

**2014-2015 OCUFA TEACHING AND
ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP AWARDS
CITATION FOR DR. HARRIET SONNE DE TORRENS**

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A colleague at the university where I work once stated: “Librarians are flexible and hold a unique place in the university in that they can choose their level of engagement with the various components and parts.” It is truly inspiring when we encounter colleagues who wholeheartedly embrace their profession and take their level of engagement to extraordinary heights. We are very fortunate to have received a nomination for such a colleague this year and I am honoured to present an Academic Librarianship Award to Dr. Harriet Sonne de Torrens, Visual Resources Librarian at the University of Toronto, Mississauga.

Teacher, scholar, researcher, author, advocate, mentor. This list gives you an idea of the scope of Harriet’s involvement at the University of Toronto. Dynamic, collaborative, engaging, proactive, enthusiastic, diplomatic, creative. These are just some the adjectives that appear repeatedly in Harriet’s letters of support, which come from a wide variety of constituencies including librarians, department chairs, teaching faculty, university administrators, students and mentees. In a library career that has spanned approximately fifteen years Harriet has become a highly respected leader within her profession; not only in her academic field, which happens to be art history and medieval studies, but as a passionate teacher, as a major player in the area of digital humanities and as a national advocate for faculty and librarians’ rights.

Harriet is a medieval scholar. With four graduate degrees, including a Ph.D. from the University of Copenhagen, she has made stellar contributions to art historical research as an author of



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numerous journal articles and books and as a presenter at conferences worldwide. She is also the director of an important database of baptismal fonts from the early Christian period to the 17th century—Baptisteria Sacra: An Iconoclastic Index of Baptismal Fonts--a tool that contributes significantly to the field of art history. Through her expertise in visual literacy Harriet has also become a driving force in the building and administration of visual databases, notably the Federated Academic Digital Imaging System, or FADIS, a learning management and courseware system developed for image-based teaching of art, architecture and visual culture that is now a consortium of fifteen contributing institutions. Through her work in this area Harriet has been instrumental in setting the direction of visual resource management at universities across the country and has made FADIS one of the most important repositories of art images in Canada.

In her role as teacher Harriet has shared her expertise in the use of images and visual databases with both faculty and students through the development and teaching of new courses for the Faculty of Information (iSchool) at the University of Toronto and for the Centre of Visual and Media Studies at the University of Toronto, Mississauga. “Her continuous creation of outstanding educational materials and visual literacy lectures has contributed to the success of graduate students and has supported and extended Faculty of Information’s master’s programs” writes a colleague at the iSchool. “She is a fantastic mentor in my professional development as an art historian” writes a student. “She cares not just about the job we are doing but that we as students learn as much as possible in the process. She successfully creates a welcoming environment that encourages both independence and cooperation and provides opportunities to learn and grow.”

The work of an academic liaison librarian is fundamentally about cultivating relationships and as the Visual Resources Librarian at the UTM Harriet truly excels in this regard. Her dossier showcases numerous letters from faculty and students expressing a deep appreciation for her efficiency, professionalism and her proactive approach in supporting and enhancing learning,



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teaching and research. Whether she is collaborating with faculty in developing and delivering research skills classes, supervising and supporting practicum students through work study positions or guiding faculty and graduate students in their digital humanities initiatives, Harriet is consistently seen as a “captivating ambassador” for her specialty. “Through her incredible ability to affect positive change, Harriet’s work directly impacts the intellectual functioning of the University” writes one referee, echoing a theme that appears repeatedly in her dossier.

Harriet is also a tireless advocate of the interests and rights of academic staff and is, as a colleague states, “a true comrade in our efforts to achieve equity in career opportunity, development and compensation for all sectors of our membership, most especially librarians.” Harriet has served on the University of Toronto Faculty Association in a number of high-level capacities and is recognized throughout the university for her solidarity with her colleagues and her exceptional contributions to current and future university governance at the U of T and other institutions. Her work in this area is described as a “model of intellectual excellence partnered with engaged activism” in one of her supporting letters.

Academic freedom, ethics and professional practice are significant issues that occur frequently in the conversation around academic librarianship. Not content to simply talk about these issues Harriet, along with three colleagues, founded the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians. In less than two years CAPAL has become a successful and well-respected non-profit advocacy group that works collaboratively with local, provincial and national organizations currently working on behalf of librarians and libraries.

“Harriet somehow manages to combine a high degree of commitment and solidarity with a personal graciousness, easy humour, humility and kindness that in their own way inspire the rest



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of us to reach higher” writes a colleague about her work with the University of Toronto Faculty Association. From the numerous heartfelt and passionate letters written in support of her nomination it is clearly evident that these qualities apply to all that Harriet does within the many components and parts of her multifaceted career.

“Harriet is not only a committed and skilled librarian with extensive scholarly achievements to her name,” writes another supporter, “she is also a caring and generous colleague, always attentive to the needs of students and faculty and always prepared to link arms in the fight for justice.”

Harriet has chosen an extraordinary level of engagement within academic librarianship and has set a standard of excellence for our profession that deserves to be recognized and celebrated. The members of the Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards Committee are delighted to present the 2014-2015 OCUFA Academic Librarianship Award to Dr. Harriet Sonne de Torrens.