Proposal to establish the Coach House Institute (CHI) as an EDU:C
Faculty of Information, University of Toronto
December 14, 2009

We propose to establish the Coach House Institute (CHI) as an EDU:C in the Faculty of Information (“iSchool”) at the University of Toronto. The CHI grows out of and builds upon the University’s long-standing McLuhan Program in Technology and Culture. The CHI will preserve the McLuhan’s Programs historical focus on technology and culture, but—given the transformative nature and implications of digital and information technologies for education, scholarship, the university, and society—concentrate on broad-ranging issues involving digital technology and culture.

A) Background

The CHI was originally envisioned in the iSchool’s Stepping UP Academic Plan, in which it proposed to establish a research institute to serve as “an intensive, interdisciplinary and interdivisional laboratory” to explore the transformative implications of “accelerating developments in information technologies.”

In 2005 the University granted the iSchool an Academic Initiative Fund (AIF) award to establish the Institute under the name “The McLuhan School.” It later became evident that the direct association of the name ‘McLuhan’ with this new Institute would be problematic, so it was decided to change the name. The CHI was established, on July 1, 2008 as an EDU:D.

B) Proposal

The CHI will be transitioned from its status of EDU:D into an EDU:C research centre, in accordance with UofT policies and guidelines. This move will: (i) recognize the broad mandate of the CHI; (ii) facilitate its governance, management and oversight within governing UofT practices; and (iii) enable the CHI to make a significant contribution to the Faculty’s intellectual presence within the University of Toronto.

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http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/Assets/Provost+Digital+Assets/Provost/guide100.pdf
As an EDU:C, the CHI will not be authorized to make primary teaching appointments, but may hold cross-appointed faculty.

C) Vision and Mandate

Society urgently needs to debate fundamental societal issues raised by the development of digital media. How do we want to live in the future they proffer? What will be the character of institutions, the role of culture, the fate of public & private, the nature of humanity? What if anything will inspire, in a reconfigured society? How will discourse, authority and expertise be forged?

The CHI’s aim is not to conduct disciplinary or interdisciplinary research on digital media per se, nor directly on the practices they enable. Instead, the CHI will probe, challenge and refashion the concepts and assumptions that underlie digital media, and reflexively apply the resulting understanding to subsequent intellectual work. Methodological breadth and reflexive epistemology are mandated by the fact that digital media affect all knowledge and inquiry; it is not an isolable, restricted subject matter. So it can freely embrace change, the CHI will function as a “skunkworks” for innovative researchers to design, critique, prototype and explore our digitally-mediated future.

D) Administrative Structure and Governance

In accordance with accepted UofT practice, governance structures for the CHI are to be in keeping with the University’s guidance on the governance of EDU:Cs. ³ Within the governance and administrative structure of the CHI, there will be four main components: (i) Dean, (ii) Director, (iii) Executive Committee, and (iv) Advisory Board.

D-1) Dean

As part of the administrative structure of the Faculty of Information, the CHI will report to its Dean. The Dean is responsible for the establishment of the Institute and periodic reviews (at least every seven years) of its mandate and direction. The Dean is responsible for ensuring that the Director operates the Institute in a manner appropriate to the mandate of the Institute and in line with University of Toronto policies and procedures. The Dean will receive annual reports from the Director, via the Executive Committee. The Dean or designate sits ex officio on the Advisory Board.

³ See fn. 1.
D-2) Director

The Director of the Coach House Institute will have responsibility for the planning, finances, and operations of the Institute, and will discharge such responsibilities for the good of the Institute, the Faculty of Information, the University as a whole, and other local, national and international communities, in consultation with the Executive Committee and Advisory Board. The Director is appointed by the Dean on the advice of the Executive Committee (excluding the incumbent Director) for a period of five years, renewable once.

D-3) Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is responsible for overseeing medium and long-term strategic planning of the Institute. It will approve the annual budget, the strategic plan, and the annual program of activity. On an annual basis it will receive a financial report, an activity report, and an outcome & impact report (see benchmarks below), to ensure that financial and academic activities are carried out responsibly and appropriately. It will also receive and approve a formal plan for the coming year. It consists of five faculty members drawn from the University of Toronto, of which at least 2 shall be from the Faculty of Information and 1 from the College of St. Michael's University. Members of the Executive Committee will be appointed by the Dean on the advice of the Director for staggered terms of up to 3 years; such appointments will be renewable. The Dean serves as or appoints the chair of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will meet a minimum of once per year at the call of the Chair.

D-4) Advisory Board

Although the Institute will be housed within the Faculty of Information, the nature of its mandate will mean that extensive collaboration will be essential if the Institute is to succeed; therefore, additional advice will be required. The CHI Director will chair and be advised by an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will meet a minimum of once per year at the call of the Chair. The Advisory Board will be responsible for providing commentary and advice to both the Director and the Dean on possible directions for the direction of the Institute. The Advisory Board will consist of up to 15 (with a minimum of 7) members from a variety of disciplines; the Dean will be an ex officio member of the Advisory Board. Members of the Advisory Board may come from within the University of Toronto and from outside, although it is anticipated that at least 5 members will come from the Faculty. They will be appointed by the Dean on the advice of the Director and the Executive Committee for staggered terms not exceeding four years in length.

E) Resources

The CHI will be funded through base funding originally deriving from the 2005 “McLuhan School” AIF award.
F) Reporting Requirements

The Director will present an annual report to the Dean and to the Faculty of Information Council detailing the previous year’s activities in fulfilling the institute’s mandate, and financial reports detailing the overall financial picture of the institute, and details on the operations of the CHI during the reporting period. This report will have been presented to and accepted by the Executive Committee.

The annual report will included documentation and performance metrics towards appropriate benchmarks, both qualitative and quantitative, including but not limited to:

1. Visitors, meetings, workshops, and other events discussing issues of information and society. These events will involve members of the Faculty of Information (including students, post-doctoral fellows, researchers, and faculty members), other members of the University of Toronto and the wider intellectual community.

2. Academically and intellectually visible CHI online web resources for students and faculty interested in issues of information and society (particularly in the larger iSchool community).

3. Partnerships with other UofT departments, Faculties, and interdivisional Institutes on jointly sponsored activities involving role of digital ideas and technologies in important academic and societal issues.

4. Successful fund-raising efforts (both research grants and advancement opportunities);

5. International recognition as a leading research site for the consideration of issues having to do with digital technology and culture.

6. Evidence of the training of high-quality personnel through the participation of students and post-doctoral fellows in CHI activities.

7. Other documentation and evidence appropriate to CHI activities.

F) Review

Assuming approval of this proposal, the Dean will call for an operational and strategic review of the Institute in accordance with the University of Toronto Policy on the Establishment and Review of Academic Programs and Units at the end of its first five years as an EDU:C, during the 2013–14 academic year.