Master of Information — Curriculum Framework

Faculty Council — June 17, 2008

I • Preamble

The Faculty of Information is developing a new curriculum for a (renamed) Master of Information (MI) degree, intended to replace the current Master of Information Studies (MIST). We plan to complete development of the curriculum and to take it through UofT governance during 2008–09. It is expected to be launched in the fall of 2009.

This document presents the overarching Framework within which details of the new curriculum will be developed. The framework is designed to enable the Faculty to develop and adjust specific course structures flexibly, quickly and appropriately, in response to the rapidly changing field of information practices. The curriculum itself is designed to meet the following goals:

1. To provide a high-quality education able to serve as a sound basis for research and professional practice in a wide range of information professions; and

2. To provide students with a blend of theoretical learning, skill development, and engaged, participatory practice through a range of instructive and experiential learning environments.

The curriculum is designed under the following assumptions:

3. ALA accreditation will be sought for the whole curriculum; and

4. In its submissions to the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS), the Faculty has identified itself in terms of the following seven fields: (i) information; (ii) library and information science; (iii) archives and records management; (iv) critical information studies; (v) museum studies; (vi) knowledge management and information management; and (vii) information systems, media, and design. Other fields may be added in the future, as Faculty strengths expand.

To move this curriculum development forward, it is proposed:

“That the Master of Information Curriculum Framework presented in §II be approved.”

II • Curriculum Framework

A. Requirements

1. To obtain a Master of Information (MI) degree, a student must complete an approved path.

2. A path is the full set of courses that a student completes in order to graduate.

3. Paths are approved by the Programs Committee in either of two ways:

   Continuing students registered in the fall of 2009 will be given an option of: (i) completing their degrees under the requirements of the curriculum under which they were originally admitted; or (ii) of meeting the requirements of the new curriculum.

   The proposal to be approved by Council includes the text of §II with the exception of all footnotes. Footnotes should be considered commentary, specific to this document only, intended to explain the intent and interpretation of the proposal. A Guidelines to the Master of Information is also being prepared, to serve as a regularly updated summary of operational procedures, recommendations, and best practices with respect to the implementation of the Curriculum.

   Paths are unordered, but fine-grained. Students who take 15 half-courses (or 7.5 FCE) in common but differ on their 16th (0.5 FCE) complete different paths. Students who take the same 16 half-courses (8.0 FCE) in different orders complete the same path.
a. By satisfying criteria specified in pre-approved path approval templates (templates); or
b. On an individual basis.4

4. To be approved, paths must meet the following conditions:
   a. Include the three core courses (INF101–INF103) and the Information Workshop (INF104);
   b. Contain a total of 8.0 full course equivalents (FCE);5 and
   c. Constitute a coherent educational program, given the student’s background and experience.

B. First semester6

1. The first semester will consist of an integrated experience consisting of:
   a. An intensive, integrative **Inauguration Week**, at the start of the semester, focused on a project or theme, to introduce students to common terminology and methods, establish appropriate expectations, foster respect for diverse areas, overcome fear, and build community.
   b. A group of three **Core Courses**:
      i. **INF101: Knowledge and Information in Society**: Critical analyses of the institutional, political, legal, and economic roles of information and knowledge.
      ii. **INF102: Representation, Organization, Classification and Meaning-Making**: Critical analyses of epistemological/ontological issues in knowledge and information practices.
      iii. **INF103: Information Systems, Services, and Design**: Critical and technical analyses of the design, fabrication, deployment, use, maintenance, and sustainability of information systems and services.
   c. **INF104: Information Workshop**
      i. An intense experiential, participatory workshop to integrate the skills, perspectives, methods, and knowledge developed in the core courses (INF101–INF103).7
      ii. Designed to: (i) develop skills in writing, communication, design, team participation, and leadership; (ii) blend theoretical and practical knowledge and expertise; (iii) provide guidance, mentorship, and instruction on how to be a graduate student, researcher, and information professional; (iv) serve as an opportunity to develop professional identity around topics of common interest; and (v) establish community and esprit de corps.

2. Ordering, prerequisites, and weighting
   a. INF101–INF103 must be taken prior to or concurrently with INF104.
   b. Except when explicitly indicated, INF101–INF104 are prerequisites for all other (non-core) MI courses. Additional exceptions require approval from the instructor.
   c. Together, INF101–INF103 plus the Inauguration Week are designed to constitute ~50% of the student’s first semester work and experience; INF104, the other ~50%.

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4As explained in the Guidelines, individual paths are intended to be collaboratively developed by students and their advisors, prior to submission to the Programs Committee.

5uoft offers 0.5 FCE for standard one-semester courses, and 1.0 FCE for courses that last two full semesters. One-semester courses are called “half-courses”; full-year courses “full courses.” The normal student course load is four half courses (2.0 FCE) per semester. As a 2-year degree, the MI thus requires that students take the equivalent of 16 half-courses—8.0 FCE.

6To be taken in common by all MI students, the first semester is intended to establish a high level of proficiency and prowess that can be counted on by subsequent courses. It is designed to instill, as “exit requirements,” abilities to: (i) search, find, sift, distill, and synthesize information—including assessing its authority and credibility—so as to be able to conduct effective research; (ii) analyze, write, communicate, and present ideas in a clear, compelling, and authoritative fashion; and (iii) formulate, design, conduct, and evaluate individual and team projects.

7Among other things, the workshops are intended to serve as the locus of student’s academic/intellectual/professional “identity formation.” Some may focus on topics that draw together students with similar long-term career plans (e.g., archives, system service design, public libraries, etc.); some may coalesce around topics that cross traditional LIS, ARM, and museum boundaries (e.g., youth information services); some may be more academic/theoretical in orientation; others targeted more professionally.
III • Next Steps

Once the Framework is in place, work will be undertaken during 2008–09 to fill out details of the M.I Curriculum, focusing on the development of new courses and path approval templates. Syllabi for core and non-core courses will be brought forward to the Programs Committee. In parallel, the Curriculum will be taken through appropriate steps of UofT governance, dealing with four interrelated issues:

1. Change of degree name from Master of Information Studies (MIST) to Master of Information (MI);
2. Change of course prefix from ‘FIS’ to ‘INF’ (to correlate with the change in name of the Faculty);
3. Change the requirements for the degree; and
4. Bring forward proposals for new courses.

Section III is not part of the Framework to be approved.