

Panel Discussion on Academic Activity  
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Moderator: Peggy Ellis, UWOFA-LA Speaker

Panel Members:

Kim Clark, Past President, UWOFA

Joyce Garnett, University Librarian

Michele Parkin, Director, Office of Faculty Relations

John Sadler, UWOFA-LA negotiating team

Ruth Wallace, Deputy Chief Negotiator, UWOFA-LA

Alan Weedon, Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty)

Peggy Ellis introduced the panel members and explained that Ruth Wallace would give an overview of several discussion points, and then each member of the panel would have the opportunity to expand on each point. After the discussion of all of the points, the floor would be open for questions. Members were asked to hold their questions until that time.

(Note: Each panel member is identified by her/his initials)

**Discussion Points:**

Academic Activity: what it is, what it isn't

RW: There is still confusion about the definition of Academic Activity (AA) in the Collective Agreement (CA). Academic Activity is defined in the article *Responsibilities of Members* as:

*the creation of new knowledge, including understanding or concepts, the creative application of existing knowledge, or the organization and synthesis of existing knowledge*

relevant to librarianship or archival practice.

It is helpful to give a few examples:

- a unique taxonomy that is applied in other institutions
- book reviews are and are not AA. A brief descriptive review would be Professional Practice (PP) or Service. An extensive, analytical, evaluative review could be considered AA

- giving an invited guest lecture at FIMS would be Service. A formal symposium about overall trends in the field could be AA.

KC: Another example. Organising a symposium would be Service.

RW: If you have a particular topic or endeavour, ask during the question time.

MP: It is difficult for librarians and archivists. There is no culture established over time. This is all new. We encourage discussion with leaders, colleagues if you need a better idea of where it fits in.

JG: It is important that individual Members make the case, put their AA into context, show its significance. A symposium could be AA if of a highly innovative nature.

RW: A difference between description and evaluation.

### Peer Review

RW: A difference between “pre” and “post” peer review. If you submit an article to an editorial board, then it is “pre” peer review. “Post” peer review is after the fact. For example, an innovative means to organize information might be adopted at other institutions.

KC: Key issue is dissemination. If write an article and it is not disseminated, it doesn’t fall under AA. Peer review for librarians and archivists is more flexible than for faculty. If “post” dissemination, can make a case that this is a form of peer review.

JS: Traditional peer review is “pre” review; usual for journals and conference papers.

JG: “Post” review more available electronically. Refers to clause 4:

*Academic Activity directly related to performance in Professional Practice is encouraged. Where a Member’s Academic Activity is judged by peer review to represent a development of materials or methods of an innovative sort or an academic advance, with application wider than the Member’s own Professional Practice, then such work may be counted either as Professional Practice or as Academic Activity, but not both.*

May be other “post” opportunities.

KC: Clause 4 refers to something that is normally part of PP adapted elsewhere. It is up to the Member to argue that it is AA.

### Academic Freedom within relevant Academic Activity

RW: Determining a topic is not assigned - your own ideas you wish to pursue as long as they are relevant to librarianship or archival practice. Your supervisor can not say that he/she wants you to focus on something else. You may choose to follow the supervisor’s ideas, but AA is not assigned. The Member chooses the research topic and makes the case for how or why it qualifies as AA. The supervisor can provide advice or mentoring, but it is up to the Member to take that advice or not.

JS: You need to keep an eye on the long-term prospect. Eventually, the result will be assessed.

KC: An example of how Academic Freedom relates to faculty. I’m an anthropologist and I teach anthropology. If I decide to write a book on gardening, that wouldn’t fall under research (equal to your AA). But if I write about urban agriculture in Ecuador, new plants introduced to the new world, how labour has mobilized for gardening, then that would fall under research. I have academic freedom. The university can’t say I have to work in Venezuela rather than in Ecuador. In my teaching, I have freedom to select books for courses. I am expected to do work in the job I was hired to do, but I can’t be told what is the content of that. Librarians and archivists are hired to do those jobs. There are different

subject areas, different areas open. But what you are hired to do should be part of that.

MP: Members also control how they approach their AA, what methodology they choose, the parameters.

AW: You have the freedom to decide what AA you want to do. Others may criticize, but can't stop you. But your AA is subject to peer review. Be mindful of how it will be assessed - in going for promotion, in the Annual Report and Review (ARR). Peers decide - other librarians and archivists. Discourse on this is important. This is a new environment; you are adapting, but don't quite know what it is. Advice from colleagues, leaders is important.

### Pace and production of Academic Activity

RW: You are responsible for managing your own scholarship - your research plan and scheduling yourselves. AA is just 10% of the normal workload. What is a reasonable amount? One example, 1 peer-reviewed article every 4 years is reasonable. One article every year would not be reasonable.

It might be useful to keep a log of your work. This would give a sense of the time devoted to AA, and the pace of your work. If 3-4 years for an article, where you should be in progress of that. Can take advantage of support and mentoring. Administration's expectations of outcomes are mitigated by knowledge that we are in transition to a new culture.

KC: AA is something new. It was not in your workload before. It takes time to get up to speed. In 5 or 10 years, there will be the expectation of accomplishing more.

JS: There is a need to plan AA. Job requirements are always apparent. AA can get lost. You could pick 1 morning a week, or you could devote an extended time when your PP responsibilities are less.

RW: How does rank play into this? Expectations for someone at the Assistant rank are not the same as the expectations for someone at Senior rank.

AW: It is hard to put numbers on what is reasonable frequency of publications for 10%. People produce at different rates and projects differ. One publication every 4 years is a little tight. Try to assess rate of productivity. Treat 1 publication in 4 years carefully. In the CA, there are different expectations for the ranks. This is a transition time. Many librarians and archivists have graduate degrees in other disciplines; these prepared them for AA in a way the MLIS degree itself doesn't. There are different levels of preparation. If you do have a graduate degree in another area, research in that area could be relevant to AA. If you have a doctorate in chemistry, can you do AA only in chemistry? No. If AA in information sources for chemistry, that could qualify as AA. Work in another discipline could count toward AA if it applies to librarianship or archival practice.

RW: Examples come back to the definition of AA in the CA.

JG: Following on the point about research in another area as it applies to librarianship or archival practice, one could look at user behaviours, bibliographic sources. Key is planning. AA not a one-shot deal, but an ongoing program.

MP: In relation to the Annual Report, if there is no evidence of dissemination annually, must report what done. The easiest way is a log of activity. This can be evidence of AA. It is wise to have a well-recorded research plan.

KC: On a research plan, the final outcome is the dissemination of your work. If looking at how anthropology students are accessing information, based on that research, this might lead to a number of different outcomes over time. It can feed into larger issues. A single project may have multiple impacts over time.

#### Academic Activity and the Annual Report and Review

RW: We need to be able to report on and comment on AA, not benchmarks set by supervisors. We are responsible for our own scholarship. In the Annual Report, we need to indicate what was done, what we anticipate doing in the next year or years.

KC: There should always be ongoing AA, but there is not always an outcome to report.

RW: For example, reporting that no writing has been done, but have had conversations with colleagues and there is a plan in place would be considered adequate.

JG: Subject pursued today doesn't have to be the AA always. New interests can develop.

#### Internal Research Grants

RW: Internal SSHRC grants are available. Information is on the university web site on the process for applying. Joyce Garnett has suggested a workshop of writing grant applications. Don't be shy about pursuing grants. There is also a dedicated research office in Weldon Library (LARSN), providing a quiet space for research. It can be booked through the Business Office.

JG: All librarians and archivists with AA in their workload can apply for internal grants. But don't stop applying for external grants as well. CARL is working to expand the definition of research for grants. Some librarians and archivists who have more experience in research can assist.

KC: There are many individuals on campus who can provide assistance with research.

RW: Librarians and archivists also have extended library borrowing privileges now, equal to the faculty's.

#### Academic Activity Leave

RW: This is covered in the *Professional Leaves* article in the CA. It may be an answer for finding time to pursue AA. It can be taken advantage of in appropriate circumstances.

#### **Questions and Answers:**

Q "Academic Activity" and "research" are used synonymously. This is not what we voted for in bargaining unit meetings in negotiations. This is a failure of union leadership. Can't do much to push this back with current CA. Interpretation can be broadened.

Librarianship is many things, not just research. Peers may have different or broader understanding of AA. Current administration interpretation is too narrow. During initial placement of ranks, submitted AA. Narrow research interpretation. What's going to happen in promotion? If only look at current interpretation, no one will be promoted in the next 4 years. How promotion ties into AA.

A RW: Is there a question in there?

- Q What happens to past AA, from the transition period? Does Annual Report and Promotion happen only with dissemination? What AA applies previous to the CA?
- A KC: The largest basis for promotion is PP.  
 JG: In the transition process, the committee developed criteria that were distinct from ongoing evaluation. The whole career was considered. Primarily PP was considered, but it did look at AA. That can't be used as the standard under the CA. The ARR is a different process.
- Q Who qualify as peers?
- A AW: Peers are other librarians and archivists. If you write something in history, other peers are not just archivists; the peers are broader. Examples of AA were mostly practical applications. There are opportunities to go further, for example, theoretical advancement would certainly be AA.  
 RW: You argue the case. Isn't theoretical discussion usually in the journal literature? Another example, theory furthering understanding.  
 MP: Don't take examples as limiting. They are intended just to dispel confusion. They are not inclusive.  
 AW: There are different kinds of peers - an editorial board, members of the promotion committee.
- Q In Annual Report process, can identify external peers to provide input on AA?
- A KC: If some AA in a journal, it is very easy to make the case that it is relevant. Could make a case for publishing in a history journal; for example, the library as a public space.  
 JG: It depends on the contribution. If acting as a consultant on how to organize, then not AA but PP. If involved in analysis and so on, could be AA. Scholarship of teaching and learning is an emerging area.
- Q How broad is librarianship or archival practice? Does it consider informatics? Are we going beyond academic library practice?
- A JG: Yes, how information is used.
- Q How far do we push the line? For example, consumer health information?
- A MP: Relevant to "librarianship" not library practice.  
 KC: It is up to you to make the case.
- Q Opportunities for publishing in music librarianship are quite narrow. We must be able to have a broader understanding.
- A MP: The vision is for Western to be on the leading edge of research. We heard in negotiations that there are not a great number of journals. It was suggested that Western sponsor a journal. You shouldn't feel constrained, hope you will take leadership.  
 JG: Possibility to publish elsewhere. There are new journals at universities. The key is credible peer review, an editorial panel. Possibilities are growing.  
 KC: I would ask colleagues what journal they read that are relevant to their area.

Q Are there plans for an institutional repository? How would this factor in? A form for peer review?

A JG: Is a form of dissemination - "post" peer review.

KC: Lots of places on the web with working papers available. That might be another option, rather than developing a journal. Working papers can disseminate work.

RW: Other venues for dissemination.

Q There are many blogs these days. Is that AA?

A MP: Not so much dissemination as impact. If not used, is useless.

RW: If find citations?

MP: In a blog, the public is responding, but not necessarily with a library background. Then the quality of responses evaluated by peers.

AW: Depends on the quality of responses.

Comment from Mike Carroll:

This is a matter of discussion for faculty as well. Lots of hits, is that service or research? It's not determined. Some argue if a blog is interesting, it is service. Others argue that it is a contribution to knowledge. It is not fully clarified for faculty.

KC: Not all forms of dissemination are created equal. Certain research outcomes are evaluated differently. There are "top tier" as well as other level journals. How dissemination venues are adjudicated can be discipline specific. There is no hard and fast rule. Publication can be seen as contribution engaging with other scholars. In promotion, the ultimate decision is in the hands of the provost, but the provost can't act arbitrarily. Peer judgements of the committee and peers where there is dissemination of work are ultimately decided by the provost.

JG: Can be "pre" print, results shared before. Can be in "pre" print and submitted for publication. There hasn't been discussion of a hierarchy of journals.

Q If there is disagreement between a Member and his/her supervisor, is there an appeal process? What if the Member is convinced the work is acceptable, but the supervisor is not?

A KC: The supervisor doesn't get to decide. It is the outcome that is assessed.

MP: It is your choice, it is not assigned. The supervisor can advise and mentor, but ultimately, it is your choice.

JG: The final ARR is written by University Librarian with input from the supervisor. The impact is what is accomplished. They may differ in opinion. There is no control over the content.

KC: The Member has a right to respond in writing to whatever is in the ARR. That response is added to your file, and goes into the Promotion and Continuing Appointment (P&CA) file.

JG: External referees for AA are also in P&CA file.

MP: There is supervisor input in the faculty, but not on topic, or how it is done. Feedback is on progress, pace of production, what might be expected.

Q On page 151 of the CA, it says "relevant to librarianship or archival practice." Is "archival practice" equal to "librarianship"?

- A Yes.
- Q Is applying for grants AA?
- A KC: It is considered to be part of the research activity, but is not an outcome.
- Q Clarify, if a difference of opinion between Member and supervisor, P&CA committee makes decision if it is AA. Is this an accurate summary?
- A JG: Outcome is the key.  
MP: You can't check in advance. It is best to seek informed advice. You make the argument that it is AA.
- Q Is it the P&CA committee that makes the call? Who makes the judgement?
- A AW: P&CA committee makes a recommendation to the provost. The provost makes the ultimate decision.  
MP: Librarians and archivists know their roles. You need to be sure that AA is within that role.
- Q Service can result in AA for other disciplines. Does this count as AA?
- A MP: Whose research plan is it? Is it a faculty member, with you assisting? Is it your plan and you researching? If a leadership position, is your AA. In a collaboration, can be a co-investigator.  
KC: What is your role in relationship to analysis of information, materials, research? Role in analysis of material is key.  
AW: The Annual Report provides an opportunity for advice and input.
- Q Is publication in a peer-reviewed journal the gold standard? Is there possibility for promotion if AA hasn't included publication in a journal, and are some journals better than others?
- A KC: Dissemination is the key. Dissemination is contributing to knowledge. It can take many forms.  
MP: Professional journals are important, but there is more than one form of peer review. For example, if you developed a system that was then used by other universities. It depends on the context.  
JG: Presenting a paper at a conference. There can be feedback.  
AW: Dissemination and peer review together. Conferences can also be judged differently. Sometimes one must compete to get a paper accepted for a conference; that may be seen as having more merit.
- Q There is peer review for OLA and CLA conferences. What is the presentation ratio? How are they rated?
- A MP: Ratio is perhaps misleading. We want to be careful. Right now, we are in a vacuum. There is not established culture of expectations. If the conference is held in high regard, that's how the culture will develop.  
KC: Remember, this is an area with lots of questions. AA is a small part of the workload, only 10% of some people's workload. The main criteria for promotion is PP. There is lots of anxiety about what counts for AA. Don't build it up too much because it is

small. It is a key issue for status as academic librarians or archivists, but a small part of the workload. What will be of interest to colleagues, and how to disseminate that. A conference paper is a good way to do that. Sometimes that is a step to later publication.

JG: Conferences are a good outlet for dissemination and networking. Sometimes, though, it is sharing the PP experience and is not AA.

KC: If a conference paper, make the selectivity of submitting a paper clear. Provide the context for it.

Q My supervisor does not have a library background. That AA is not assigned is not clear in the CA. In my Annual Review, there was a sense that I was doing AA without approval, there was no sense that I had autonomy.

A MP: AA has implications for PP environment. For example, creating a new database has implications for existing systems or client groups - things that need to be discussed. Distinguish right to AA and impact on environment that need to be discussed. Still must function within the system.

KC: 10% of workload is AA - not assigned. 10% is service, some assigned, some not. I am wondering if this is a workload issue.

Q How can someone ensure that the supervisor is aware of the parameters?

A MP: Be clear in your own definition. There may have been misunderstanding whether fell in PP or AA. AA is not assigned. Have a conversation with your supervisor.

Comment from Mike Carroll:

This is new for supervisors, too. It sounds like the supervisor didn't understand. I know some don't understand; but that's their problem. You can have the conversation. If this is a problem, you can go to UWOFA or the Office of Faculty Relations.

KC: There are lots of these kinds of discussions. Most Members are with Western Libraries, with Joyce. Non-Western Libraries librarians are in a unique situation. A dean may have only 1 librarian. Partly, it is adapting to a new situation. UWOFA-LA can provide support.

MP: The Office of Faculty Relations has been working with academics about the CA. But it is all new and patience is needed. Have a discussion.

Q I question if something is AA, and if I should pursue it. P&CA committee may decide not. Perhaps we could have standing research committee to advise, assist with grants?

A MP: There is a difficulty. The P&CA committee can't be bound. You would accept the advice at your own peril. Evaluation is by external referees. It is not necessarily the topic, but the outcome that supports or negates the evaluation.

KC: Various workshops would be useful. Joyce suggested one for applying for grants. Even informal discussions would be useful, a venue for sharing.

JG: Perhaps there is a need for formal or informal mentoring. It is up to the individual to reflect on AA and progress toward outcomes.

Q A concern about clause 3.1 in the *Annual Report and Review* article. The level of

performance is categorized. That includes AA and Service. How is AA rated outstanding, very good, good, etc.? What conversations have there been with supervisors to guide them in assigning these ratings?

A JG: There are ongoing discussions with leaders about the different levels of performance. In Western Libraries, there have been recent discussions about AA of Members at different ranks. For 2007-2008, there is a generosity of interpretation, a recognition that this is early on in the process. As for quantitative, we haven't gone there yet; that is evolving. There is recognition toward dissemination.

KC: There are 3 areas in workload. Each is evaluated, but they don't have the same weight. AA is only 10% of the workload. A small part of workload, a small part of evaluation.

Q Grants vs. money. Is money available for equipment - tape recorders, software? These can be shared. How do get money for these things?

A JG: There is support for AA in the libraries. You can use the Professional Expense Reimbursement (PER). This is something to discuss more thoroughly. Software useful for AA could benefit in PP, too. Not sure how this works in faculty.

KC: Sometimes you can get this through grants. If it can be used widely, it might be in the department budget. I also use PER.

MP: Also, think outside the box - other contacts at other universities, sponsors.

Q Clarify comment re dissemination of PP at a conference: what done here, what learned, how it can benefit, the results of analysis. AA or not?

A JG: Depends on level of analysis, nature of content.

MP: It depends. If routine, no. If innovative, could be.

Q Clause 3c of Responsibilities, "the organization and synthesis of existing knowledge." How is one evaluated on something subjective like that?

A MP: No question it is subjective. In reality, you are being evaluated by others. Ask yourself how will others regard this?

KC: Partly, it is for you to make the case.

JG: Different would be an analytic report of PP.

KC: You make the case, providing content and context.

Q The CA will expire and be renegotiated. If we are not happy with it, let the union leadership know it. This doesn't have to be it.

A RW: The contract committee is not closed. Communicate your concerns to the leadership, but getting involved is the best way to have your concerns met.

Q Is an institutional repository an opportunity to put conference presentations out there?

A JG: It's an opportunity to look at a new means of dissemination. I'm hearing it is favourable to have an internal source for dissemination, a repository for some form of "pre" print or "post" print dissemination of a paper.

Q This is all new, but we are part of a larger community of librarians at other universities. There are examples, and we can collaborate. There is a wider community to draw on.

A JG: CARL still looking at a research agenda, looking at what librarians and archivists are doing.

Peggy Ellis thanked the panel for their participation, and the Members for their attendance and questions.