

**2016 CAUT Librarians' & Archivists' Conference Report**  
**October 21-22, 2016**  
**Shawn Hendriks**

The 2016 Librarians' and Archivists' Conference provided attendees with an overview of the current collective bargaining landscape in Canadian colleges and universities along with a two-day negotiation exercise to build practical skills.

**Resources:**

CAUT Collective Agreements Database: <http://collectiveagreements.caut.ca/>

Attendees were given access for the bargaining exercise, but it is not yet available for members.

**Conference Package:**

I have a conference binder with additional information based on the topics presented. I'm happy to share this with anyone interested in learning more.

- What is collective bargaining?
- Bargaining Basics
- Structuring the team
- Do's and Don'ts
- Drafting collective agreement language
- Table tips for bargainers

**Presentations and Panel Discussions**

The first day of the conference consisted primarily of presentations and panel discussions pertaining to collective bargaining. The following is a selection of notable discussion.

**Memorable Quote:**

"We are fighting for the right to do our jobs better" – Penni Stewart, Past President CAUT

**Side-Tables:**

Side-tables are typically formed to deal with difficult aspects of the negotiation. These may continue to be unresolved even if a collective agreement is ratified. Attendees offered various perspectives, but most believed that side-tables should be avoided. The employer may use a side-table as a delaying tactic or as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy, especially if the side-table is created for a specific group within the bargaining unit (ie. librarians and archivists).

**Workload:**

A discussion was held regarding workload language in collective agreements. Some collective agreements do not state expected hours of work for librarians and archivists (such as Western), which

gives members greater flexibility. However, members often face unwritten rules due to workplace culture. Other collective agreements state that members must work a set number of hours per week, but the irony is that most librarians and archivists working under this system regularly exceed these hours due to work requirements and professional responsibilities.

#### Membership in Bargaining Units:

In addition to librarians and archivists, a range of professionals with master's and doctoral degrees work at the university. Many of these professionals perform research as part of their work, so would it be sensible to include them in the faculty bargaining unit? This question was put to the attendees, but no response was given.

#### Plain Language Guides:

One conference participant suggested that a plain language guide to the most important aspects of the collective agreement would be useful to members. I suspect this has not been widely adopted because associations typically have summarized information on their website and a plain language guide may provide a problematic interpretation of the collective agreement's language.

#### Writing Collective Agreements:

I also received advice for writing collective agreement language, such as using short sentences, simple language, lists and bullets where appropriate, and avoiding passive voice and "shall". Conference participants also debated the use of inclusive and exhaustive language; both may be appropriate depending on the nature of the article.

#### Other Findings:

- A common objective for librarians and archivists across Canada is achieving parity with faculty in terms of contract language.
- Even if an article in the collective agreement isn't followed to the letter, the employer could use often-ignored language in the future to the detriment of employees.

### **Bargaining Simulation Exercise**

The remainder of the conference simulated a negotiation process between the employer and the association. I joined four others as the employer team negotiating five articles: academic freedom, grievance and arbitration, professional expense reimbursement, hours of work, and compensation. Like the association, we had a mandate that set the parameters of our bargaining strategy.

I enjoyed the simulation, and I now appreciate the significant amount of time and resources that are required during collective bargaining. Teamwork and leveraging strengths and expertise are key to a successful outcome. Communication and understanding is also important between the employer and association. In more than one instance, one side made assumptions about what the other side wanted without asking clarifying questions. This led to confusion as to why an article was not approved. I expect,

however, that in a real scenario where a history between the groups exists there is less likelihood of misunderstanding.

By the end of the exercise we achieved our mandate and reached an agreement with the association. Some groups were less successful. I am cognizant that all the participants were librarians and archivists, so I expect that true collective bargaining is a greater challenge.

Based on the experience and skills I developed over the course of the conference, I would like to contribute to the UWOFA-LA negotiating team's future success as appropriate.

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank UWOFA for the financial support to attend this conference. As Chief Steward for UWOFA-LA, this experience provided me with an enhanced perspective of librarian and archivist issues, and I hope the knowledge and skills I have gained will be valuable to our bargaining unit.