Academic librarians in Canada are among the most heavily unionized workers. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Librarians’ Salary and Academic Status Survey for 2010-11/2011-12 suggests that of the approximately 1,288 academic librarians who are members of CAUT, over 95% are part of their faculty associations. In the US, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in its 2014 release of the *Union Members Summary* states that “Among occupational groups, the highest unionization rates in 2013 were in education, training, and library occupations… (35.3% each).” Librarians in both jurisdictions have been unionized for some 45 years and have been represented by various professional associations since the early 20th century. Despite these numbers, Kathleen de la Peña McCook notes that “the literature of academic library unionism is scant.”

*In Solidarity* documents the birth of labour organizing of academic librarians in Canada and to a lesser extent in the US. It offers specific instances of working conditions and workplace practices, analyses of collective agreements, tales of labour disruption; it describes the experiences of librarians on bargaining teams and even conveys one group’s failed attempt at organizing. Although not the intention of the book originally, *In Solidarity* can be used as a textbook introduction to unionizing—not only for librarians but for other academic and public sector workers. A concept such as collegial governance is applicable to all academic staff; collective bargaining is universal among unionized employees; and the historical chapters will prove instructive for a great many workers. In this case, because many of the subjects involved were and are women, *In Solidarity* also documents
the struggles of a largely female occupational group to gain control of their working conditions.

The chapters in the first section, *The Origins of Academic Librarian Labour Organizing in Canada*, chronicle the impetus and first efforts of academic librarians to organize from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. Leona Jacobs explores the key roles played by the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) in raising the issues of academic status, salaries and working conditions for academic librarians. Jennifer Dekker examines the lack of advocacy on the part of professional associations and the proactive role of CAUT in advancing the working conditions of Canadian academic librarians.

In the second section, *Case Histories*, Martha Bufton discusses the issues of gender and status at Carleton University in the broader context of the pursuit of equity in Ontario during the 1960s and 1970s. Harriet Sonne de Torrens describes the early history of librarianship at the University of Toronto, including the evolution of library education and the fight for recognition and status of librarians. Robin Inskip and David Jones describe the parallel movement in Ontario’s system of community colleges, focusing on their struggle for academic equivalency to teachers and equal pay for work of equal value.

The third section, *Current Issues and Experiences*, explores current issues relating to the unionization of academic librarians. Meg Raven, Francesca Holyoke and Karen Jensen examine the workload responsibilities of teaching, research and service and the role of collective agreements in ensuring balance. Marni Harlington and Natasha Gerolami provide a comparison and analysis of collective agreements, illustrating their importance in controlling the trajectory of librarians’ work. Justine Wheeler, Carla Graebner, Michael Skelton and Margaret (Peggy) Patterson use autoethnography to convey the experience of librarians participating in faculty associations, providing a compelling narrative of the impact on the participants and the communities they represent. Douglas Vaisey provides an overview of the complaint and grievance process and librarians’ experiences of grievance. The section concludes with Mary Kandiuk’s examination of the role of collective bargaining with respect to improving terms and conditions of employment and the issues and challenges experienced by librarians as members of minority groups within faculty associations.

In the final section, *Case Studies*, two chapters examine the strike by academic librarians and archivists at the University of Western Ontario, a pivotal event in academic librarian labour history. Mike Dawes, Linda Dunn and Aniko Varpalotai examine the issues of salary, academic status, and autonomy that led to the strike in 2011, while Christena McKillop focuses on the empowerment of librarians during their job action. The only chapter in the collection to present a US perspective, by Stephanie Braunstein and Michael F. Russo, depicts a very different labour environment at Louisiana State University and a stark difference in resolve between US and Canadian academic librarians with respect to unioniza-
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The section concludes with an examination by Tim Ribaric of the issues and challenges of collegial self-governance for academic librarians at Brock University.

Readers will no doubt remark that most of the contributions are written by female authors. Is this surprising, given that the “marginalization of librarianship is due to the fact that it is a woman’s profession” and that the “undervaluing of library work” is a “product of its gendered nature”? Librarians—mostly female—mobilized early on to tackle issues of pay equity, academic status and professional autonomy. But other than unionization, what means were or are available to them? Professional associations? Friendly relations with library administrators? Frustrated by a lack of progress, librarians turned away from their professional associations and local library administrators and instead looked to the national academic labour organization, CAUT or in the US, the National Education Association, the American Association of University Professors or other unions, as well as their local faculty associations, to further their collective professional interests.

While striving for a balance in terms of representation of the US and Canada, we found that few American librarians were willing or able to share their stories. Therefore this collection is nearly entirely focused on Canada, where the percentage of unionized workers is, like in the US, slipping, but remains high for workers in the educational sector. The Canadian context is of course smaller (in terms of numbers of librarians and numbers of universities) than the US. It might surprise American readers to discover that there are fewer than 100 universities in Canada and that they are nearly all publicly-funded.

Despite this, we believe that the historical accounts, pressing issues and case studies we have gathered can provide guidance to those who are interested in above all improving their workplaces, but also asserting their academic status, exercising their academic freedom, participating in collective bargaining and accepting the responsibilities that accompany all of the above, no matter where they are located geographically.

A Few Words on Academic Freedom…

Unfortunately no author responded to the Call for Proposals with a chapter on the issue of academic freedom for librarians, which we feel is one of the core—perhaps the core—issues of our time. In Canada, there have been recent and notable cases of tenured or permanent librarians being terminated for arbitrary reasons or sued for expressing professional opinions. The ability of management to limit speech through various sanctions, combined with the comparatively small size of the academic librarian job market, we suspect, has resulted in an environment where not many want to write or speak publicly about their experiences, while others are prevented from doing so by agreements governing the settlement of grievances. But silence erodes free expression, chips away at academic freedom (through the exercise of self-censorship) and ultimately, damages democracy itself. Bruce Barry writes, “The ability of these people (public employees) to speak freely and publicly about the agencies where they work is an important way of keeping
tabs on the effectiveness of the critical services they provide, and by extension the effectiveness of open government in a democratic society.” This statement is particularly fitting in a time when it is vital to critique excessive managerialism, litigation and neoliberal politics in universities, and ensure that postsecondary education remains independent of business and government interests, and that citizens have the right and the ability to access higher education. Regarding the crackdown on freedom of expression, Henry Giroux states, in our universities “This loss of faith in the power of public dialogue and dissent is not unrelated to the diminished belief in higher education as central to producing critical citizens and a crucial democratic public sphere in its own right. At stake here is not only the meaning and purpose of higher education, but also civil society, politics and the fate of democracy itself.”

We have attempted to weave together chapters that speak to the various facets of academic librarian activism and union participation. Contributors describe the powerful role of unionization, collective bargaining and collective agreements in defining terms and conditions of employment. Motivated by a desire for justice in the workplace, they became active, not only in pursuit of their own interests, but in defence of those whose rights have been violated. The core values of academic librarianship—the belief in academic freedom, shared governance and equity—are all evident in the contributions.

We hope that In Solidarity encourages academic librarians to be more active in their unions, and to push for unionization or facilitate changes in their workplaces that replicate those of unionized libraries. But being unionized does not confer immediate benefits. Librarians must bargain for better working conditions. We must enforce that we have academic freedom and freedom of expression within our workplaces. Once gains are made, unionized librarians must ensure an employer’s compliance with the collective agreement which can be more difficult than negotiating the agreement itself. Sustained effort is required to ensure that unionization, organization or other forms of workplace activism are not for nothing. It is also critical that academic librarians cultivate and express their collective voice. The story of academic librarian labour activism and union participation is necessarily about finding this voice and being heard.

There are many ways to be a workplace activist; working through a union is only one, but it is where we have focused. However, this book should not be seen as only for those librarians or libraries that are unionized; its goal is much broader: to bring about positive changes in our workplaces; to enhance the working lives of librarians; to educate librarians about professional solidarity; and to strip away some of the fear in asserting one’s rights and making one’s voice heard in the workplace.

– Jennifer Dekker and Mary Kandiuk
Bibliography


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1. CAUT, Librarian Salary and Academic Status Survey, 2012 Part I: Salaries, Salary Scales and Academic Status, Dec. 2012 http://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/librarians/2012-lsass---part-i-revised.pdf. This number includes colleges from British Columbia as represented by the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC; from Alberta as represented by the Alberta Colleges Institutes Faculty Associations; and from Ontario as represented by the Ontario Public Services Employees Union.


9. With a contribution by Francesca Holyoke.