

# Organize and Assemble II

## Progressive Librarians' Guild

### Edmonton's Symposium

[Summary of the keynote lecture was written by Toni Samek. The summary of the poster presentation for *Special Collections in the Pride Library (UWO): The Closet Collection and the Queer Graphica Collection* was written by Sarah Barriage and Peggy McEachreon].

#### 1. Introduction

On October 20th, 2012, The Progressive Librarians' Guild of Edmonton held its second annual symposium at the City of Edmonton Archives. Like the previous year, presentations focused on a wide variety of topics of interest to progressive information workers. Approximately 40 people from the Edmonton area and beyond attended the symposium.

Below, you will find summaries of each presentation at the symposium.

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- Stephen MacDonald is the Resource Coordinator with the Edmonton Social Planning Council. He holds a Masters in Library and Information Studies from Dalhousie University.
  - **KEYWORDS:** Activism; Archives advocacy & activism; Austerity (Economics); Budget cuts; Canadian Library Association; Cataloging; Consumer society; Critical theory; Deprofessionalization; Domestic violence; GLBTQ literature; Grassroots organizing; Information ethics; Innovation rhetoric; LGBT literature; Library advocacy & activism; Library and information science education; Library outreach programs; Library science – Moral & ethical aspects; Library service to immigrants; Library service to women; National archives – Canada; Social capital (Sociology); Social media; Technological innovations.

## 2. Paper and Panel Presentation Summaries

In her keynote, Toni Samek (Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta) shared highlights from an *in press* article she wrote for the 20th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Information Ethics* (Fall 2012). The article is titled “I Guess We’ll Just Have to Wait for the Movie to Come Out”: A Protracted First Stand for Teaching Information Ethics.” Her keynote borrowed the same name. This work provides a condensed chronological record of the formation of the Information Ethics Special Interest Group (SIG) in the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE).

Samek’s compressed account was comprised largely of documented SIG business she painstakingly archived during her time as both a founding member and the first Information Ethics SIG convenor. She illuminated the laborious, lengthy and ultimately contentious process (2004-2008) during which the Information Ethics SIG realized the 2008 Position Statement on Information Ethics in LIS Education, which can be read in full here: [http://www.alise.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51](http://www.alise.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51)

Samek’s colourful keynote prompted our PLG community to be mindful of the vulnerability of people, ideas, intention and momentum to bureaucratic red tape, the politics of process, and the oft bumpy application of rhetoric to practice. She opened her talk with an 8 June 2012 Wikipedia entry for *Red tape*, defined as “excessive regulation or rigid conformity to formal rules that is considered redundant or bureaucratic and hinders or prevents action or decision-making. It is usually applied to governments, corporations and other large organizations”. She then walked us through the highs and lows in the multi-year collective effort on the Statement, a journey that began in Germany, wavered over an extended play debate over the words “should” vs. “could”, and concluded in the USA. She brought the talk to a close with considered thoughts about the common activist experience of attempting to make a conscious dent in officialdom. And she delivered on her promise to prod our unending education in the politics of process.

The engaging discussion that followed Samek’s keynote gave attention to how to weight issues and address them in strategic fashion, the importance of assessing when to pass the leadership torch, and a cost benefit analysis of the de-linking of politicized individual names from institutional or group efforts.

The second presentation was a panel discussion led by Michael Gourlie, a government records archivist at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, Braden Cannon, an audio-visual archivist at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, and Kathryn Harvey, Head of Archival and Special Collections at the University of Guelph. In their presentation *The Archivists Are Angry: Fighting Austerity*

in *Canadian Archives*, they focused on the recent federal government cuts to archival programs in Canada, the impact of these cuts, and the *On to Ottawa* protest that was organized in response to these austerity measures.

Michael Gourlie provided the audience with some context about the relationship between the federal government and archives in Canada. During this segment, he spoke about:

- the National Archives Act in 1911 and how it provided financial support for archives in Canada,
- the creation of the Canadian Council of Archives in 1985 and the subsequent formation of provincial archival councils that directed federal funding to archives across the country so they could run special projects, process backlogs of donations, and provide experience and training opportunities for new archivists.
- cuts to federal spending on archives in the 1990's,
- the creation of the National Archival Development Program, which provided archives across Canada with funding to hire archival workers, run special projects (including preservation projects that targeted threatened media), digitize items from archive collections, and deliver archive management training to archive workers.
- The merger of Canada's national archive and library, the 'modernization' process at Library and Archives Canada that took place after Daniel Caron became the national archivist and librarian, and major funding cuts to Library and Archives Canada in 2012. These cuts led to the elimination of the National Archival Development Program.

Braden Cannon continued the discussion by looking at how archivists responded to the elimination of the National Archival Development Program. Mr. Cannon felt that this would be a great opportunity to organize archivists around this particular issue. He sent an email to Canadian archives listservs asking archive workers if they were interested in organizing a response to these cuts. Archive workers were overwhelmingly supportive of this idea, but they did not know what actions they could take. After some discussion, a number of Canadian archive workers decided to form a grassroots movement that would organize a national day of action on May 28th to protest the elimination of this program. The event, which was titled the *Archivists Trek to Ottawa*, was a series of protests organized by archival workers in Ottawa, Edmonton, London, Ontario, and other cities across Canada. The protests in Edmonton and London were run by the local PLG chapters, demonstrating the importance of relying on pre-established activist groups to initiate social action.

The movement also created a position statement, which condemned the NADP cuts and framed it within the larger context of Canadian Prime Minister

Harper's austerity measures in the 2012 budget. This motivated other members of Canada's archival community to get involved in the movement.

Mr. Cannon added that in formative stages of this movement, there were some internal disagreements around how it was being organized. In those early stages, a group within the movement thought that it needed a hierarchical structure and should be endorsed by archival associations in order for it to be legitimized in Canada's archival community. This led to a split in the movement. This group began sending messages to other members of the movement that portrayed Mr. Cannon and others in the movement as radicals that they should avoid working with. As a result, this group created a split in the movement. To resolve this problem, a long-time union activist in the movement served as the intermediary between both sides. The irony of this is that after the intermediary spoke to this group, they agreed with the grassroots principles of the movement and became active members.

The movement proved to be a great success, building momentum for the next fight. As well, members of the movement were asked to join ACA committees, demonstrating the movement's credibility and potential influence in the archive community. Mr. Cannon said that it also improved the organizing capacity of archive workers across Canada, establishing support networks and relationships that can be drawn upon to take future actions.

Mr. Gourlie added that after these protests, provincial governments in provinces whose archival councils lost all of their funding decided to provide them with the funding they needed to keep operating. This reduced the negative impact that the elimination of the NADP had on Canadian archives.

Kathryn Harvey spoke about the Ottawa protest, which she participated in. During the event, a 'mock funeral' was held, which featured a procession of archive workers from British Columbia to the Atlantic Provinces who gathered in Ottawa for the day of action. It was supported by a variety of plural organizations connected to the archival community, including the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Canadian Council of Archives. The protest also received good coverage in Ottawa. Archive workers from all over Canada contributed to this successful protest.

In addition to the Ottawa protest, she also spoke about the role of archivists in Canada and the changing role of the federal government. She said that archivists play an important role in shaping our country's history. She added that governments can also have an impact over how history is interpreted. To demonstrate this, she referred to the federal government's decision to spend \$28 million over four years to "celebrate" the War of 1812. An egregious example of the re-writing of history occurred in Stouffville, Ontario where the Conservative MP, with the support of two thirds of the town council, organized a military march to the town hall and requested a CF-18 fly-by. Citizens of the town objected not to commemorating the war, but to the way it was done in that

community which was founded by Mennonites and historically connected to the pacifist movement in Canada.

Dr. Harvey added that the austerity measures that were introduced by the federal government put a great deal of pressure on archives in Canada. She argues that it is important for Canadians to view archives as social institutions that can profoundly influence how Canadians view their history. This is why they deserve to be adequately funded and managed so that they continue to make Canadian history accessible to the public. She noted that the grassroots movement against the austerity measures must continue the discussion and determine what its next actions will be.

Our third presenter was Pilar Martinez, Executive Director of Public Services at Edmonton Public Library and president of the Canadian Library Association (CLA). Her presentation *Creating Change and Achieving Progress in the Restructured CLA* focused on why she decided to run for the presidency of the CLA and what she would like to achieve during her term in office. Ms. Martinez said that she felt that this was the right time for her to take on this role and help re-shape the CLA into an organization that places greater emphasis on dialogue and member participation.

During her presentation, Ms. Martinez talked about the important advocacy work that the CLA does to ensure that the interests and concerns of Canadian libraries are addressed. She mentioned that the CLA has proven itself to be a reputable organization in the library community and has a strong working relationship with the federal government. Over the years, the CLA has been invited to participate in discussions around the development of legislation that affects libraries, such as Bill C-31, which focuses on copyright reform in Canada, and the Federal Access to Information Act.

According to Ms. Martinez, the CLA is in a transitioning period. During this period, Martinez wants to clarify what the CLA's role is in the library community and how it is supporting Canadian libraries. This will involve discussions with CLA members around what the organization can do to represent the interests of libraries and library workers in Canada. She is also interested in getting CLA members more involved in the organization and increase discussion about its future role in Canada's library community. She believes that by increasing involvement among members, the CLA can take full advantage of their ideas and strengths and improve the organization as a whole.

Ms. Martinez then talked about ways that the CLA can continue to be an influential voice for Canada's library community. She spoke about a recent presentation that library consultant Ken Haycock gave in Edmonton surrounding the power of influence. She said that in his presentation, he identified certain characteristics that individuals and organizations must possess in order to be influential including reciprocity (treating others the way that you would like to be treated) and being likeable, which helps you to gain credibility and influence.

These leadership values could be adopted by the CLA to have influence over government policy decisions that affect the library community in Canada.

She ended her talk by reminding those who have given up on the CLA to think back to the successful grassroots library advocacy initiatives that have been facilitated by the organization. She reminded the audience that the CLA can continue to use its reputation and influence to remain a strong advocate for Canadian libraries.

Following her presentation, Ms. Martinez took questions from the audience about the future of the CLA and its role as an advocate for Canadian libraries.

Our fourth presentation was a panel discussion with Michael McNally and Tami Oliphant, who are both professors with the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta. McNally began with his paper presentation “The Allure and Danger of Innovation Rhetoric for Libraries.”

McNally started by looking at the writings of major figures in the field of innovation. McNally noted the differences between sociological examinations of innovation, which is characterized by Everett Rogers ‘diffusion of innovation’ theory, and economic theories of innovation that have been heavily influenced by the writings of Joseph Schumpeter.

This was followed by a discussion on innovation rhetoric. In this part of his discussion, he spoke about how innovation is considered by many to be an imperative and inevitable, while the negative impact that innovation can have on society is ignored, giving the example of crack cocaine and how it only really benefits the innovator instead of those who consume it. He also looked at the tendency for innovation to be viewed in solely economic terms as a means of creating new goods, processes and services, without looking at the social changes that innovation can create (e.g. women entering the workplace). His discussion also looked at how innovation can benefit consumers and not those who build products that are born from innovation (providing the example of poor labourers who build products for Western markets that they cannot afford to purchase). As well, innovation creates goods that replace workers and leads to unemployment. Also, it is constantly creating new stuff. As a result, we are never fully happy.

After this, he turned his focus to the impact that the innovation rhetoric mentioned above is having in the LIS field. McNally reviewed 40 years of LIS literature using Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to look at innovation in our field and how the term innovation is being used to explain these changes. Critical discourse analysis analyses detailed examples of text within the social context of the period they were written. This allows us to understand how texts are produced and consumed, while underscoring the dialectical relationship between discourse and social relations. Throughout his review of LIS literature, McNally found that the term innovation was being used

inconsistently. He also found that there were many instances where innovation was misused, describing minor changes in the way that libraries deliver services. McNally found that innovation rhetoric actually does a significant disservice by further naturalizing innovation and information society rhetoric and ultimately strengthening neoliberal discourse that is antithetical to libraries.

Information society discourse is rooted in the works of Daniel Bell and others, who writing in the 1970s argued that a fundamental shift was taking place in advanced societies whereby a post-industrial or information society was coming to replace industrialism. The new information society consisted of information workers and replaced the industrial workers of the previous era. The ideological roots of the information society have been forgotten. The promise of information society and a move away from the problems of industrial society has been used discursively to advance neo-liberal ideals in our environment. The innovation discourse is part of a broader discourse around marketization.

Returning to the issue of libraries, McNally argues that librarians are generally not innovators, but are responding to change and are invoking innovation rhetoric in the face of uncertainty in our environments. He emphasized that we should look back at progress and the Enlightenment and the emphasis they placed on economic, social and moral improvement. He also stresses the need for librarians to use their knowledge to be agents of progressive change.

Tami Oliphant's talk "Patrons, users, customers, prosumers?: Digital labour and librarianship" focused on the implications of prosumption and digital labour in society and in libraries. Prosumption is the act of creating goods, services, or experiences for personal use and satisfaction, rather than for sale or exchange. At the beginning of her talk, she posed the following question to the audience: "If we view library patrons as consumers of information and libraries as sites of production and consumption, what impact does that have on the traditional role of librarians in society?"

Dr. Oliphant stated that we are now living in what Toffler and Toffler characterize as the Third Wave. Within this Third Wave, society has adopted new ways of living that are shaped by the current forms of technology that we live with. This age is characterized by the demassification of the production of goods and services and the creation of professions responsible for producing specialized goods and services. This is in contrast to the Second Wave or industrial age, which valued mass production of goods by a workforce of workers with an interchangeable set of skills.

In our computerized age, Dr. Oliphant says that the digital technologies being produced are creating new digital spaces for collaboration between individuals. Examples of this include wikis, social media networks and other online programs that allow us to collaborate with one another. At the same time, corporations are benefiting from these collaborations by using them to monitor our online behavior and collect information that they can then use to

create goods and services designed for us. As a result, people often self-monitor their online behavior, even though they may or may not actually be monitored online.

Currently, citizens are using technologies to simultaneously produce and consume goods and services. Individuals who fall into this role are defined as prosumers. Because they are not being paid for the goods and services they produce, they can participate in a non-monetized economy. Dr. Oliphant points out that the monetary economy would not exist without prosumption, citing the unpaid labour associated with parenting as an example of this.

Ritzer and Jurgensen argue that prosumption is a new form of capitalism. In their view, prosumers are more difficult to control than paid labour because they exist independently from the capitalist monetary system. As a result, it becomes difficult for capital to exploit these workers and difficult to monetize some prosumption activities. Humphreys and Grayson, on the other hand, argue that prosumption is the same old form of capitalism as capital continues to exploit prosumer labour. Ms. Oliphant gave the example of Innocentive by Proctor and Gamble, which allows anyone to visit the company's website to design a product in exchange for a monetary prize.

Dr. Oliphant emphasizes that while prosumption allows us to produce and consume something for free, it devalues the expertise and specialized knowledge of professionals, including librarians. She then explored how prosumption has influenced library services and undermined librarian and information workers' expertise. She used Bibliocommons as an example. Bibliocommons allows individuals who are using a library's online catalogue to make suggestions as to how the catalogue can be improved, write reviews, provide recommendations for purchases (collection development), among other activities. The ideas shared by the user are then adopted and are used to modify the program. As a result, users' knowledge is considered on par with the professional knowledge of the librarian, which potentially devalues our professional expertise and consequently, our MLIS education.

She gives another similar example of 'patron-driven acquisitions'. In some library systems, once a book is explored or requested, a library will order the title. If a book or collection at the library is popular, this increases its value. If it isn't popular, it will potentially not be purchased and if the library already holds the title. It is at risk of being removed from the collection. This is a problem for books or collections that are rarely used but have cultural and historical significance. One of the significant criticisms of prosumption is that it can provide a way in which companies entice users to labour on their behalf for no pay and sometimes to actually create products on the company's behalf for no pay. In libraries, this is happening with the automation of circulation services and cataloguing.

Dr. Oliphant ended her discussion by stating that prosumption is neither a

good nor bad / black or white issue. While there are benefits to prosumption, there are certain consequences and impacts this practice has on our role as professionals. While prosumption gives individuals the opportunity to contribute, it simultaneously reduces the value of the knowledge of experts in our field. There has to be a place in society where people can use new forms of technology created in the computerization age to contribute to something that benefits the individual and the collective. As a result, the benefits and problems of prosumption that Dr. Oliphant addresses in her talk are worth discussing further as we try to engage our patrons while also recognizing the value and importance of our profession knowledge.

Our last presenter of the day was Lindsay Whitson, an MLIS student at the University of Alberta. In her presentation “Un(der)mined Potential? Library Partnerships and Immigrant Women”, Whitson discussed her qualitative research project on the attitudes and service priorities of Saskatchewan public libraries toward immigrant women. The first purpose of this study is to learn more about the attitudes that public librarians hold about library services for immigrant women and how they are delivered. The second objective of this study was to review the policies of library systems in six of the ten major destinations for immigrants in Saskatchewan to determine if they allow for the implementation of family law public legal education and information (PLEI) services and programs, especially for immigrant women.

The theoretical framework of Whitson’s study is social capital, or social networks and relationships that build trust among individuals and encourages collaboration to address problems. She is interested in how public library engagement with immigrant women allows them to build a trusting relationship with libraries and view them as credible sources of PLEI.

In carrying out this study, Whitson’s objective is to bring attention to potential gaps in library services for immigrant women. Her hope is that this study contributes to LIS research that encourages integration of family PLEI into library programs attended by immigrant women.

Before discussing her preliminary findings, Whitson discussed the major themes in her literature review, which provided the audience with context that could be used to understand the unique challenges that immigrant women face, their need for PLEI and how public libraries can help to address that need.

In her literature review, Whitson looked at the following topics:

- the lack of literature on the information needs and information-seeking behaviours of immigrant women and potential reasons for this problem (including language barriers, cultural mores, and the challenge of gathering representational information from such a diverse group of women).
- the particular challenges that immigrant women suffering from intimate partner violence may experience as they attempt to flee abusive

relationships (including language, cultural barriers, financial insecurity, and discrimination)

- how legal aid programs tend to provide less support to litigants in family law cases than criminal cases or others that could result in restrictions being placed on the defendant's personal freedom, and how this can force some immigrant women into defending themselves in family law cases (including divorce and child custody cases), despite the fact that they may have limited knowledge about the legal system, and
- public libraries and how their function and accessibility can help improve immigrant women's access to PLEI

By October 2012, Whitson interviewed nine employees from six public library systems across Saskatchewan to learn more about their perspectives on PLEI services for immigrant women and their library system's delivery of these services. Among those interviewed included a regional director, several branch heads, and unit heads from small, medium and large communities across the province. She mentioned that she will also contact two legal aid organizations to understand their views around delivering PLEI to immigrant women.

Below are some of the major preliminary findings that arose from her discussions with employees at the six participating public library systems in Saskatchewan and her review of their library policies:

- When reviewing the library policies for the six participating library systems to determine if they allowed for PLEI programs and services in their branches, she did not find any information that suggested otherwise. As well, the study participants that she spoke to supported her observations.
- When reviewing the occurrence of PLEI in these library systems, participants reported that their libraries have electronic and physical PLEI resources in their collections. However, it was more difficult to find evidence of current PLEI programming in these library systems. One participant mentioned that the public demand for this type of program is cyclical. They said that this service was last popular between 5 and 10 years ago, before the current immigrant boom in the province.
- Participants expressed differing views about the need for family law PLEI services in their library systems. Two participants felt that this is a valuable service, mentioning that they regularly receive questions about divorce, custody and maintenance issues. Other participants questioned whether there was a need for this type of service. One mentioned that immigrants may have more pressing concerns, adding that if a need for this service becomes obvious, programs could be developed and implemented to address those needs. Another person mentioned that immigrant language barriers could make it difficult for them to access these services.

- There was also a concern that offering family law PLEI could lead to the immigrant community labelling the library as a legal information centre, potentially overshadowing the other programs and services that they offer.
- When discussing popular resources for immigrant women in their branches, a participant in Regina referred to the program *Learning Together*, a highly successful family literacy program that teaches English to immigrant women and their pre-school children. The program is a reflection of the library system's strong focus on family literacy. It was the result of local immigrant women being unable to attend individual English tutoring lessons at the library because they had to take care of their children while these tutoring sessions took place. This program's popularity is largely because of the fact that the women are able to bring their children to this course. It's popularity has led to the development of a second section for this program.
- During discussions, some participants mentioned that cultural mores can complicate the delivery of library services for immigrant women. Examples of this include familial limitations that restricted women and children from freely accessing certain library material or having a library card, and conflicts between family responsibilities and library commitments that prevent them from attending library programs that they are interested in.
- Participants also referred to financial restraints and how they place limitations on the types and scope of services and programs that they deliver to immigrant women.

In her concluding remarks, Whitson mentioned that she was heartened by the fact that most of the participants in her study said that they would offer family law PLEI programs in their libraries if they felt that there was a growing need for them. She was also encouraged by the fact that participants were interested in integrating family law PLEI into other library programs to improve access to this information. However, she argues that libraries need more information about the help-seeking preference of immigrant women who experience intimate partner violence. This information would help public libraries assess their role as providers of family law PLEI and determine how they can do more to improve immigrant women's access to this information.

### 3. Poster Presentations

In addition to the panel and paper discussions, there were two poster presentations during the symposium. Below are descriptions of those presentations.

#### *Special Collections in the Pride Library (UWO):*

### ***The Closet Collection and the Queer Graphica Collection***

Presenters: Sarah Barriage and Peggy McEachreon

In most libraries, collections of works with homosexual themes are often catalogued under generic subject headings such as “gay fiction”. This can pose significant limitations for scholars or others attempting to access materials which address specific themes within this area. Sarah Barriage and Peggy McEachreon sought to address these limitations through our work on the Closet and Queer Graphica Collections (which are housed at the Pride Library, an academic LGBTQ resource centre at the University of Western Ontario) by developing unique subject terms for the materials contained within them. This poster presentation summarized the work that they did during this project.

For more information about these collections or the Pride Library, please visit <http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/>

### ***threeSOURCE: A Research and Resource Hub for Alberta's Third Sector***

Presenter: Stephen MacDonald

threeSOURCE is a freely-accessible online database that is managed by the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Managed by the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC), threeSOURCE was created to help the province's social services sector, social researchers, government officials and the general public access current and reliable sources of information created by Alberta's non-profit, or third, sector. It also contains resources with a wider geographic scope that focus on important social issues of interest to the target audience.

During this poster presentation, the ESPC's Resource Coordinator Stephen MacDonald gave symposium participants information about the database, while also demonstrating its search engine and why it is a valuable social research tool.

To learn more about threeSOURCE, please visit <http://www.threesource.ca>.

## **4. Conclusion**

*Organize and Assemble II* was a lively and highly engaging speaking event that fuelled progressive discussion around a wide range of important issues that affect the information sector. We look forward to our next symposium in October 2013 and hope that our annual symposium continues to serve as an important discussion forum for information sector workers and educators.