EDU:C Status for ATRC

As you will be aware, the ATRC is a strength of the iSchool (Faculty of Information) and this is the result of the drive and initiative of its Principal Investigator in Inclusive Design, Ms. Jutta Treviranus. The ATRC currently exists as an 'informal' centre within the iSchool. This informal structure makes it difficult to bound its activities and to manage it as a discrete research and innovation centre. We have been considering a variety of ways of managing the ATRC better, ensuring that its financial arrangements and human resources are bounded and transparent, and how its research activities might be better integrated into the Faculty. We believe that this can best be done by establishing the ATRC as an EDU:C within the Faculty of Information. Attached is the initial draft of the terms of reference for an EDU:C to establish the ATRC as the Inclusive Design Institute.

EDU status for the ATRC is, I think, the best way to proceed: it establishes Inclusive Design as an ongoing priority for the Faculty's research interests; it clarifies accountability mechanisms; it brings the ATRC in line with University policies, a state which it has not always been able to achieve; and it makes it clear that it is a research centre as opposed to a service unit which happens to have applied research at its core.

It is our hope that in establishing this EDU:C that an increasing number of Faculty will collaborate on grant getting and in research with the IDI/ATRC. A view shared both by the Dean and by the Director of the ATRC.

Under the Dean’s Report we will propose that ATRC be established as the IDI/ATRC and I ask that you support this recommendation.

Seamus Ross
Dean and Professor
Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

3 September 2009

9 September 2009: Note on Revised Documentation

Following further reflection Ms Jutta Treviranus and I agreed that as the work of the IDI/ATRC is heavily embedded in its community it is essential that the new Institute have a conduit to its stakeholder community. We introduced a Stakeholder General Assembly (see page 6) to enable this interaction and added four new benchmarks (see page 7) to improve the granularity at which we measure the work of this new Assembly and the IDI/ATRC itself.
Proposal to establish the Inclusive Design Institute / Adaptive Technology Research Centre (IDI/ATRC) as an EDU:C at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

9 September 2009

Background

In 2005, the Adaptive Technology Resource Centre (ATRC) moved its operations from the University of Toronto Library’s Resource Centre for Academic Technology (RCAT) into the (then-)Faculty of Information Studies to operate as a service and research unit within the Faculty and to help fulfill the Faculty’s plans to develop expertise in a wide variety of socially-engaged information-related disciplines. The ATRC at the time was already an internationally recognized centre of expertise on barrier-free access to information technology. Since its inception in 1994, the ATRC had combined service (to students, staff and faculty at UofT as well as to the community at large), education and awareness on inclusive design practices, and multi-sector, cross disciplinary research and development to advance the area of inclusive design of emerging information and communication technology.

The move to the Faculty of Information afforded an excellent opportunity to enhance the research expertise of the ATRC while placing it firmly in a highly-regarded teaching and research unit within the University and allow the field of inclusive design to have a research ‘home’ among the divisions of the University, rather than having it distributed.

The ATRC has been a massive success. Between 2005 and 2009, under the leadership of Ms. Jutta Treviranus, Senior Research Associate, the ATRC has had a remarkable track record in identifying and pursuing research opportunities and the funding to go along with it. For example, the Mellon Foundation has provided multi-million dollar grants for the FLUID, Fluid Engage and Decapod Projects, and, most recently, the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Research Fund- Research Excellence and Research Infrastructure Programs have funded significant multi-institutional proposals to be housed at the ATRC to develop inclusive design research expertise.

With the growth of the ATRC, the time has come for formalize the ATRC’s activities in the Faculty of Information and to provide it with a secure ‘home’ within the University of Toronto that will strengthen its status, formalize the presence of inclusive design as an area of research expertise, clarify the ATRC’s governance, and develop a clear accountability framework within the Faculty of Information and the University of Toronto more broadly.
The essence of this proposal is to turn the existing ATRC into the Inclusive Design Institute/Adaptive Technology Research Centre as an Extra-Departmental Unit within the Faculty of Information.

**Vision and Mandate**

The Inclusive Design Institute/Adaptive Technology Research Centre (IDI/ATRC) has as its primary and overarching goal to perform research dedicated to helping ensure that emerging information technology and practices are designed inclusively from the earliest stages of development. Inclusive design as a concept enables and supports the participation of the full range of human diversity.

The IDI/ATRC supports open standards – as well as open access and open source wherever possible – to distribute the results of its research as widely as possible and to encourage broad participation in its initiative through its collaborative work. All the research of the IDI/ATRC supports the principle that people with disabilities should be both producers and consumers of information, knowledge and culture.

The IDI/ATRC evolves and clarifies the role of the existing Adaptive Technology Resource Centre (which currently does not hold EDU status), defines its operational and governance status, and places it more clearly within the research interests of the Faculty of Information. It provides a structure within which researchers from a variety of disciplines and other institutions can collaborate to meet the institute’s goals in a coordinated fashion, allows a clear conduit for principal investigators to access resources in building research profiles, and provides research and funding opportunities for qualified PhD students in the Faculty of Information to perform their research in the field of inclusive design. In the longer term, it will provide a ‘home’ for the development of inclusive design as a future area of faculty specialization within the Faculty of Information.

The IDI/ATRC has as a core part of its mandate the requirement to be fully self-funding.

**The Inclusive Design Institute and University of Toronto Strategic Planning**

IDI will support the University of Toronto’s key academic goals as outlined in its academic planning documents:

1) Provide an outstanding and unique student experience

   - PhD students will be able to perform their thesis-related research with the assistance and support of existing researchers and help shape the nature of future research grants as the academic field of inclusive design develops;
- Faculty supervisors will gain access to a range of equipment and experienced staff in the development of top-flight research proposals for which they will be principal investigators, thereby allowing greater direct student involvement at all levels into ongoing groundbreaking research.

2) Meet scholarly challenges through interdisciplinary, interdepartmental, interdivisional and other collaborations

- The IDI/ATRC is explicitly designed as multidisciplinary. Even though its home is the Faculty of Information, the existing ATRC structure has brought in interest from numerous Departments and Faculties across the University of Toronto and around the world, and has recently been the successful applicant in a major (over $12 million) multi-institutional CFI/ORF-RI grant.

3) Clearly link graduate and professional academic programs to strong research experience

- The current ATRC has an excellent record of developing projects and attracting research funds and infrastructure. By mandating greater linkages with the Faculty, the existing excellence of the Centre can be harnessed to the Faculty of Information’s strategic research plans and its faculty involvement therein.

4) Scholarship and academic programs will be relevant to and have impact on the broader community

- By its mandate, the IDI/ATRC has as its goal the spread of concepts relating supporting diversity and inclusivity at all levels of society. Put simply, inclusive design as an ideal is meant to have significant impact throughout the community. - The ATRC has played a pivotal role in drafting current legislation mandating accessibility in Ontario and the IDI/ATRC will act as a much-needed centre of expertise to support the sustainable implementation of accessible practices. This same legislation is being considered at the federal level.

5) Activities reflect U of T’s local and global community.

- The Adaptive Technology Resource Centre already has numerous international grants and is an active participant in national and multinational groups involved with inclusive design.

**Adaptive Technology Resource Centre**

The existing ATRC will be transitioned from its status of unincorporated resource centre into an EDU:C research centre modeled on University of Toronto policies and guidelines.
Activities unrelated to research programs by faculty members or research associates will be spun off (in the cases of services offered) or completed and then wound down in favour of the development of a robust centre acting on behalf of principal investigators.

Programs

The IDI/ATRC will form the basis of a developing specialization in Information. Over time, it is hoped that the existence of the institute will aid in the recruiting of outstanding faculty and staff.

Administrative Structure and Governance

Within the governance and administrative structure of the IDI/ATRC, there will be six main components: Dean, Director and Research Coordinator, Principal Investigators, Executive Committee, Advisory Board and Community General Assembly.

Dean

The Dean of the Faculty of Information is responsible for the establishment of the Institute and periodic reviews (at least every seven years) of its mandate and direction. He is responsible for ensuring that the Director and Research Coordinator is operating the institute as a fully self-funded operation. He receives routine reports from both the Director and Research Coordinator and has overall governing authority over the institute. The Dean or designate chairs both the Executive Committee and the Advisory Board, who assist the Dean in the fulfillment of the Dean’s oversight responsibility.

Director and Research Coordinator

The Director and Research Coordinator is responsible for the overall operation of the institute, including its financial and human resource management, subject to the overall direction of the Dean. The Director and Research Coordinator is responsible for the following:

- Facilitating the identification of trends in the field of inclusive design and the development of plans to address them;
- identifying and contacting faculty members who would work as PIs and assist them in developing research plans that meet the strategic goals of the institute and of the University;
- identifying funding opportunities and developing, or assisting in the development of, grant proposals’
- coordinating the various research projects run by the institute;
• working with the Dean and Advisory Board in ensuring a clear flow of information about the institute’s activities;
• ensuring that the IDI/ATRC maintains an income stream that meets its costs, generates overheads, and allows for appropriate growth;
• managing the human resources of the IDI/ATRC in accordance with University of Toronto policies and guidelines;
• providing a detailed financial, human resource and activity report to the Dean and the Faculty Council twice per year;
• advocating for inclusive design in the community; and,
• acting as PI on some projects.

Principal Investigators / Faculty supervisors

Each research project run by the IDI/ATRC will have an assigned principal investigator. Their responsibilities are laid out by University of Toronto policies on principal investigators. It is hoped that their projects will allow for the funding of their doctoral students for their thesis work wherever possible.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is responsible for ensuring that budgetary decisions of the institute are carried out responsibly and appropriately. Chaired by the Dean, it consists of the Director and Research Coordinator and five individuals drawn from the Faculty of Information and from the institute’s staff and principal investigators, as well as the Chair of the Stakeholder General Assembly. It is responsible for reviewing and overseeing agreements with other institutions that will aid the institute in meeting its multidisciplinary and multi-institutional mandate. The Executive Committee will meet a minimum of three times per year at the call of the Chair.

Advisory Board

Although the Institute’s primary affiliation will be with the Faculty of Information, the nature of its mandate will mean that extensive collaboration will be the only means by which the Institute will succeed; therefore, additional advice will be required. The Director will report to and be advised by an Advisory Board chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Information and consisting of between four and six other individuals appointed by the Dean from the Faculty of Information, active Principal Investigators, representatives of the University’s and Faculty’s administrative staff, and the elected Chair and one elected member of the Stakeholder General Assembly. The Advisory Board will meet a minimum of two times per year at the call of the Chair. The Advisory Board is responsible for providing commentary and advice to both the Director and Research Coordinator and the Dean on the
general state of inclusive design and adaptive technology, promising developing areas of research, possible opportunities to enhance the scope and develop new strengths in the field, and bring together active researchers and community members in a forum for the exchange of ideas.

**Stakeholder General Assembly**

Acting on the principle “nothing about us without us”, the IDI/ATRC will have a body specifically dedicated to inclusion of the communities to which its research is directed. The Assembly will be composed of at least 15 members of the community, from whom one will be elected as Chair. The Chair will serve as a member of both the Executive Committee and the Advisory Board. An additional member will be elected to serve on the Advisory Board. The Stakeholder General Assembly’s mandate is to provide a cooperative voice to the relevant communities as research projects are developed and proceed to assist Principal Investigators in ensuring that their research is effective and meaningful and achieves the maximum impact. The Stakeholder General Assembly will in no way limit the academic freedom of researchers or the IDI/ATRC more generally.

**Reporting Requirements**

The Director and Research Coordinator will present biannual reports to the Dean and to the Faculty of Information Council detailing the previous year’s activities in fulfilling the institute’s mandate, as well as financial reports detailing the overall financial picture of the institute, and details on each of the research projects underway during the reporting period.

The Dean may at any time require a report on the status of the institute or of any of its individual projects.

**Benchmarks, Measures of Success**

The institute will develop key performance indicators to assist in the evaluation of its effectiveness. Among them will be

- Number of current and completed projects
- Number of Faculty principal investigators
- Number of Faculty of Information faculty members acting as principal investigators
- Amount of research funding secured
- Number of PhD students funded through institute research opportunities
- Number of academic papers produced by institute or as a direct result of research performed at the institute
- Amount of funding provided to PhD students
• Number of student opportunities available in research projects
• Number of patents and other intellectual property rights secured
• Evidence of take-up of research results and ideas by public bodies
• Number of collaborative institutions and partners
  - number of community organizations actively engaged in the research and research planning with priority given to organizations identified annually by the Stakeholder General Assembly
• Number of developers of emerging information and communication systems engaged in research and implementation of research with priority given to the organizations identified annually by the Stakeholder General Assembly,
• Number of adoptions of inclusive design principles, tools, components and software systems in policies, practices and ICT systems with priority given to adoptions identified annually by the Stakeholder General Assembly,
• Achievement of targets in advancing the inclusive design of ICT systems and practices locally, nationally and internationally as identified annually by the Stakeholder General Assembly.

In short, however, success will be measured by the transition of the existing centre into an institute that will be highly regarded as an important locus of research in inclusive design that involves faculty members and students performing groundbreaking research in this important field, while at the same time managing its financial and human resources in an effective, fully self-funded manner.

Transition of ATRC into IDI/ATRC

The Faculty and the ATRC acknowledge that the move to a fully self-funded EDU will not happen immediately, but must happen as soon as possible. In addition, the ATRC’s historical role as a University of Toronto service should be spun off either into its own centrally-funded service or into some other arrangement that does not require either the Faculty or the institute to offer central services for the University of Toronto as a whole.

The Director and Research Coordinator will direct the staff of the institute to work with the Dean and Assistant Dean, Administration of the Faculty of Information to move the institute into a position where human resources can be most effectively and ethically managed in the framework of a self-funding unit, while removing financial liabilities associated from the Faculty of Information to the institute itself wherever possible. In addition, the Faculty will offer some support in the transition from a cost centre for the Faculty into a self-sufficient entity.
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.