have external involvement in library affairs.</p> <p>2nd Opinion: it was a breakthrough when it was first established but perhaps needs review.</p>	The concept of a library council, in itself, is not meaningless. However, it is important to periodically review governance structures to ensure they remain effective.

Table 12: Continuation of Table 11.

Institution	Mandate	Positives	Negatives	Perception of effectiveness & why	Advice
U.Winnipeg	Not available for SASOL	<p>1) SASOL and SLC bring librarians and faculty together to discuss important library issues;</p> <p>2) SLC [NOTE: not the committee being described by this summary] has the power to recommend things; a certain degree of decision making power;</p> <p>3) librarians benefit from working side-by-side with faculty</p>	<p>1) reconstitute w/ fewer librarians and make it's focus more as a faculty/student advisory group so faculty/students have opportunity for input before final decisions are made</p> <p>2) have someone other than UL chair to remove any conflict of interest in soliciting feedback</p> <p>2nd Opinion: Not explicitly outlined but summarized as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - timeline for setting the agenda does not allow for adequate preparation or informed discussion; - although there is some discussion of issues, impression is that the meeting content is mostly for information where the UL tells of the decisions made elsewhere; - librarians not aware of the details of the budget so have to trust the UL and Admin on fiscal matters; - nothing is taken to a vote; discussions ensue and when impasse is reached, decision is to "agree to disagree and take the direction of the UL." 	<p>Overall, it is an effective point: useful forum for discussion although does not have the power to ensure recommendations are followed (source of potential weakness).</p>	<p>Important to have faculty/librarian dialogue on many levels since faculty reps are often: a) junior, b) busy, c) turn over frequently so are always learning.</p>

Table 13: Continuation of Table 11

Institution	Mandate	Positives	Negatives	Perception of effectiveness & why	Advice
U.Ottawa	a) official means of consultation between UL and the librarians b) role to discuss issues in a collegial setting and make recommendations to the UL concerning the policies, operations, and development of the Library Network.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bishop's	"The Council will provide a forum for the discussion of issues related to the library and to the profession, and, if suitable, make recommendations arising from these discussions to the Chief Librarian and the Senate Library Committee.."	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Saint Thomas-More	1) make decisions on acquisitions greater than \$500; 2) advise on acquisitions of serials; 3) recommend on receipt of large donations; 4) recommend on the selling of collections. May advise on changes to the Faculty Council's policy on the library.	1) representative of the academic disciplinary areas; 2) the President is on the Committee; 3) Library Director is on the Committee and typically chairs it; 4) that it exists	The library director should always be chair.	Effective: provides a formal opportunity to communicate directly with some members of the faculty on a regular basis; a body that can make formal decisions which are integrated with the college governing.	The library director should always be chair
U.Manitoba	1) To facilitate communication between the Academic Librarians for the purposes of professional development; 2) To contribute to the formulation of Libraries policies and procedures; 3) To formulate recommendations to the Director of Libraries on matters affecting the Libraries.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Table 14: Continuation of Table 11

Institution	Mandate	Positives	Negatives	Perception of effectiveness & why	Advice
Memorial	<p>1) To make recommendations to the Senate on academic matters and to make recommendations to the UL on matters relating to policy, operations, and development of the libraries;</p> <p>2) Council may request reports from the UL, branch heads, division heads, and any currently constituted library committees or task groups;</p> <p>3) Council's deliberations should normally avoid operational details of individual units, unless they have broader significance within the University libraries.</p>	<p>1) representative body for all librarians;</p> <p>2) allows contact with and input from members of other academic units;</p> <p>3) reinforces librarians equal academic status with faculty in other academic units</p>	<p>1) effectiveness is dependent on attitude of UL so that Council is more conduit for information rather than decision making, resulting in a question of usefulness.</p> <p>2) reluctance to express disagreement in the presence of non-library Council members;</p> <p>3) hard to staff various positions on Council because Council is not seen as an important form of academic service</p>	Not as effective as it should be: (mostly due to the negatives articulated)	<p>1) essential to librarians' claim to academic status so long as they are representative</p> <p>2) essential to the relationship to other University governance structures</p> <p>3) effectiveness depends on amount of involvement by librarians which in turn depends on care in framing the constitution (TOR) and a belief that participation matters.</p>
U.Calgary NOTE: The Library & Cultural Resources Committee is appears to be a parallel committee that appears to be the equivalent of a GFC Library or Senate Library Committee.	<p>a) to provide advice on matters referred to it by the Library & Cultural Resources (L&CR) Committee;</p> <p>b) to recommend for transmittal to the L&CR Committee on any matter it believes relevant to the improved functioning of the Library;</p> <p>c) to elect a representative to the L&CR Committee;</p> <p>d) to take responsibility for matters assigned to it by the L&CR Committee or the Vice Provost, L&CR;</p> <p>e) to elect standing or adhoc committees to study matter of particular concern;</p> <p>f) to provide a forum for the discussion of any matter of interest to Council members;</p> <p>g) Council minutes to be distributed to the L&CR Committee.</p>	<p>1) Great place to discuss policy;</p> <p>2) Good to get regular updates from the Vice Provost (UL);</p> <p>3) Good time to see everyone from locations around the city and get to know your colleagues.</p>	<p>1) Can often be "high jacked" by certain people and their own agenda;</p> <p>2) Have people regularly attend rather than just when they feel like it;</p> <p>3) More time and more participation for "member's forum" which is where Council members can share their own experiences with conferences, research, etc.</p>	Not sure	None offered

Table 15: Continuation of Table 1

Observations:

This casual survey would suggest that there is not wide spread implementation of library councils (i.e., slightly better than 50% in this non-scientific sample). At the same time, I would be shocked if we actually scratched a bit deeper into our committee structures and did not find some groupings of academic librarians within our libraries that were council-LIKE but just not referred to as a library council. As an example, the University of Lethbridge has never had a library council, *per se*, in my 18 years here, which is why it is being considered as a step forward⁴. At the same time, since I started at the UofL, there has always been some overarching committee chaired by the University Librarian and inclusive of all the academic librarians (plus relevant others although never faculty) whose mandate included advising the University Librarian, reviewing and/or recommending on library policy, and promoting communication within and from without (via the university librarian). Whether they replace, report to or are equal partners with the Senate/GFC Library Committee, the library councils described in this survey do not differ in these principle functions from the non-library-council committees I have experienced.

A few points made by the respondents stood out for me and allude to the contradiction I believe we experience within the academic sector of our profession:

1) On membership

Some offered the advice to keep the library council purely academic and the purview of those members of the academic staff in the library (i.e., the academic/professional librarians). Some felt that having the membership of the council extend beyond the boundaries of the academic staff in the library, curtails discussion in a variety of ways.

Others, however, felt that having representation from across the academic disciplines and from the student body facilitates two-way communication between the library and the university community.

Regardless of membership, however, it is important to keep the librarians as key members of the council in terms of holding key positions and in terms of maintaining their active engagement with the council. I would suggest it is also important to keep the external-to-the-library members actively engaged with a relevant agenda or you miss out on why you want these members present (i.e., communication). As one respondent pointed out, faculty reps tend to be junior, busy and turn over frequently and suggested that the communication has to take place at many levels which I took to mean not just at a council meeting.

⁴ Those with longer memories than mine, recall that a library council did exist in the very earliest days of the library.

One more thing, there is a sense from one respondent (at least) that the larger the membership, the more ineffective the library council becomes.

2) On Chairing

In the keeping with the model of faculty councils, the CAUT discussion paper notes the recommendation that the library council be chaired by the university librarian. Most of the library councils described are, in fact, chaired by the university librarian. However, opinion was mixed about the merits of this point. Some felt it kept the university librarian accountable to the library council while others felt it allowed them to control the library council too much in terms of agenda, the type of feedback solicited, etc.

3) Effectiveness

Respondents for three of the councils described did not comment on effectiveness of the council.

Two respondents describing two different councils were not sure about the effectiveness of their council because of their own inexperience with this form of governance.

Three of the 13 councils described were perceived as being effective because they provided a forum for communication and discussion. It would seem if that is the main objective of the library council, then it is a good vehicle for this purpose.

Five of the 13 councils described were perceived to be ineffective or not as effective as might be, the main reason being attributed to the relationship of the council to the university librarian. As mentioned earlier, two of the councils described were actually not functioning at all and the reason given in one case was quite specifically attributed to the university librarian. As noted in the CAUT discussion paper, “[i]f the council is to be a productive, collegial body which contributes to the development and well-being of the university, there must be a good working relationship between the council and the chief librarian.”

Interestingly, the flip-side of this is that the effectiveness of the council is sometimes in the hands of the members. High-jacking of the council by members with personal agendas as well as disinterest were two points raised by respondents as points of weakness.

Finally, an additional reason for the library council being ineffective came back to communication. In a forum, designed with collegiality in mind, some respondents felt it was not conducive to communication because people felt uncomfortable or were made to feel uncomfortable by the discussion or, cynically, because they felt the communication was one

way (usually top-down), the agenda controlled, they lacked information to participate and/or the communication consisted of reporting on decisions already made.

4) Accountability

Most of the terms of reference for the library councils described instruct the university librarian to give due consideration to the advice and recommendations of the library council. (I did not (and could not) include all the picky details in this summary.) One library council, however, requires the university librarian to report on the fate of the recommendation and the decisions for making that decision. I have no idea if this is actually done or how it is done but it is an interesting “twist” in this relationship between the library council and the university librarian.

5) Terms of reference

The CAUT discussion paper notes the following:

“The library council should be a collegial forum that engages the librarians and the administration in positive discussions about the direction the library will take. It is not meant to be, nor should it attempt to be, a management group. The council is the forum in which policy is debated and recommended; it is the responsibility of the library administrators to implement the policies. A failure to distinguish between the two functions can result in problems if the administrators fear that the library council will encroach on their managerial responsibilities.”

It is interesting to see that the terms of reference for two of the councils specifically acknowledge this boundary.

My opinion:

Firstly, I don't believe there is a common understanding of what a library council is or does or should be expected to accomplish—relative to existing library committees and relative to the Senate/GFC Library Committee.

Secondly, I believe it is really important to know what it is that is being attempted with a library council. As an academic librarian, I feel the academic sector of librarianship is pulling in different directions: those of us wishing to be academic LIBRARIANS and those of us wishing to be ACADEMIC librarians and those of us wishing to be, simply, academic librarians. Is the idea behind the concept of a library council about the emulation of faculty structures so they will accept us as academic staff? OR is it about a structure that truly has merit for determining and accomplishing the goals of the library? Can it be both? Whatever the case, I believe we, as academic librarians and along with our university librarians,

should be clear about what we are trying to accomplish in structuring library councils or we risk disappointment, disengagement, alienation. Can we be so honest?

Finally, if the issue at the heart of any matter is one of trust (usually lack of) and/or control (usually lack of), I believe no amount of restructuring around a library council is going to fix that problem—there is something else going on and we should be careful of reacting to the wrong stimulus.

Again, thanks to everyone who responded.

Leona Jacobs