

Codifying Academic Freedom: An Examination of Collective Agreements for Librarian Specific Language Tim Ribaric (Brock University)

Academic Freedom is a foundational component of the modern University. The notion is brought to life and exercised through a very particular article of the collective agreement. This article almost always provides a well honed, lofty, and almost self-evident description of the protections to teaching, and research that need to be maintained. Challenging ideas in the classroom are shielded from the reluctant hang wringing of administrators. Research that pushes boundaries and challenges norms proceeds with a slow march for the betterment of all. Our traditional Faculty colleagues conduct their business with full confidence that their activities are well protected, yet what about us as Professional Librarians? In most cases we can rely on this same exact article to afford protections. This is of course due to the fact that we are in the same bargaining units as those traditional Faculty members and are bound to the language as well. Yet, when pressed, does this language really offer protections to Professional Librarians that are specific to the work they conduct? A judicious application of teaching and research for the traditional Faculty member is hard to parallel with certain core Librarian duties. Where does collection development fit? Collaborating on an in-depth research consultation that might unearth ideas contrary to what the institution holds as fundamental? In some cases the collective agreement is silent on these activities. While most would view these types of conduct allowable under the spirit of academic freedom it is possible that a strict interpretation would exclude these endeavours from established protections.

Fortunately this is not always the case, and as time progresses breaks to this trend develop. A selection of collective agreements of Canadian universities now have specific provisions for the conduct of Professional Librarians under the overarching concept of Academic Freedom. This paper will attempt to present this landscape by examining text from collective agreements of Canadian institutions to see how (if at all) protections for Librarians are constructed.