

CAPAL Conferences as Critical and Empathetic Spaces: Towards a “Safe” Space

To Conference Attendees, Presenters, Convenors, and Volunteers:

CAPAL/ACBAP aspires to provide a positive, critical conference experience for everyone, regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, religion, and personal beliefs. The conference organizers invite all participants to think critically about how offensive verbal comments related to age, sexual orientation, gender orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, religion, and personal beliefs as well as deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, harassing photography or recording, sustained disruption of talks or other events, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention, impact others and align with historically entrenched systems of oppression. Conference organizers have the responsibility to address such behaviour and would consider measures ranging from private conversation with the individual(s) involved to (in extreme cases) removal from the conference without refund.

CAPAL’s core principles reflect a strong commitment to upholding academic freedom and intellectual freedom, as is reflected in our Terms of Reference and Statement of Principles. In our association’s Mission Statement we assert that in order “To further the professional interests of our members, CAPAL shall take national leadership on behalf of the entire membership in advocating for high standards in the profession, fostering the creation and dissemination of knowledge about academic librarianship, and providing critical analysis and public comment on issues affecting academic librarians and academic librarianship” (CAPAL 2012). In CAPAL’s Terms of Reference, we affirm that “CAPAL supports core academic values including freedom of information, academic freedom and academic integrity” (CAPAL 2012). To this end, we recognize that conferences are at their best when they operate as critical spaces, within which intellectual engagement with disturbing content is sometimes highly productive. We welcome discussion and/or imagery related to troubling topics (e.g. sexualized imagery, language commonly considered offensive) provided they are situated critically and presented in a respectful manner, especially towards historically marginalized communities. Please note that we do not condone use of gratuitous imagery as attention-getting devices or unnecessary examples. Conference staff will be happy to help participants address concerns that arise over the duration of the conference. If you are being harassed, notice that someone else is being harassed, or have any other concerns, please contact a member of the CAPAL/ACBAP conference staff immediately.

This document is not about respectability politics or civility. We recognize that these concepts can — and indeed have — been used to silence marginalized communities even further. Rather, this is both a recognition of the prevalence of harassment and other violence in academic and professional spaces, as well as an expression of the hope that the CAPAL conferences be positive critical spaces for all involved. At the same time, we recognize that this initial attempt towards such a goal is necessarily limited and imperfect: safer, more critical spaces cannot be willed into being by policy alone and depend, ultimately, on the collective and critical engagement and empathy of all involved. We value your contributions as conference participants, as well as being open to comments on this and any other aspect of our conferences that will help us improve future work.

Thank you for your time in reviewing this document.

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