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EDITORIAL

Preparing for work in Canadian Academic Libraries: The Library Student

Perspective

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With the emergence of extensive digital technologies and economic imperatives, academic libraries are under pressure to change (Hernon & Matthews; Wilson). Responses to these pressures include forecasting the future of academic libraries (Gorman) and clarifying the core concerns amongst groups of librarians (Granfield, Kandiuk, & Sonne de Torrens). Library students understandably feel some degree of anxiety mixed with uncertainty about their hoped for careers. Under such circumstances, how are library students preparing for the workforce? This question is answered by a group of Canadian library students who reflect on their experiences in the first student chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL). In 2012, academic librarians in Canada formed the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL), a national association of librarians of post-secondary education institutions. CAPAL's membership is not limited to academic librarians but includes students as well. Following its formation, the CAPAL student chapter has arranged the following activities:

- Organized tours of local academic libraries
- Hosted workshops that gave student members an opportunity to teach other members how to use common library technologies, such as Camtasia and LibGuides
- Arranged "Lunch with an Academic Librarian" series in which local academic librarians shared their experiences about librarianship with students over lunch
- Provided sessions from students who recently completed co-op positions in academic libraries to discuss their work and work environments
- Developed a collection of collective agreements that apply to librarians working in post-secondary education institutions in Canada.

Numerous communication channels have been used including paper and electronic-based posters, Facebook page and email. A CAPAL academic librarian from our university was sought to function as an advisor for the first year.

Reflecting on the first year, having a significant membership drive at the start of the first semester was crucial for building momentum and we were startled by the abundance of opportunities that were available to us. Most of them stemmed from the student chapter being situated in a university setting, the very environment in which academic librarians exercise their profession. Being embedded this way allowed the student chapter to create extracurricular activities to engage with academic librarians at an interpersonal level, to see their working environments, and to gain insights into issues affecting them. Because students are not yet socialized to the profession, they might not be aware of the range or significance of opportunities available.

Very little research has been done on the role of extracurricular involvement in graduate student professional development. Gardner and Barnes examined the benefits education graduate students gained from involvement in national professional associations and found that students perceived it as critical to their professional development and career aspirations (377-382). With the exception of Davis et al., there are virtually no studies on library student involvement in student chapters of library associations. The CAPAL student chapter resulted in benefits for a range of stakeholders:

- Student members: gained opportunities to take on unique roles and organize events relevant to academic librarianship
- CAPAL chapter: increased membership enrollment and by seeking local academic librarians to be involved in its activities, the student chapter inevitably promoted CAPAL to librarians at a time when it was just starting out.
- Library profession: through the lunch discussions with academic librarians the student chapter prepared students for the challenging transition into the workforce (Harrington; Oud)
- Library schools: according to Tinto's model of student progression, graduate students are likely to persist in their studies if they can successfully integrate into social and academic communities rooted in their departments. If aspiring academic librarians enroll in library school only to find coursework to be tangentially related to their

interests, they would rightfully question their decision to continue. Student chapters focused on academic librarianship have the opportunity to be a part of the integrative process that constitutes graduate student retention and progression.

From our perspectives as library students, we feel that preparing for work in academic libraries requires moving beyond the formal library curriculum. We encourage students interested in academic librarianship to take responsibility for using the extracurricular activities to advance their education, career goals, and the profession of academic librarianship itself.

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