



June 20, 2011

Dr. Patrick Deane, President and Vice-Chancellor  
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Dear President Deane,

We -- the librarian members of the York University Faculty Association -- write in support of the librarians and archivists at McMaster University. In particular we express our grave concern over the recent downsizing of professional staff, the casualization of labour at McMaster University Library, and the recent comments from Jeff Trzeciak, the University Librarian, diminishing the value and future of librarians at McMaster. Such comments provide clear evidence of a highly uncollegial and unsupportive work environment. We have previously written indicating our distaste for the organizational restructuring that led to the creation of new positions quickly deemed irrelevant and the subsequent firing of two highly respected senior colleagues. As new and even more worrisome issues grow increasingly apparent, we are compelled to write again.



While we recognize and embrace a need for other kinds of skills and specializations in academic libraries, they should not come at the expense of professional expertise that has taken many years to assemble. Such disregard is particularly troubling coming from an administrator at an institution of higher learning, which should have the highest regard for knowledge, specialization, and expertise.

Even more crucially, changes to staffing models should not come at the expense of academic freedom. We are deeply troubled by the casualization of labour involved in replacing full-time positions with precarious contract positions. Non-librarian/archivist employees in limited term contract positions do not enjoy the academic freedom or the background and systemic awareness required to express new challenging ideas or disagreement over the strategic directions or priorities of the Library and consequently the quality of internal debate and the imaginative possibilities of the library system as a whole will suffer as a result of an increasingly centralized, hierarchical orthodoxy.

While change is certainly needed as we approach the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century, it is critical that the professionals charged with preservation and stewardship of our academic and cultural heritage be at the forefront of any sustainable renewal and planning process. A university librarian, much like a dean, is not a CEO, but a collegial partner in collective governance of a public institution. Change cannot be effectively managed in a highly charged and hostile work environment. Note that the McMaster Health Sciences Library, the one not administered by Mr. Trzeciak, managed to absorb budget cuts without rancor or losing staff.

The reputation of McMaster's Library is suffering as a result of the actions of its University Librarian. For instance, see the recent article by Ian Brown in the *Globe and Mail*, where Mr. Trzeciak's vision was openly dismissed. One only has to take a

quick look at library-related blogs and social media-to see that McMaster University Library is quickly becoming known amongst librarians as a rogue institution. Nor does your Library seem to provide a supportive environment for grassroots innovation from librarians and archivists. Innovation appears to be only permitted from the top down. Such a reputation does not bode well for future recruitment of excellent librarians or post-docs. We also suspect that retention of your current librarians and archivists—highly respected by their national colleagues—will become an increasingly large issue for your institution. No-one could blame them for looking elsewhere, given the climate Mr. Trzeciak has created.

We are also disturbed by the recent agenda-setting “Future of the Academic Library Symposium” organized by Mr. Trzeciak, which initially had only three female speakers out of a possible 21 on the program and no front-line librarians or archivists. Such inequity would be unrepresentative and egregious in any context but considerably more so in this instance as, according to CAUT statistics, 73% of academic librarians in Canada are women. The issues raised by this symposium might seem distinct from the concerns raised above, but we connect this inequity of gender to the obvious inequity of recent labour practices at McMaster University Library. We see voices being silenced: the voices of professional librarians and archivists and the voices of women. The message-from this symposium and from the overarching ideological agenda espoused by Mr. Trzeciak is that the future of libraries is controlled and dictated entirely by library administrators. Male library administrators.

In the wake of all of the above, we were particularly troubled to learn that Mr. Trzeciak's most recent review and reappointment occurred without the input or involvement of MUALA or indeed any of the librarians at McMaster-the people in fact best positioned to evaluate a library director's performance.

This letter has been unanimously endorsed by the librarian members of the York University Faculty Association. The YUFA executive, representing all our faculty and librarians, has also publicly expressed its support for McMaster librarians. We continue to monitor the situation at your institution and continue to advocate for the rights and responsibilities of archivists and librarians at McMaster, believing as we do that our responsibilities for, and commitment to, the preservation of Canada's scholarly and cultural heritage transcends the boundaries of our own institution and extends across them all.

Sincerely,

Walter Giesbrecht,  
Union Steward  
On behalf of the librarian members of the York University Faculty Association

Cc: Ilene Busch-Vishniac, Provost and VP (Academic),  
McMaster University  
Jeff Trzeciak, University Librarian, McMaster University  
McMaster University Academic Librarians' Association  
McMaster University Faculty Association  
York University Faculty Association