

## Ready for a Fair Deal Librarian and Archivist Leadership During a Canadian Faculty Association Strike

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### Résumé de l'article

Les bibliothèques universitaires canadiennes sont des environnements syndiqués, nécessitant mobilisation et action collectives pour aborder les conditions de travail et les négociations contractuelles. La University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA - Association des professeur.e.s de l'Université du Manitoba) compte 1 264 membres, dont 52 archivistes et bibliothécaires, et a résolu en 2021 la plus longue grève de l'histoire de l'association. L'accord nouvellement ratifié contenait des gains majeurs pour faire progresser l'équité salariale au sein du syndicat, et la grève elle-même a maintenu des niveaux historiquement élevés de participation et d'engagement des membres de l'UMFA, en partie grâce aux contributions importantes des bibliothécaires et des archivistes. Dans cet article, trois bibliothécaires qui ont occupé des postes de direction distincts au sein de l'UMFA, en particulier lors de sa grève de 2021, analysent les forces et les difficultés uniques des bibliothécaires et archivistes travaillant au sein d'un syndicat de professeur.e.s plus large pour apporter des changements. S'appuyant sur les compétences de base de la bibliothéconomie, telles que la collaboration, la consultation, la communication et le leadership, les auteur.e.s ont collectivement et avec succès rempli des rôles centraux dans l'orientation stratégique, les fondements organisationnels et la mobilisation sur le terrain de l'effort de grève. Le contexte historique du climat de travail et de l'histoire des mobilisations à l'Université du Manitoba est revu et démontre que les compétences de base des bibliothécaires et des archivistes sont des compétences précieuses et impératives dans la mobilisation syndicale du personnel universitaire. Les bibliothécaires et les archivistes peuvent utiliser ce récit pour éclairer le développement de leur propre activisme au sein de leurs syndicats et de leurs lieux de travail, et pour examiner comment leurs propres compétences peuvent contribuer à bonifier et améliorer leurs conditions de travail.





# Ready for a Fair Deal: Librarian and Archivist Leadership During a Canadian Faculty Association Strike

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## ABSTRACT

*Canadian academic libraries are unionized environments, requiring collective organization and action to address labour conditions and contract negotiations. The University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA) has 1264 members, including 52 archivists and librarians, and in 2021 resolved the longest strike in association history. The newly ratified agreement contained major gains to advance pay equity within the union, and the strike itself maintained UMFA historic high levels of participation and member engagement, in part due to the significant contributions of librarians and archivists. In this paper, three librarians who held distinct positions of leadership within UMFA, particularly during its 2021 strike, examine the unique strengths and difficulties of librarians and archivists working within a broader faculty union to make change. Relying on core competencies of librarianship, such as collaboration, consultation, communication, and leadership, the authors collectively and successfully filled central roles in the strategic direction, organizational foundation, and on-the-ground mobilization of the strike effort. The historical context for the labour climate and organizing history at the University of Manitoba is examined and demonstrates that core competencies of librarians and archivists are valuable and imperative skills in faculty union organizing. Librarians and archivists can use this narrative to inform the development of their own activism within their unions and workplaces, and to examine how their own skills may help enhance and improve their working conditions.*

**Keywords:** *archivist leadership · faculty union · librarian leadership · union leadership · unions*

## RÉSUMÉ

*Les bibliothèques universitaires canadiennes sont des environnements syndiqués, nécessitant mobilisation et action collectives pour aborder les conditions de travail et les négociations contractuelles. La University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA - Association des professeur.e.s de l'Université du Manitoba) compte 1 264 membres, dont 52 archivistes et bibliothécaires, et a résolu en 2021 la plus longue grève de l'histoire de l'association. L'accord nouvellement ratifié contenait des gains majeurs pour faire progresser l'équité salariale au sein du syndicat, et la grève elle-même a maintenu des niveaux historiquement élevés de participation et d'engagement des membres de l'UMFA, en partie grâce aux contributions importantes des bibliothécaires et des archivistes. Dans cet article, trois bibliothécaires qui ont occupé des postes de direction distincts au sein de l'UMFA, en particulier lors de sa grève de 2021, analysent les forces et les difficultés uniques des bibliothécaires et archivistes travaillant au sein d'un syndicat de professeur.e.s plus large pour apporter des changements. S'appuyant sur les compétences de base de la bibliothéconomie, telles que la collaboration, la consultation, la communication et le leadership, les auteur.e.s ont collectivement et avec succès rempli des rôles centraux dans l'orientation stratégique, les fondements organisationnels et la mobilisation sur le terrain de l'effort de grève. Le contexte historique du climat de travail et de l'historique des mobilisations à l'Université du Manitoba est revu et démontre que les compétences de base des bibliothécaires et des archivistes sont des compétences précieuses et impératives dans la mobilisation syndicale du personnel universitaire. Les bibliothécaires et les archivistes peuvent utiliser ce récit pour éclairer le développement de leur propre activisme au sein de leurs syndicats et de leurs lieux de travail, et pour examiner comment leurs propres compétences peuvent contribuer à bonifier et améliorer leurs conditions de travail.*

**Mots-clés :** *leadership des archivistes · leadership des bibliothécaires · leadership syndical · syndicats · syndicat des professeurs*

**A**CADEMIC libraries in the Canadian context are unionized environments, requiring collective organization and action to address labour conditions and contract negotiations (Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) 2017; Fox 2007). The University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA) is the certified bargaining unit of 1264 professors, instructors, librarians, and archivists; there are currently 52 total archivists and librarians in UMFA. In late 2021 UMFA successfully resolved the longest strike in association history, with a ratified agreement reached after 35 days on the picket lines. The agreement contained major gains to advance pay equity within the union, and the strike itself maintained historic high levels of UMFA participation and member engagement, in part due to the significant contributions of librarians and archivists.

## Background and Context

### *Culture of Librarian and Archivist Leadership in the University of Manitoba Faculty Association*

Librarians and archivists have a strong presence in UMFA, and a history of leadership within the union that has developed into a symbiotic culture. There has been a pattern of librarian presence on UMFA's bargaining team and Executive Council for over 25 years, to ensure that librarian and archivist issues and perspectives are represented directly by librarians and archivists. Librarians are also renowned for their contributions to UMFA's labour actions, notably UMFA's first strike in 1995. Repeatedly on the picket lines in 2016, as well as 2021, members who had also been on strike in 1995 would describe with excitement and admiration how in 1995 a group of librarians marched into a chaotic strike headquarters, and within hours had established phone trees, a system for communicating with members and the media, and overall job-action coordination, order, and efficiency. This was also noted by Ian Kerr: "the professional librarians proved particularly adept at the organisational aspects of striking; UMFA is fortunate to have them within the union" (Kerr 1996, 1926). Hearing this tale on the picket lines in 2016 was a demonstration of the effectiveness of past librarian contributions, but was also framed as an expectation: librarians, you have skills that are pivotal to our union, and our job action. We need you to utilize those skills to contribute to our collective success.

The culture of librarian and archivist participation within UMFA has not been reserved for a limited number of roles, but is inclusive of regular union operations, such as having members on committees, delegates within the larger labour movement, and participants in job action. This participation and engagement has led to stronger protections for archivists and librarians at the University of Manitoba. For example, the CAUT Bargaining Advisory on *Workload and Complement* describes desirable contract language used in collective agreements, and highlights UMFA's agreement which explicitly describes the rights, duties and responsibilities of academic librarians (CAUT 2009, 10). Having these rights, duties and responsibilities explicitly stated clearly outlines what is, and is not, the work of librarians. It prevents scope creep for those without librarian and archivist training and expertise, and prevents the assignment of routine tasks that take librarians and archivists away from the roles and responsibilities for which their training and experience are best suited. The Bargaining Advisory further references the protections and rights that UMFA's Collective Agreement affirms for librarians and archivists to conduct research (CAUT 2009, 9). Recognizing the need for parity of all academic staff (CAUT 2021) and utilizing librarian and archivist participation, UMFA's collective

agreement has incrementally over successive rounds of bargaining improved parity for librarians and archivists, as well as instructors. Notable gains include the introduction of research days for librarians and archivists, and ensuring any new language for professors and instructors has parallel language for librarians and archivists (such as provisions for research/study leaves, protections to ensure reasonable assignment of workload, and protections against research metrics).

Participation and engagement of librarians and archivists within UMFA has also led to greater interpersonal and professional relationships with faculty, and a stronger faculty perception of the value brought to the university community by archival and library professionals. Resulting from their union participation, librarians and archivists have developed professional relationships with other academics which have resulted in additional collaborative opportunities between faculty and librarians. For example, faculty seeking academics to participate on committees have recruited librarians and archivists. Another example is with collaboration opportunities outside of librarian professional support obligations, such as faculty seeking assistance designing user experience work and departmental researcher surveys. It is a symbiotic relationship, where librarians and archivists value the protections within the collective agreement, and the union values the skills and contributions of librarians and archivists. We therefore feel it is our duty to uphold the expectation that has been put before us: we have crucial skills that benefit our union, and we need to ensure we continue our involvement to advance our collective gains. The culture that has developed is at this point quite well established and symbiotic in nature.

### ***Challenges for Librarians and Archivists as Minority Members in the Broader Faculty Association***

Though space has been reserved for librarian and archivist participation and leadership within UMFA, heavy activity by a minority group of members within the union also presents significant challenges to organization and mobilization. Professorial elitism and credentialism expressed by the larger union membership can, and has, sowed discord and bred resentment on all sides. To provide a recent historical example, at the conclusion of a contentious bargaining round in 2016, including a 22-day strike, workload protections were gained for professors and instructors but not librarians and archivists. The following year, workload protections for librarians and archivists were purposefully sought and gained to ensure parity for all members. At the 2017 ratification meeting, several professors at the highest rank spoke against ratification, because not enough gains had been achieved for professors, who form the majority of members in the union. Instead

of reflecting on the situation from an equity perspective, where a union is stronger if it ensures all members have equitable protections and rights, some professors expressed professional elitism. There were accusations of there being too many librarians and instructors in positions of power within the union, and that this had led to undemocratic priorities. Librarians and archivists subsequently felt devalued: some professors were taking a dated view of our profession (CAUT 2021), and this created a sense that librarians and archivists were not seen as academics within their own union.

The struggle to build solidarity in environments rife with elitism and credentialism, particularly across professional programs, is key to maintaining archivist and librarian membership and engagement in broader faculty unions. Each of the authors started our paths to leadership within UMFA as members of the Board of Representatives, which is the representative governing body of the association and consists of one elected representative for every 15 members. The librarian and archivist representatives who preceded us in these roles were strong participants within the union and created a welcoming and inclusive space within the University of Manitoba Libraries. They ensured librarians and archivists were well aware of the protections available to them within the Collective Agreement, and that they had trusted colleagues they could turn to with concerns or questions about their working conditions and rights. Each of us built on those past practices to increasingly be more inclusive and welcoming, and strove to provide opportunities for greater participation of librarians and archivists. These efforts included encouraging individuals to participate on committees or to attend Board of Representatives meetings as alternates, increasing the frequency and openness of our own communications about the activities of the Board of Representatives and UMFA Executive Council, and increasing opportunities for librarians and archivists to be informed and provide input on union decision making.

### ***Building High Participation by Librarians and Archivists in the Faculty Association***

As we entered bargaining in 2016, UMFA started learning and applying the organizing model (McElvey 2016), starting with a basic charting exercise. Prior to the strike vote, each Board Representative was given a list of their constituents, with the goal to connect with each of them to ensure they understood the current state of negotiations and to ensure they cast their ballot in the strike vote. Librarians and archivists were amongst the constituencies with the highest participation and contributed to the highest voter turnout and highest participation in UMFA's history. In our roles as Board Representatives, we individually massed members to vote, engaging in discussions of bargaining issues and the importance of a strike vote for



creating power at the bargaining table. In the final days leading up to the bargaining deadline, UMFA discovered that both the university's administration (CBC 2018) and the provincial government had interfered in negotiations (Macintosh 2022), a revelation which ultimately led to the 22-day strike.

Though important and significant gains were achieved by the strike, social media and internal documents (texts, emails) indicate that there was much discontent within the membership (Desai and Hiller 2016). This was particularly true for librarians and archivists who had not gained similar protections to workload and job protection as professors and instructors (Warren 2016; Cooke 2016; Neilsen 2016). Utilizing our organizational, conceptual, and communications skills, we began preparing for the 2017 round of bargaining, and organized a librarian and archivist-led bargaining priority for workload protections. After many union librarian and archivist committee meetings, problem-solving working groups, and drafts of contract language, we reached consensus as a constituency. We then presented the proposal to UMFA's Collective Agreement Committee, along with our arguments for the proposed language. It was wholeheartedly accepted, was a key priority in that year's bargaining package, and the aspects of the proposal that were integrated into the collective agreement were an important and substantial gain towards parity among librarians and archivists.

This first strong mobilization of librarians and archivists as a group, and subsequent success in achieving our language goals as a minority among union membership, demonstrates just how effective the skills of librarians and archivists can be when turned to collective action. Of course, we were able to achieve these gains within a union where we have an entrenched culture of librarian and archivist union activity, with librarians and archivists who were familiar with drafting Collective Agreement language, with librarians and archivists on key union committees, and with a Collective Agreement Committee that valued equity, parity, and member-driven bargaining priorities. In later bargaining rounds we used our skills in organizing, writing collective agreement language, and advocacy in solidarity for our non-librarian/archivist union members, which has substantially contributed to the strength of our union as a whole.

## Three Individual Perspectives on Librarian Leadership in a Faculty Union

### *Librarian Leadership on the Picket Lines*

*Lyle Ford*

A picket line is a direct action, utilized in a strike, that has an impact on the general public. Twenty people stopping traffic and handing out leaflets makes a strike real, and offers a chance for strikers and citizens to connect. Participating on a picket line can be a fraught experience, but it provides the opportunity for meaningful conversations between strikers and people in cars. In the 2021 job action, we ran a total of five picket lines: three on the campus at the south end of the city, one at the campus near the centre of the city, and one at the provincial Legislature. Throughout the course of the 35-day strike, we held special events, such as rallies at the Legislature and administration building, as well as a “Week of Action” that focused on the political stream of our strike and included picketing two constituency offices of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), and distributing information leaflets in targeted MLA ridings.

I worked as a picket captain, as I did during the 2016 strike, at a busy location, midday, for three hours each week day, from November 2 until December 6. After five years serving as a member of the Board of Representatives, these positions seemed like logical progressions. As a Board Rep, I have had the opportunity to keep members informed, and to hear their perspectives. Managing the flow of information to and from the union is a major function of the job, and I felt equipped to perform that role on the picket line, too. The line was composed of about 20 UMFA members, plus occasional supporters like students, other unionists, and flying pickets from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Defence Fund. The work was supported by UMFA's Job Action Committee that handled all the logistics for running picket lines, such as providing transportation to the picket locations and providing a range of supplies: safety equipment, including delineators, whistles, and safety vests; cell phones to contact strike headquarters, or police in case of emergency; porta-potties; refreshments; picket signs; and when the weather dropped below -10°C, a heated trailer. Our picket line distributed daily information leaflets written by UMFA's Organizing and Communication Committee. It would have been impossible to have safe and functional picket lines without the dedicated work of those two committees.

My experience as a liaison librarian was very useful as a picket captain. Organizing people is outside of my traditional role, but I was called on for leadership,



collaboration, consultation, and communication daily. The patience I have developed doing reference work over the past 25 years also served me well.

My job as a picket captain consisted of coordinating three-minute traffic stoppages, watching to make sure the picketers were safe and warm, serving as a morale booster, ensuring members signed in so they would receive their daily strike benefit, arranging for co-captains and leafleteers, liaising with strike headquarters, answering questions, and facing down aggressive drivers who tried to drive through the pickets. We had multiple drivers who tried to disrupt the picket line, including two Winnipeg police officers who bullied their way through early in the strike. Thankfully there were no injuries, but the stress of stopping those vehicles took its toll on the picketers. As the days passed, though, the picketers began massing in front of the vehicles in spontaneous demonstrations of solidarity—it was no longer one or two people standing in front of vehicles. I found these demonstrations of solidarity invigorating and the picketers seemed to share that sense, gaining resolve as the strike progressed.

The best part of the picket was the connections made between people from all over the campus. I had engineers, business professors, scientists, humanities scholars, nurses, librarians, and social scientists on my line. Students, members of local labour unions, and community members joined our picket line serving as contacts with the larger community, and reported gaining rich discoveries about our common struggles. The conversations between picketers were fascinating. Listening to people talk about the common cause, their research and teaching, and their impression of the provincial government and university administration made it apparent that we were united in wanting a fair deal. The camaraderie alleviated much of the anxiety created by the job action, and bolstered determination for a strong demonstration against the unfair treatment we all faced.

### ***Librarian Leadership on the Executive Council, Organizing and Communications Committee, and Virtual Picket Lines***

***Ruby Warren***

In both the organizing lead-up to the 2021 strike and the strike itself, I served in a variety of leadership positions designed to focus on connectivity within the union. I worked as a Member at Large of the Executive Council prior to Spring 2021, and was elected to Council again on September 22, 2021 to replace the Secretary who resigned mid-term. Additionally, I served as a communications-focused member of the Organizing and Communications Committee, working on draft internal and external communications in concert with UMFA staff and other members of the Executive.

My role on the Executive Council is a familiar one to any librarian with collaborative administrative duties: meetings, argumentation for positions on organizational actions and priorities, and administrative minutiae (signing documents, staff direction, keeping records). As Secretary, I bring my professional experience with documentation to each meeting of the association, creating detailed minutes for submission to the archival record.

### *Communications*

A perhaps more interesting portion of my work is in the drafting of communications from the union. Union communications require a number of skills librarians are uniquely suited to bring to the union. Librarians are far more used to writing for an audience unfamiliar with their content or message than the majority of academic faculty union members, an approach useful in both internal and external communications. Union communications often require the synthesis of complex information like bargaining positions, legal advice and rulings, and government regulations. These communications need to be attention-grabbing, skimmable, clear, and thorough, without being seen as condescending or simplistic, in order to satisfy union members who are all experts in their specific fields, often too busy to engage deeply with union materials, and are strongly opinionated regarding union actions and priorities. Writing for this audience is something academic librarians are intimately familiar with via their work on subject guides and email reference assistance.

My expertise as a User Experience Librarian also greatly informed this work, in that it assisted with structuring information in easily skimmable jargonless chunks. Anyone accustomed to and skilled in writing for a web audience would find these skills useful in writing email communications and public facing union documents, and in deciding what information needs to be documented or communicated. Keeping both union members and the public informed is a balancing act of communicating as much information as these groups could theoretically need, while avoiding overwhelming them with either sheer volume or jargon-based technicality. Communications must also manage the emotional states of members as a collective, recognizing when to provide guidance and scaffolding to their internalizing of information (a tactic best suited to moments when anxieties are high), and when to present simply and with little authorial voice (often best in moments of resolution or initial information overtures). Many librarians and archivists in public facing roles find this emotional management fairly intuitive, as they have built their ability to provide these supports to students and faculty in high-stress situations, as well as (to varying extents) to their own colleagues in collaborative and collegial working situations (Lowe and Reno 2018).

### *Leading on Virtual Picket Lines*

During the strike itself I also served as a picket captain, but unlike my co-author, my picket line was virtual. Virtual pickets, initially conceptualized and considered by our union out of necessity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were designed to develop and disseminate worker-generated propaganda combating anti-worker propaganda created by the employer and various other anti-union actors. This served two very important purposes: educating the public on our labour issues, and the maintenance of union member solidarity and morale. Each virtual picketer was assigned a picket group that met each day for one hour to share information, self-report union-supporting activity, develop strategies, and brainstorm ideas for new materials. Picketers were then expected to serve an additional two hours every day independently, creating their own materials or contributing to the spread of information across the internet and via telephone.

Leading a virtual picket line entailed guiding fellow union members in information gathering, the creation of communications, and interactions with the often hostile public; managing morale, interpersonal conflicts, and emotional states in the members of your picket; and finally, organizing and disseminating information on administrative procedures and concerns (strike pay, accommodations, voting procedure, bargaining procedure, etc.). The relationship between these duties and the core competencies of librarians as identified by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) is obvious, particularly the core competencies of collaboration, consultation and communication, engagement and participation, and leadership and facilitation (CARL Competencies Working Group 2020). Less obvious is the way that functional academic librarianship roles build skills to accomplish these leadership goals while maintaining decentralized and democratic collaborative control within both the union as a whole and the picket itself.

As a functional academic librarian, my job forces me to work collaboratively with other departments and librarians in order to complete my work. As an “internal consultant with little decision making authority” (Macdonald 2015), I have become adept at motivating cooperation via fostering community and engaging personal interest and investment. This meant that I was already primed to find, encourage, and value the unique possibilities present in each of my virtual picketers, and to incorporate them in determining the direction of our virtual picket work both individually and as a union. Early in leading my pickets, and in my discussions liaising from executive with other picket leaders, I emphasized conducting a sort of open ended probing interview: what are you good at? What would you like to learn? How can these things be used to either put pressure on our employer or boost the morale of your colleagues with you on the lines? This provided the members of my

picket group space to explore using their skills for the benefit of the union, and their duties ultimately included researching, counseling, and writing and publishing a vast variety of content, from opinion columns to chants for rallies to memes to song parodies.

Additionally, this decentralized collaborative approach to virtual picketing, with flexible hours, duties, and locations and no requirement of contiguous hours of work, proved to be a boon to equity among contributing members. Members with disabilities were for the first time met with picket duties that were both legitimized as “regular” picket duties making real and substantive contributions to the strike efforts and that were also flexible enough to meet their needs. Members with caregiving responsibilities reported a similar appreciation for these facets of virtual picketing. A commitment to equity and inclusion is of course also a CARL Core Competency (CARL Competencies Working Group 2020), as well as a fundamental librarian value across specialties (American Library Association 2019; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions n.d.). More importantly, it allowed our virtual picketers to bond themselves to the union, the struggle, and each other in a way that left them feeling supported and valued.

### ***Librarian Leadership as President of the Faculty Association***

#### ***Orvie Dingwall***

Not only do academic librarians and archivists belong in their faculty association unions in leadership roles as my co-authors have outlined, they also have the skills and are well situated to lead the union in the role of President. The University of Manitoba has had a faculty association since 1951, though it was not until 1974 that “UMFA was formally certified by the Manitoba Labour Board as the bargaining agent for full-time academic staff at the University of Manitoba” (UMFA 2022). In the 50 years since, I am the third librarian President of UMFA, the first woman librarian President, and only the eighth woman president overall. I also became the first President to be located at a campus other than the main Fort Garry campus at the University of Manitoba.

#### ***Journey to Becoming the President***

The start of my journey to becoming President starts similarly to many others: by increasingly becoming involved over a number of years I developed the knowledge and institutional history to take on the role of President. After becoming a member in 2010 and following UMFA’s communications, I first became formally involved when I was elected to the Board of Representatives in 2012, after the previous long-serving Board Representative retired. I was active as a Board Representative, attending and

actively participating in all of the meetings and other union events available, and I took seriously my responsibility to update the constituents I represented (health sciences librarians). I similarly kept the union's Executive Director and President apprised of issues within my unit and the libraries in general. I worked closely with the other two libraries Board Representatives, meeting with new members to highlight important aspects of the Collective Agreement, recruiting librarians to serve on search committees, serving on committees as the union rep, and other union liaison duties. After serving as a Board Representative for two years, the librarian who had been serving on UMFA's Executive Council retired. With the experience I had gained, I was well positioned to fill this vacancy and joined the Executive as a Member at Large, to continue the union's over 25 year history of reserving an Executive position for a librarian or archivist. Another librarian retirement led to me joining the bargaining team in 2016.

The next chapter of my journey to becoming President was less linear than the first chapter. After the 22-day strike in 2016, I ran to be vice-president and was narrowly defeated, and was instead recruited to become UMFA's Treasurer. Serving as Treasurer not only increased my understanding of the union's finances and reserves, but also the general operations of the union and the staff who manage the everyday operations. In 2020 I was acclaimed into the role of Vice-President, though I then lost in a re-election bid to retain that position in the following year after a contentious round of bargaining during the COVID-19 pandemic (CBC 2020). After that defeat I again was elected to serve as Treasurer, before winning a by-election a few months later to become President. Through this increasing involvement within my union, I developed familiarity with various subgroups of UMFA members, such as the specifics of their working conditions and the priority initiatives they were supportive of advancing. I developed first-hand knowledge of the long-standing democratic processes within UMFA, which were structured to ensure decisions are made and directions are driven not by a small group of individuals on the Executive or at the sole discretion of the President, but by member-driven priorities. I also took advantage of available training and education opportunities, particularly through the CAUT, such as the Librarians' and Archivists' conference, and the CAUT Collective Bargaining Workshop, as well as workshops and conferences through the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

Despite the experience and knowledge gained through my various roles within UMFA, much of my applied leadership competencies were developed in my work as a health librarian. The first time I ever chaired a meeting was as the President of the Northern Alberta Health Libraries Association (NAHLA), a chapter of the Canadian Health Libraries Association (CHLA/ABSC) with approximately 35 members. Then

as President of CHLA/ABSC, I continued the previously established member-driven approach with the development of the 2011-2013 strategic plan based on the direction from CHLA/ABSC members and the greater health library community (Dingwall et al. 2011). As an Executive member of another CHLA/ABSC chapter, the Manitoba Association of Health Information Professionals, we explored virtual meeting options in order to reduce travel time among our widespread membership (Dingwall et al. 2014). This previous familiarity and expertise with conducting meetings virtually was especially critical in the unique context of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, when union meetings were conducted exclusively in a virtual environment and had anywhere from 3 to 900 participants.

### *Librarian Skills are Presidential Skills*

I became President of UMFA on September 26, 2021 in the middle of an intense round of bargaining, the fourth round of contentious bargaining in six years. Less than one month later, UMFA members had the highest participation levels in a strike vote, and the highest number of “yes” votes, in UMFA history (Macintosh 2021). Less than two weeks later we initiated what became the longest job action in UMFA’s history. The role of the President is only one of many important roles within an academic faculty union, and the successes and gains of the strike are directly attributable to the collective power and strength of the general membership. It was through the dedication, hard work, and perseverance of the collective membership, and staff, that we achieved the gains we did. Coming into the role of President mid-term and mid-bargaining round, UMFA members needed someone with the type of history and experience that I had developed since starting to get involved, but they also needed someone with the skills and competencies of academic librarians and archivists.

Though I was involved as a member of the CAUT Librarians and Archivists Committee who critiqued CARL’s Core Competencies (Austin-Smith and Robinson 2020), and I continue to believe they lack important elements, the CARL Competencies remain a reasonable set of Canadian competencies for librarians and archivists and were obviously well suited to leadership as President of a Canadian faculty association union. Vision and innovation, as well as active learning and adaptation, were particularly necessary in coordinating the first academic faculty association strike during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that each time public health orders were tightened in-person picket lines and rallies were compliant and safe. Engagement and participation, as well as evaluation and assessment, are also union organizing principles: unions rely on charting, mapping, and structure tests (McAlevey 2016) to assess morale, commitment, and sheer numbers of participants, all factors that must inform strategic decisions in bargaining and strikes. Most critically, the importance of collaboration, consultation and communication cannot



be overstated. Although the President of a union often becomes the public face of a strike, they must take their direction and draw support from large groups of union members. Every single member that participates, from the picket lines to the committees to the executive, needs to both feel represented, and be trusted to inform how the President represents union positions in both the media and to the membership.

## Conclusion

Librarians and archivists have skill sets that prove tremendously valuable to organizing efforts, and their involvement in any union can help push it to greater successes. We aimed to provide examples of librarian and archivist skills that are beneficial to academic unions, but this is by no means a finite list. We each began our involvement in the union by being informed about the work of the union, then simply showing up and actively participating in general meetings, gradually building our presence into positions of leadership. As we worked to support other members with our unique perspectives and practical skills, we raised the profile of librarians and archivists, and our unique issues and hardships, in the consciousness of our fellow members. Along with the presence of instructors in public leadership positions, the presence of librarians and archivists has supported the push for equitable treatment of all members within the union. For example, the 2021 initial bargaining package including a unified salary grid (that is, equivalent salary scales across ranks for all membership types) was solidly approved by 76% of the general membership, despite repeated attempts by a small contingent of research faculty to remove the unified grid from proposals (Executive Director Greg Flemming, UMFA Bargaining Update – SGM Debrief communication to members, August 23 2021). The efforts to remove this proposal for union-wide equity may have been successful without the vocal presence of known and trusted union activists and leaders from the ranks of librarians, archivists, and instructors advocating for their inclusion in both general and leadership meetings.

We strongly encourage academic librarians and archivists in faculty unions to increase their presence in union work, considering both the unique skills they may hold and how best to offer them to their colleagues and comrades, as well as the improvements to working conditions and protections that can be achieved. There are a large variety of ways to contribute to your union, and we have only demonstrated a handful of them. Unions need members skilled in everything from information management to public speaking to structured conversations as well as other unique skills individual librarians and archivists have. These skills are critical to achieving parity for librarians and archivists, and collective gains for academic workers. It is only through collective action that we can organize and mobilize membership to

achieve significant gains, which cannot be achieved without mass-scale member participation. By making yourself available and present, you increase the likelihood that your working conditions as a librarian or archivist will be prioritized and respected.

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