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## **Vote NO to the Librarian & Archivist MoS**

### **Executive Summary**

- The MoS poses a serious threat to the academic freedom of faculty members at York University
  - It strips from librarians and archivists the right to conduct disciplinary research and assigns managerial oversight of our research agendas to the Dean of Libraries
  - Its ratification will trump other language designed to protect academic freedom in the Collective Agreement and it will prepare the way for the imposition of similar restrictions across the University's other faculties and departments
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### **Four Reasons to Vote No:**

#### **“This is a terrible step backwards” – James Turk**

James Turk, Director of the Centre for Free Expression at Ryerson University and former Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) describes this Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) as *“a terrible step backwards.”* His expert reading of the document has led him to conclude that it *“narrows what are deemed legitimate scholarly areas of work”* while also *“narrowing...what will now be deemed relevant to assess.”* That we would even contemplate the possibility of trading away our academic freedoms is being met by dismay and disbelief by colleagues across Canada.

#### **This is a threat to ALL faculty members at York**

The Employer has used newly negotiated language relating to librarians and archivists in the past as a means to test new policies and programs that become enshrined in the language of the Collective Agreement (*e.g.* the .5 Course Research Release Program, first established for librarians and archivists in the 2009-2012 Collective Agreement, was later instituted across all faculties in the subsequent 2012-2015 Collective Agreement). The new language contained in the MoS – language that would become part of the Collective Agreement – effectively strips YUFA librarians and archivists of the right to conduct disciplinary research outside

of “librarianship and archivy” and grants managerial oversight for research and scholarship to the Dean of Libraries. The ratification of the MoS would set a terrible precedent and lay the groundwork for the imposition of similar restrictions across the University in subsequent negotiations. That outcome would foreclose the ability of faculty to conduct research across disciplinary boundaries, to pursue unrestricted lines of inquiry, and to follow evidence wherever it leads. The vast majority of academic librarians across Canada have unfettered academic freedom enshrined in their collective agreements. We do not want to join the small handful of institutions where this is not the case.

### **The MoS unreasonably narrows the scope of our scholarship**

The MoS artificially and arbitrarily narrows the scope of research activities that will be deemed relevant by the Employer. “Librarianship and archivy” are subfields of an inter-discipline called Library and Information Studies. Thus the scope of our work is narrowed not merely to that of a single and isolated discipline – but to two small fields within it. The scope is yet narrower still. Legitimate research would need to be tied to “professional practices” meaning that only applied research relevant to practical operational issues in libraries and archives would be deemed acceptable. While applied research is important and needed, such a narrowing of scope would rule out most theoretical, historical, socio-political, and/or conceptual work; it would limit how and when librarians and archivists can enter interdisciplinary conversations about collective memory and heritage, epistemology, print and digital culture, digital scholarship, and other relevant fields; and it would impede the ability of librarians to liaise effectively with faculty colleagues as they work to build strong research collections in disciplines and fields to which they contribute as scholars in their own right. Librarians and archivists have important contributions to make and their professional practice is strengthened by such engagement to the benefit of all.

### **The MoS impedes the scholarship of equity seeking groups**

Reinforcing and policing disciplinary boundaries will make it far more difficult to engage in the kinds of interdisciplinary scholarship often practiced by scholars from equity seeking groups and those working on issues that are relevant to marginalized communities. In recognition of this fact, YUFA’s Indigenous Caucus has issued a statement strongly opposing the ratification of the MoS: *“It sets a dangerous precedent for potential changes in any department moving forward that restrict our academic freedom as researchers, and gate-keep disciplinary boundaries in a way that could stifle important work Indigenous scholars (and others) are doing to push these boundaries or explicitly act on the peripheries of particular boundaries where there is space for exploration and innovation.”* Faculty members committed to the preservation of interdisciplinary work at York and to encouraging scholarship about equity seeking groups should vote against ratification.

## The finer points

### *The language of the MoS is deeply flawed*

There is a high degree of ambiguity around the words “librarianship” and “archivy” because they are not defined. That lack of clarity, combined with several competing clauses, will force the parties into early arbitration and lead to further conflict with the Employer. Because the language in the MoS is the most recent language to speak directly to academic freedom, moreover, it will both temper and weaken freedoms that would otherwise be protected by Article 10 of the Collective Agreement.

### *The process has at times been fraught*

The proposed language that was approved by the YUFA Library Chapter before bargaining began read: "Publications or other presentations in librarianship, the archival profession or other **disciplines**." Although the bargaining team consulted with the Library Chapter during the process, they did not seek instructions from the Chapter regarding this significant departure from the approved language governing academic freedom, nor did they seek it from the YUFA Executive. Furthermore, YUFA has no clear procedures around the signing of these important documents and in this particular instance the MoS was signed by a designate of the President without first being presented to the YUFA Executive for discussion and approval.

### *Barry Miller's clarification only confuses the issues further*

When librarians began to raise red flags about this unanticipated new language a clarification was sought from the Employer to assuage these concerns. That statement had the opposite effect. In an email dated 24 January 2019, Barry Miller, Senior Policy Advisor on Labour Relations, asserted that the scope of permissible research remained unchanged by the new MoS. His assertion was based on the false claim that librarians and archivists at York *never possessed academic freedom in the first place*. Barry Miller's correspondence makes it impossible to mistake the fact that the Employer is intent on restricting academic freedoms at York University. The rejection of the MoS is the only thing that stands in the way.

### **What happens if the MoS is rejected?**

We believe the Employer is at least as anxious as YUFA to make improvements to librarian and archivist T&P. With the agreement of both parties, a new bargaining team will return to the table with a strengthened hand to negotiate clearer language that preserves the academic freedom of all YUFA members. In the meantime, existing procedures that safeguard academic freedom will continue to apply. **If you harbour any uncertainties whatsoever, the safest course is to vote NO so that unambiguous language can be negotiated to protect our academic freedoms.**