

The librarian members of the University of Guelph Faculty Association wish to issue a statement of support for Dale Askey, Associate University Librarian at McMaster University, who has recently had a libel lawsuit brought against him by the Edwin Mellen Press. In the summer of 2012, this Press filed a lawsuit against Mr. Askey, and against McMaster University (his current employer), suing both parties for defamation, and seeking over three million dollars in damages. The suit is in response to a blog post that Dale Askey wrote in 2010, while working at Kansas State University, expressing his professional opinion about the quality of the publications of this Press.

As a professional librarian engaged in collection development, Mr. Askey is fully qualified and indeed required to make a judgment on the quality of published material as part of carrying out his day-to-day employment at an academic library. As the Canadian Library Association has stated, "The impartial evaluation of information quality is one of the key contributions of professional librarians". The right of academic librarians to voice their opinions about materials they collect and the publishers from whom they purchase these materials, is a natural part of the larger debates which make academia a rich environment for intellectual exploration and evaluation.

The very nature of academic enquiry and the production of new knowledge depends upon the free exchange of ideas and opinions. As a participant in the higher education publishing cycle, Mellen Press should understand and respect the basic principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression which are universally recognized and practiced within the higher education community. By bringing a lawsuit which aims to stifle the right of librarians to express their professional opinions, Mellen appears to be both retaliatory and sadly unaware of how central these values are to their prime audience.

The librarian members of the University of Guelph Faculty Association strongly urge Edwin Mellen Press to drop this suit, which represents a serious threat to the academic freedom of librarians, faculty, and academic staff at all universities. We join with our many colleagues locally, nationally and internationally in supporting academic freedom, and Dale Askey.