Information Services at the iSchool

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF INFORMATION
It is easy to fall into the use of clichés when talking about ‘information’ and ‘services’, so pervasive are those words and concepts today. Yet when we put the words together as ‘Information Services’ at the Faculty of Information and surround them with people and resources of all description, they take on powerful significance in elucidating why we are at the iSchool. The words move beyond concepts to action and engagement, with each other and with the world.

Information Services is committed to providing the highest quality services and resources to enhance the teaching, learning and research endeavours of the iSchool community. We do this in a number of ways: by having outstanding people at your service, by providing comfortable and inviting private and collaborative physical work environments, by maintaining state-of-the-art information technology infrastructure, by providing access to extensive scholarly resources, by extending the ethos of the Faculty to the digital environment, and by building community. Our goals are those of the Faculty and the University; we are active partners in their many successes and occasional failures.

We are all members of the Faculty of Information as well as participants in many different communities: the faculty community, the student community, communities of theory and communities of practice, the Ph.D. student community, and the masters students community.

Information Services provides the intellectual, ethical, social, physical, and digital linkages that help build a strong and vibrant iSchool community. Welcome, be part of this community.
It’s fair to say that Information Services (IS), as it looks today, would not exist without Joe Cox. He began his career in the Faculty as a cataloguing librarian, in what he called a traditional library. Today, he identifies as both a librarian and an information professional. Under his direction, the Faculty of Information’s library has transformed into a collaborative, technology-rich information centre that supports the ways we learn about and understand the world.

Of all the resources IS provides, Joe believes a sense of community is most important. His hope is that the Inforum is “a place that develops those close relationships that give our profession its unique status, its unique attributes, and how it interacts with information.” He also wants the Inforum to be “a model of what information can do in society.” He believes technology is integral in forming this community.

The transition from print to digital is a priority for Joe, who suggests this is the defining issue facing the profession in the 21st century. While he admits this is no easy task, he aims for IS to be “experimental” and “edgy” and is willing to “push the envelope a bit to try new things and make the jump one that others can follow.” His vision is one where Information Services can act as a bridge between our heritage and the challenges facing the next generation of information professionals.
Information Services Unit

The Information Services unit at the Faculty of Information consists of the following specialized teams: Research & Reference Services, Public Services, Collections & Resources, Instruction, and Information Technology & Systems.

We work together to anticipate, engage in, and respond to the research, teaching, and learning needs of iSchool students and faculty. Our chief goal is to provide high quality services to our users.

Part of providing great service means knowing the members of our community and connecting with them on a daily basis. Interactions at the Information Desk are a great opportunity for us to get to know you and for you to get to know us.

We are resource people, mentors, teachers — here to assist members of the iSchool community with their information and technology needs. Service is our focus. Ask us anything!

“In the 2010 Information Services User Survey, staff attitude and competence were the top two things students “liked best.”

“The staff are some of the nicest, most genuinely helpful people I have ever encountered in my university career . . . I cannot stress enough how they have contributed to making my experience here positive.”

Student respondent, 2010 IS survey
Learning Spaces

Research in education indicates that learning spaces should be designed to support multiple types of learning activities and enable connections and collaboration within and beyond the classroom (Oblinger, 2005).

The Inforum serves as the information hub and gathering place for students, faculty, and staff at the Faculty of Information. The vision for the Inforum is shaped by Information Services’ mission to respond to users’ experiential, research, and learning needs by providing a space that facilitates collaborative face-to-face interactions, individual study, and digitally-mediated interactions within an academic environment.

The Inforum, located on the fourth and fifth floors of the iSchool, offers its users four group study rooms; one electronic classroom; one lecture/studio space; a print collection with over 128,000 volumes; a café-inspired collaborative area with a SMARTBoard, computer, modular furniture and a coffee/espresso machine. We offer five clusters of four collaborative workstations, an open area with 35 modular tables and chairs to promote user interaction and facilitate collaborative work, and two public workstations. Students also have access to quiet study rooms and individual study carrels for focused individual work.

The Inforum is a place for research, learning, and connecting. Ultimately, it is about building community: “I like that there is a feeling of community, and that even if I walk in alone, I will ultimately know someone… It feels intimate” (Student respondent, 2010 IS survey).

Throughout the year, Information Services offers in-class instruction and workshops exclusively for iSchool students, faculty, and staff, with the aim of providing a solid foundation for practical application of course content and theoretical concepts. These workshops explore the role of and the dynamic information landscape in professional and academic contexts.

Incoming graduate students benefit from our Orientation Instructional Series, which introduces them to academic life at the Faculty. In these workshops students become familiar with the individuals, resources, facilities, and technologies that support academic studies at the iSchool. The workshops are highly recommended by faculty, as students acquire skills and information crucial to their academic success. The Fall and Winter Instructional Series build on the groundwork laid by the Orientation Instructional Series, the iSchool curriculum, and professional and academic events. The workshops in these series provide participants with an opportunity to engage with emergent technologies and to become proficient users of various applications. In the 2009-2010 academic year, IS staff created and delivered 48 unique instructional workshops for students, faculty, and staff at the iSchool.

We endeavour to meet our community’s instructional needs by offering relevant workshops and implementing pedagogical methods that complement individual learning styles.

A listing of our instructional workshops is available on our web site at www.ischool.utoronto.ca/inforum-technology/workshops.

“Innovative Instruction

“The iSchool’s instructional series is fantastic. I have benefited enormously from the workshops on research, RefWorks, and Photoshop.”

Student respondent, 2010 IS survey
Public Services

Our physical and virtual service points are staffed by the Information Services team, who are committed to providing pleasant, prompt, and proactive access to our resources and facilities, along with the services and consultations that enable people to put them to good use.

The Inforum is also a space for exhibitions and displays of student and faculty work, and a gathering place for knowledge-sharing events such the Student Job & Networking Fair, and other professional development experiences.

Our borrowing services offer everything from laptops, iPads, and e-book readers, to books and extension cords. Our electronic collections are accessible from anywhere.

Information Services staff work closely with iSchool professors and instructors to make course readings easily accessible to students. Whether it is through links to full-text e-resources embedded in electronic reading lists, or through the Course Reserves Collection (a physical collection of course-specific materials which may be requested at the Inforum Information Desk) we put required and recommended readings at students’ fingertips.

Research & Reference Services

Information Services provides research and reference services to all members of the iSchool community. We specialize in graduate-level research and help users access the resources and facilities available at the Inforum and in the University of Toronto Library system.

IS information specialists offer one-on-one consultations to help students, faculty, and staff working on research projects, publications, papers, and assignments. We help users develop effective search strategies, including how to use the various print and electronic resources within the catalogue and individual databases.

To take advantage of this service, drop by the Information Desk, call, or email us. We navigate through the complex information terrain of scholarly research to help members of the iSchool community succeed in their research and studies.

I like that the Inforum community is relatively small and that the staff make an effort to know students’ names. I always feel welcome at the Inforum.”

Student respondent, 2010 IS survey
Each year, Information Services conducts a survey among iSchool students to assess the services we provide and identify ways to improve. The survey is a vital touchstone for strategic IS planning.

In the spring, iSchool students share their opinions via an online survey that seeks to elicit their feedback on IS staff, services, facilities, and resources. Each year, survey responses have indicated a high level of overall satisfaction with IS. Our knowledgeable, friendly staff, diverse work spaces, and extensive collections and resources consistently rank among the things that students like best about Information Services. We appreciate the positive comments—they reinforce what students think is important about our work.

Student survey responses also point to areas for improvement. Each year, following the survey, the IS team puts together an action plan to address students’ concerns. This plan includes direct responses to students’ concerns by outlining the specific steps we will take to address priority items identified in the survey. Student input is critical in shaping the work we do.

Find this year’s complete survey report on our web site at www.ischool.utoronto.ca/inforum-technology
“It is also amazing to be connected to one of the best [iSchool] print and electronic collections in North America.”

Student respondent, 2010 IS survey

Collections & Resources

Information Services provides students, faculty and researchers with access to resources in all aspects of information studies and museum studies. From its inception as a research-level collection for archival studies and library and information science, the collection has grown to cover critical information studies, cultural heritage preservation, digital curation, information systems and design, knowledge management, and museum studies. Our collection is the only one in Canada dedicated entirely to these areas of study.

We collect works in all formats, including print and audio-visual resources, the latest monographs, graduate theses, and highly regarded journals in the discipline. Our print collection has grown to over 128,000 volumes, and top electronic journals, databases, and reference tools in the Information discipline can be accessed through the University of Toronto Libraries’ electronic resources gateway.

The Inforum is home to the Subject Analysis Systems (SAS) collection; we are the only North American clearinghouse for classification schemes, subject heading systems and thesauri published in the English language.

We also purchase literature geared towards practitioners, which alumni and working professionals may borrow from the collection. Students and faculty may use University of Toronto libraries and major academic and research institutions across the city to supplement our collection.

To discover what’s new at the Inforum, or to suggest a new title, check out our new titles at www.ischool.utoronto.ca/inforum-technology/collections/new-titles
Information Technology & Systems

Information Services provides expertise in the development and use of information technology for the Faculty. We support and assist all members of the iSchool in their studies, research endeavours, and daily work.

Our core competencies within this area reside in web and Internet-related solutions; server administration and management; and technology support, including desktop, wireless, mobile and network related tasks. Our knowledge in these areas allows us to help the iSchool community navigate the ever-changing landscape of emergent technologies.

We recently activated four new wireless access points to provide more coverage and network density for users who bring their laptops, mobile phones, netbooks, or iPads to the iSchool.

We work on an ongoing basis to improve our information infrastructure, implement technology upgrades, and acquire equipment that facilitates learning, research, and experimentation.

Through our innovation, we strive to position the Faculty at the forefront of information technology trends.

“We have excellent resources including books and software programs . . . the commitment to up to date technology is fantastic.”

Student respondent, 2010 IS survey
Leading Research

Scholarship is important to the Information Services team. Cultivating collaboration, professional development, new practice and policy, our practitioners actively engage in scholarship in order to understand and tackle the trends and issues of the profession. Recent research topics include:

- An exploration of how students are dealing with the challenges of utilizing mobile phones for research and collaboration in academic libraries— institutions where guidelines and policies often restrict their use (Kathleen Scheaffer, MIS, Outreach and Instructional Services Coordinator, in collaboration with Professor Rhonda McEwen)

- Investigating how North American libraries deal with the challenge of cataloguing backlogs and the systems put in place to help solve this problem (Elisa Sze, MIS, Collections Coordinator, in collaboration with Professor Lynne Howarth and Ph.D. Candidate Leslie Moor)

- A longitudinal survey of Faculty of Information students’ experiences throughout their education, which has since expanded to include other Information programs across the world (Nalini Singh, MIS, Reference and Public Services Coordinator, in collaboration with Professors Joan Cherry and Wendy Duff)

We believe engaging in academic research makes Information Services stronger. Whether it is looking at ways to understand the social implications of new media, evaluating how libraries are balancing print and electronic serials collections, or finding the link between information seeking and graffiti, our practitioners participate in ground-breaking research, which impacts Information Services as well as information organizations around the world.

“I don’t want to stagnate in my knowledge. I want to know what is happening now and always feel like I am contributing to the field.”

Elisa Sze, Collections Coordinator