To: FIS Council  
From: Brian Cantwell Smith, Dean  
Date: March 18, 2008  

Re: Faculty Name Change

It is proposed that the following motion be approved at the Faculty Council meeting of March 25, 2008:

That Council recommend to the Academic Board that the name of the Faculty of Information Studies be changed to the Faculty of Information, effective June 30, 2008.

A • Rationale

Reasons for shortening our name include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. No prominent academic units (Faculties or departments) have ‘Studies’ in their names. The word ‘Studies’ is intrinsically weak. It suggests a Faculty unsure of its status and place, rather than one that is confident.

2. Rather, the standard custom is for academic units to have names designating the field of study that the unit addresses, not (at a meta-level) the study of that field. Thus in each of the following cases we use the names on the left, not the names on the right:

- Faculty of Medicine not Faculty of Medical Studies
- Faculty of Law not Faculty of Legal Studies
- Faculty of Architecture not Faculty of Architectural Studies
- Physics Department not Department of Physical Studies
- Department of Philosophy not Department of Philosophical Studies

3. We have been struggling to integrate Museum Studies into a “larger” FIS, and therefore to change the denotation and connotation of the familiar name, in informal speech, in alumni/ae and student councils, etc. We would like our name, in people’s imaginations, to encompass a wider range of people, activities, programs, and groups. We have plans to continue to enlarge—including opening or integrating our graduate programs with one or more undergraduate efforts. It will be vastly easier for the new name “Faculty of Information” immediately to connote the entire expanded academic unit, than to change the connotation of the term ‘FIS,’ which has become entrenched in imaginations and habits.

4. Within our local community, our Faculty is known as ‘FIS.’ This acronym has no broader connotation, however; nor does it mean anything. While it has served as a proper name for our particular unit, it neither conveys anything to someone who doesn’t know us already, nor locates us as a member of any broader movement. In addition, the acronym has other meanings, even at UofT (where it is also used to name the “Financial Information System” component of the administrative computing network).1

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1When I arrived at UofT, almost everyone I spoke to around the rest of UofT assumed that ‘FIS’ meant the financial system. I had to explain that it was also the name of a Faculty.
5. The new name will signify our membership in the emerging community of Information Schools ("i-schools"). There is a movement within this group to adopt such simple names as *Information School*, *School of Information*, etc., in order to establish Information Schools as a type—i.e., a cohesive and recognizable unit for granting agencies, patterns of allegiance, rating systems, public discussions, etc. For example:

   a. The University of Michigan's i-school is simply called the *School of Information*.
   b. The University of Washington similarly uses the simple name *The Information School*.
   c. In 2006 UC Berkeley changed its name from the "School of Information Management and Systems (SIMS)" to the simpler *School of Information*.

Of the 19 Universities forming the Information School Caucus, just 4 others continue to have 'studies' in their names. Several of these 4 are also contemplating name changes—to the simpler "Information School" or "School of Information." Among other reasons, one consideration driving this movement is that since these schools are increasingly known as information schools, it makes sense to have the formal designation reflect universal behaviour.

**B • Discussion**

A number of additional considerations explain the context of this proposed name change:

1. If our name becomes “Faculty of Information,” we will no longer be known by an acronym ("FIS" or "FI" or anything else), but simply as *Information*. Note that we all currently say the following sorts of things:

   a. “She is an associate professor in Nursing.”
   b. “Architecture is having a party at 4:30 tomorrow.”
   c. “He is studying Medicine.” (i.e., the word used to name the Faculty is the same word that we use to designate the object of a student's study)
   d. “We need to include representatives from Engineering, Pharmacy, and Arts & Science.”

If our name were “Faculty of Information,” then similar things would be said about us:

   a. “She is an associate professor in Information.”
   b. “Information is having a party at 4:30 tomorrow.”
   c. “He is studying Information.”
   d. “We need to include representatives from Information, Law, and Arts & Science.”

This practice would have the substantial merit that people would know what we are, what we stand for, etc.

2. Faculty names have no direct impact on the names of programs or degrees. So changing our name in this way will not have any impact on any of our courses or degrees. Down the road—perhaps in conjunction with the on-going curriculum review—we may want to consider changing the name of the MISt degree to the simpler *Master of Information*. Approval for such a change, however, is an entirely different process.

   The 3-letter prefix 'FIS' with which some (not all!) of our courses are identified is yet another, independent issue and problem. That too, is something we may want to review—especially given point #3, above. But again, any change to Faculty course prefixes would come out of a separate process.

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2http://www.ischools.org/
3. Some have asked what will happen to our logo—an abstract representation of the 3-letter combination ‘FIS’. As it happens, the University (at the highest level) has made a decision to eliminate distinct logos for individual Faculties, departments, and programs—and to bring everyone under a single “graphical brand.” You will note that this memo is printed with an indication of this new brand on its masthead.

4. Some graduating students have asked how they would refer to the Faculty on their resumes. The answer is: however they like—they could refer to the Faculty using either the new or the old name, as they see fit.

C • Conclusion
For these and a variety of similar reasons, I believe the time has come to put this change into effect. Although the new name may initially seem odd, I am confident that it will very quickly become so natural that it will seem odd that we were ever called anything else. I will therefore be pleased to present the motion as spelled out above.

Brian Cantwell Smith
Dean and Professor, Faculty of Information Studies