

Disrupting Traditional Power Structures in Academic Libraries: Saying No, How to Do it, and Why it Matters (Workshop; note: Goes until 5:00).

Melanie Cassidy, Learning and Curriculum Support Librarian, University of Guelph.

Erin Menzies, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Strategic Planning and Policy Division, Capacity Planning and Priorities Branch.

Ali Versluis, Open Educational Resources Librarian, University of Guelph.

Many academic libraries are currently facing austerity measures, personnel reductions, vacancies, or compression. At the same time, libraries seek to be viewed by their campus communities as hubs of innovation, service, and teaching. As libraries continue to expand services in the face of these changes, the weight of increased workloads on librarians results in a new set of pressures: diminished mental health, increased precarity, and an inability to engage in critical teaching and learning practices.

These challenges sit at the intersection of resilience and job precarity, neoliberalism, and vocational awe. Within the context of the academic library, resilience is endorsed as a means of negotiating precarious employment by encouraging untenured, tenure-track, term, and other non-permanent librarians to continually prove their value to the institution or risk not being renewed or rehired. The neoliberal perspective further promotes an environment where individual culpability is assigned at the cost of challenging institutional constructs and practices, and the role of the librarian is to contribute to the preparation of students joining the workforce. Finally, the self-reflective nature of librarianship and the acceptance of our work as a calling (as opposed to a profession) contributes to the internalizing of an inability to meet professional demands as personal failings, leading to burnout.

This 90-minute workshop seeks to interrogate our position as librarians within this construct, both in terms of how we are influenced by this intersection and how we (tacitly or explicitly) support it. The aim of the facilitators is to unpack these concepts and how they intersect, creating a space where participants proceed to develop and utilize a shared vocabulary to foster discussion and develop strategies to disrupt traditional power structures in academic libraries. Our ultimate goal is to engage in meaningful discussion and to share best practices that create space for ourselves and colleagues to say “no” when they need to, and to maintain our profession’s ability to perform effectively and in good health.

The facilitators will provide a current-state analysis, including an overview of current literature, to ensure participants share a mutual understanding of key concepts. Through guided-discussions participants will share experiences, work to develop best practices, and establish a “resilience taxonomy” to provide support in resisting overwork, precarity, and other negative side-effects of neoliberal working conditions in academic libraries.