

York's under-staffed stacks

York at the bottom again: Student/staff ratios in Canadian research libraries (2000)

RANK	LIBRARY	RATIO
1	Toronto	217
2	British Columbia	244
3	Manitoba	303
4	Saskatchewan	319
5	McGill	330
6	Queen's	367
7	Western Ontario	375
8	Alberta	379
9	Laval	410
10	McMaster	430
11	Waterloo	475
12	Guelph	506
13	YORK	538

NOTES:

(1) York ranks 110th out of 112 libraries in the Association of Research Libraries.

(2) The student/staff ratio available from the ARL database is calculated as [total full-time students]/[total YUFA + YUFA-Exempt + P&M library staff].

It is York's librarians who are responsible for developing the library collections on which teaching, learning and research depend. It is they who teach our students how to find and make sense of the increasing complex information universe.

With increased numbers of students requiring assistance—especially with the incoming double cohort—it will be difficult for librarians to maintain current library services, including providing in-depth and individualized reference and research assistance.

Teaching will be compromised as librarians will face larger class sizes. Opportunities for hands-on learning will be limited.

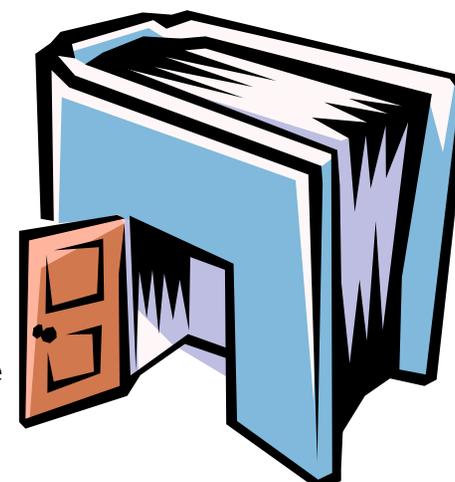
With the employer's offer and announced budget plans, librarians are rightly concerned that York's already poor student-to-librarian ratio will worsen, resulting in a decrease in professional availability and activities. York needs more librarians.

Also, like faculty, librarians need more time for research and professional development, enabling them better to develop the collection and instruct students. Of the librarians who responded to YUFA's negotiating survey, *all* indicated the difficulty of balancing teaching, research, and service roles under their current workloads.

Librarians believe that the double cohort will negatively affect all aspects of their jobs. Meanwhile no substantive discussions regarding the double cohort are taking place in the library. Now that a new University Librarian has been appointed, management has an opportunity to take a pro-active approach to librarians' long-standing concerns.

YUFA proposes:

- one additional research day per year for each of the 36 YUFA librarians
- an increase of two in the librarian complement



Condition: 'critical'

What the reviewers said ...

Excerpts from the Report of the Review Committee (5 May 2000)

'York University Libraries are significantly underfunded for the role they are expected to perform...and as a result are also unprepared (financially) for the new roles they must assume for the evolving University. The libraries have "made do" and worked well "under the circumstances" for many years but this is not a sustainable strategy. Staff overload and burnout are obvious and the ability to initiate new resources and services is severely constrained.'

'[T]here is a critical need to find increased, reliable funding for the Library.'

'The current level of library funding constrains innovation.'

'The question of funding is in large part a decision by the York community about the value of the Library in the fulfillment of the academic mission. Is "getting by" adequate?'

'With one of the country's lowest librarian/student/faculty ratio the reviewers were impressed with the number and quality of services YUL offers its users. The Librarians engaged in public service and collection development already do some faculty liaison but the Self Study and the consultation suggest a need for more interaction between faculty and librarians...Given the current demands on York's Librarians, doing more faculty liaison will be a difficult goal to achieve without an increase in the librarian complement.'

'YUL is faced with deteriorating and cramped facilities.'

'YUL staff has been very proactive and creative in optimizing the existing space but they are running out of options and the opportunity to make changes is limited without an infusion of new funding.'

'[H]eavy workloads are causing stress but staff expressed pride in their accomplishments under tough circumstances. Some expressed concern that with cutbacks, retirees would not be replaced in the future and workloads would continue to increase.'

'General morale – this was characterized by a lack of trust, transparency, and mutual respect...'

'[S]taff do not feel the workplace environment is safe for them to engage in debate or to disagree with their colleagues or managers.'



The big picture ...

What the CAUT Librarians' Committee says about librarians and workload (December 1999)

'[Academic librarians] are being given more responsibility than they can fulfill with the resources of time and expertise they have at hand.'

'There are three (interrelated) causes for the bur-

geoning workload of academic librarians: diminished resources for universities at large, including reductions of library staff; an increasingly managerial or corporatised style of governance at the highest levels; and an explosion in the complexity and sheer quantity of work to be done, largely due to the expansion of the role of information technology...more work, not less, as systems increase in diversity and complexity.'

'[An] illusion of economy [is] created by a reduction in reference statistics, because information technology often requires much more intensive and time-consuming "front-end" instruction than traditional facilities...users expect more than they used to: they will often have a computer and internet connection at home, and it is the librarian's expertise that they need. In the field of reference this means a longer interview, and therefore fewer interviews in a given period of time.'

'Unless there are mechanisms whereby librarians can control their workload, it will inevitably increase without limit, and the quality of work and of life both will continue to plummet.'

'A threshold set by the librarians will have the greatest likelihood of being appropriate...An institution's own librarians are best suited and best placed to know what it can accomplish successfully.'

'Academic librarians' work consists of at least 3 distinct activities: professional practice, academic service and research or professional development ...The balance among them must be recognized, and the opportunity to accomplish all of them provided.'