Library Councils in Canadian Academic Libraries:

Scanning the Literature

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Collegial Governance

The structure and processes by which decisions are made:

- Complex/contextual
- Distinct from management/leadership
- Dimensions of authority, power differences
- Negotiations, decision-making
- Accountability
“All librarians should be members of a Library council which is chaired by the Chief Librarian. The Council should have responsibility for the development of policies and procedures for the operation of the library as a whole and should be responsible to the senate or equivalent body.”

Section V, CAUT/CACUL Guidelines on Academic Status for University Librarians (1976).
Furthered our role as an “...integral part of the educational process”

“...those of us wishing to be academic LIBRARIANS and those of us wishing to be ACADEMIC librarians and those of us wishing to be, simply, academic librarians”

“...to have a library staff also reporting, through a Council, directly to Senate as is suggested... would lead to anarchy”

4:1 support staff to librarians
Librarians need to be managers and do not have time
Librarians required to function as a team in a way that faculty rarely were

1977: Library Council Functions

York University
- Deliberate on library policy
- Advise the Director of Libraries
- Legislate committee policies and procedures

Laurentian University
- Make recommendations on the affairs of the library
- Chief Librarian was an ex officio member of who generally accepted Council’s recommendations

“Chief Librarians still maintain great autonomy and Library Councils analogous to Faculty Councils have been slow to develop”

1. Library council of all academic librarians on staff consider all matters of academic policy & develop policies to be considered by senate
2. Senate library committee to work more like other senate committees; charged with ensuring proposed academic policies are in line with existing ones
3. Increased presence of rank and file librarians to senate would further embed the library into wider university governance structures

“...most Library Councils represent a weak form of collegiality or of governance by rank and file librarians.”

[Library Councils] should function similarly to faculty councils

Chief librarian occupy the role of a dean

Venue where budget proposals are first discussed & debated

Not merely an advisory body

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“It is not, therefore, surprising that some of them see this attitude as a form of discrimination against women. University libraries should be operated in a fair and constitutional manner, just as faculties ought to be”

“[If] the library council does not function productively as a collegial governance body within the library, then the librarians should work to change it.”

“A failure to distinguish between the two [management and governance] functions can result in problems if the administrators fear that the library council will encroach on their managerial responsibilities”

2008 Survey revealed:

- 13/25 respondents had library councils
- More common in flat organizational structure
- Majority chaired by UL
- Only 5 report to senate

“is the idea behind the concept of a library council about the emulation of faculty structures so that they will accept us as academic staff? OR is it about a structure that truly has merit for determining and accomplishing the goals of the library? Can it be both?”

Institutional theory attempts to explain why organizations in field tend to look and act the same.

“...forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions”

Three Isomorphic Pressures:

1. **Coercive** isomorphism is the pressure exerted by governments, laws or other organizations

2. **Mimetic** isomorphism is when organizations, model themselves after others perceived more successful

3. **Normative** isomorphism stems from the networks, standards and established practices of professional groups

“...filtered by a common set of attributes, they will tend to view problems in a similar fashion, see the same policies, procedures and structures as normatively sanctioned and legitimated, and approach decisions in much the same way”

Collegial Governance

Is it effective?  Does it matter?
Effective Collegial Governance

**University of Maryland**
Lost 20% of its budget
Eliminated 29 programs, 7 departments and 1 college
Capable of bleeding their own ranks for the sake of institutional welfare

**Eckel (2000)** Case studies of 4 universities
Faculty willing and able to make difficult decision to cut programs for the benefit of the university


- Have input into how the orchestra is managed
- Vote to select new musicians and chief conductor
Strengthened Governance Processes & Fostering Collegiality:

1. Attract and retain top academic talent
2. Are more important than dissatisfaction with salary
3. Positively correlated with institutional financial performance
“. . . leadership may sometimes be as significant (if not more significant) for the damage it causes as for the benefits it brings in its wake”

“The faculty’s role in governance . . . . is the foundation for academic freedom”

“participation of academic staff in governance structures”
Expression of a diversity of views & opinions
No inappropriate advantage
Ensure inclusiveness

Thanks!

Any questions?

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