CAPAL Statement on the
CFLA National Forum Paper: Artificial Intelligence and Intellectual Freedom Key Policy Concerns for Canadian Libraries

The Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians / l'Association canadienne des bibliothécaires académiques professionnels (CAPAL/ACBAP) supports the key takeaways on the intellectual freedom rights of library users from a national forum hosted by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques's (CFLA-FCAB) on artificial intelligence and intellectual freedom as articulated in the *Artificial Intelligence and Intellectual Freedom Key Policy Concerns for Canadian Libraries* (2018) paper. However, CAPAL/ACBAP would like to also highlight the need to protect the intellectual and academic freedom of librarians and information professionals.

The rights of users are fundamentally undermined when the rights of librarians who develop collections, systems, and library spaces are not protected. The CFLA-FCAB national forum paper does not adequately consider, or address, the inherent and imperative link between the intellectual freedom rights of librarians and information professionals and their ability to perform the work that is essential to a strong democracy. The freedom to hold, inquire into, support, and express all ideas, including the unpopular and unorthodox, is a fundamental professional value which librarians not only uphold and defend but to which they also have a right. The vulnerability of librarians and information professionals in this regard was underscored when, in 2013, Library and Archives Canada released the *LAC Code of Conduct: Values and Ethics* which placed conditions on the ability of LAC's librarians to teach, speak at public conferences, and other public engagements.

In 2016, CAPAL/ACBAP issued the [Statement on Academic Freedom For Academic Librarians](#) reinforcing our view of the essential nature of academic freedom to the role of the Academic Librarian. CAPAL/ACBAP "believes that academic librarians have the right to academic freedom and, at the same time, a responsibility to uphold academic freedom," and defines academic freedom as:

the freedom to express, communicate, enquire, review, examine, question, teach and learn, in private or public contexts, even when those ideas oppose the viewpoints held by bodies of authority, religious, sectarian or political perspectives.

Further, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) affirms the right to academic freedom by faculty members, including librarians, with its [Policy Statement on Academic Freedom,](#)

Academic freedom includes the right, without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom to teach and discuss; freedom to carry out research and disseminate and publish the results thereof… freedom to acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentary material in all formats... Academic freedom always entails freedom from institutional censorship.

Intellectual freedom cannot be protected in the academic context without the freedom to uphold, research and teach theories and ideas that are contrary to dominant discourse. The inextricable link between intellectual freedom, librarians' professional practice, and academic freedom must be considered as it is both historical and legal, and privileges the right to criticism and dissent for those working within the academic world. This principle is of such paramount importance that it is typically protected via contractual means; yet even if intellectual and academic freedom of librarians is not included in contractual language, CAUT asserts in its Policy Statement that employers are still not entitled to violate it.

In considering the rights of library users only, the CFLA-FCAB statement ignores that librarians require professional autonomy and protection to offer unfettered information access to users, and to conduct their own research. Without such protection, librarians could be put at professional risk. CAPAL/ACBAP urges CFLA-FCAB to consider adding explicit support for librarians and library staff in this statement on intellectual freedom.

The CFLA-FCAB further states that artificial intelligence (AI) "is a category of technology that is becoming more and more capable of understanding our information needs, and which we will need to embrace in order to fully uncover its true potential." John Buschman (2003) argues that LIS tends "to fall well within the boundaries of uncritical hype of technologies", and that we "celebrate rather than evaluate" and "remain largely unconnected to the ongoing scholarship that has raised critical questions about technologies" (149-150). CAPAL/ACBAP cautions that the profession needs to critically assess artificial intelligence and its impact on LIS and the larger world in order in order to more fully understand its potential.

In the face of the disappearance of 50% of jobs in the next 20 years mentioned by CFLA-FCAB, CAPAL/ACBAP wishes to consider the costs of a wholesale embracing of AI. We believe there is merit in considering whether new job sectors will fully replace the 50% of jobs that will disappear, and that a discussion on the social impact this massive economic shift and the mentioned "income distribution problem" will have on individuals and communities is further warranted.

Finally, the openness of AI mentioned by the CFLA-FCAB, highlighting open source code and unfettered access to datasets as important to the library community's concerns regarding privacy, consent, and appropriate data use, considers prevention of anti-competitive behaviour as the paramount benefit. CAPAL/ACBAP believes the benefits to openness extend beyond anti-competition and include improved access to data, data transparency, and data sharing resulting in improved collaboration and innovation. The potential benefits and detriments of AI itself extend beyond data and open source code, and the effects on libraries need to be delineated beyond these concerns.

Buschman, J. E. (2003). Dismantling the public sphere: Situating and sustaining librarianship in the age of the new public philosophy. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.