TO: Members of Faculty – Faculty of Information
FROM: Dr. Seamus Ross, Dean and Professor
DATE: December 12, 2014
RE: Update on the New Partnerships with the Central Library Work Group

I write to provide an update on the New Partnerships with the Central Library Work Group, which was established following the Faculty Strategic Retreat in June of 2014.

First, I would like to thank all members of the Group for their contributions over the past three months on this strategic initiative. I am grateful for their hard work and dedication.

During its discussions, the Work Group was mindful of the suggestion from the 2014 External Reviewers that, "... a re-envisioned Inforum has the potential to contribute in a more fundamental way to the strategic needs of the faculty." In this context it makes sense to reflect on the nature of spaces and services in the Inforum. Our reflections may help us to identify ways we might improve our teaching and research promise, and make it possible for us to increase enrollment and strengthen our already vibrant and thriving iSchool. Are there possibilities that we as a community can see to enhance the Inforum’s core contribution to the Faculty and its excellence into the future? While our discussion of these changes reflected an effort to focus on academic possibilities for enhancement of research and experiential and experimental learning, our discussions took place against the backdrop of some very harsh fiscal realities. In thinking about next steps we need to ensure that academic priorities, and especially those in our strategic plan are foremost in our mind, but we need to be attentive to the fiscal constraints under which we operate.

Over the past few months the members of the Work Group have shared their passionate views on the future of the Inforum. In late October members of the Work Group requested that I provide a possible vision of the future for both the space on the fourth and fifth floors of the Inforum, as well as the services that would continue to be offered. We had fervent discussion on this document and everybody in the Work Group felt it should be shared, even those who did not agree with it.

We all agreed that our discussions about New Partnerships had reached a point where they would benefit from broader consultation. I would like to encourage you to read the attached document. You will have an opportunity to provide your input at one of upcoming Town Hall sessions (see last section of the attached document) or by emailing it to ischool.review@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Seamus Ross
Dean and Professor

Attachment.
DISCUSSION DRAFT FOR CONSTITUENCY COMMENT

Inforum Renewal

Discussion Document revised 23 October 2014; revised 28 October 2014; revised 17 November 2014

Background

A Task Force on Strategic Directions for Information Services was struck by the Faculty “to oversee and coordinate an action plan for the future shape and services of the Inforum”. In response to this mandate, the Task Force recommended that “just as the Inforum re-conceptualized the former Faculty library, it is now time to re-shape Information Services into an incubator of ideas and interaction”. The Inforum must continue to move in the direction of becoming “an experimental and experiential platform for exploration and discovery” to remain at the “heart of the Faculty”. The report convincingly testified that “[b]y creating a dynamic, cutting edge incubator and collaborative, unlike anything in North America, the Faculty can leverage and maximize this advantage to further its strategic directions”. Indeed, these ideas align precisely with the vision of the iSchool’s Strategic Plan, Pathways to our Future 2012-2017, and will make many of the goals and objectives, which it espouses, achievable.

Fiscal circumstances changed, even as the Task Force report was being finalized in May 2013, which impact on the ability to implement all of the Task Force recommendations. However, five of the six “key transformational recommendations” (pp.3-4) still provide an inspirational starting point for any reconceptualization of the Inforum. The first five of these recommendations provide a touchstone for the draft proposal which follows. These are that the re-conceptualized Inforum should be the Enabler[] of Exploration, Experimentation, Incubation & Laboratories; a catalyst for Curriculum & Co-curriculum: Coordination, Alignment, & Relevance; a pillar of the Digital iSchool & IT Innovation: Presence, Cloud, On-Demand, Research Support, & Toolkits; an engager of the iSchool with External Communities: Building Partnerships & Engagement; and a driver for Efficient Operations: Standardizing & Streamlining Core Services. The Report of the iSchool 2014 External Reviewers encouraged us to think imaginatively about our relationship with UTL/Robarts and in doing so to consider how this might impact on use of space and the provision of services in the Inforum.

Vision

The Inforum provides a rich array of services for the iSchool, but as one of the recommendations of the Task Force Report acknowledges (p.4), “Information Services should adopt as many centrally provided services as possible (in particular those from UTL and I&TS)”. Where possible, services which are already provided through the adjacent Robarts Library, such as collection development approval plans for acquisitions, the purchase of shelf-ready materials, circulation and shelving, off-site storage and retrieval services for low-use items, networked printing and scanning, should be shared with the Inforum. Development and monitoring of the approval plans would reflect the ongoing needs of the Faculty research and teaching programs, through consultation with individual faculty and committees.
Many of the newer research initiatives, envisaged by faculty members, require access to research laboratories. Simultaneously, we need more opportunities to strengthen the link between praxis and theory, which is the hallmark of a professional program of study. By providing our students with experiential, experimental, and empirical learning opportunities, in collaborative and research-centric spaces located in the Inforum, we can continue to realize the role of the Inforum as the “gateway to the iSchool”.

The use of digital resources and digital research environments requires purpose-designed, collaborative, and configurable spaces. Currently, there are two initiatives underway, seeking funding for lab spaces. We anticipate the demand will grow and one of the immediate tasks for an implementation group will be to canvas the faculty members and UTL partners to assess their needs. Some areas of focus might be: electronic records, knowledge media design, digital curation, electronic books, heritage initiatives, museology, objects and places, digitization, and inclusive technologies.

As noted in the Task Force Report, “unlike almost every other discipline, information is not a service to the Faculty, information is the work of the Faculty”. To ensure an environment that continues to support that work, in the digital age, we propose the following re-purposing of space and services offered in the Inforum.

A Draft Proposal

Imagine that you have walked into an Inforum stripped back to its exterior walls, where smart glass would be used to segment spaces, where segmentation is necessary. The 4th floor of the Inforum covers 840 NASMs. It would become home to the 7th Floor Semaphore Laboratory (308 NASMs), a reconfigurable open plan experiential learning environment (416 NASMs), and five smart collaboration pods (116 NASMs). The 5th floor of the Inforum covers some 308 NASMs. It would be configured as 3 research and learning laboratories of about 100 NASMs each.

Semaphore Lab

Currently, the Semaphore facilities on the 7th floor of Robarts utilizes 307 NASMs, including four offices for faculty, a conference room, post-doctoral cubicles, and three research-hardened learning environments: a collaborative and experimentation zone, a 3D design environment and the maker lab. On the 1st floor of Robarts, Semaphore uses some 135 NASMs for games research, experimentation, design research education, and offices. These iSchool facilities have become a Faculty (and even University) flagship exemplar for interactive, experiential, experimental, and research-led learning.

At the Faculty retreat (June, 2014), one of the ideas was to bring Semaphore into the Bissell Building. Initially, we would propose moving the 7th floor Semaphore facilities to occupy 35% of the 4th floor of the Inforum, leaving the 1st floor Semaphore facilities in Robarts. The Semaphore facilities, from the Robarts 7th floor, would provide an example for the new “hub” for collaboratory research-centric activities we hope to develop.
Open Plan Experiential Learning Environment

Roughly 424 NASMs on the 4th floor would be allocated for study space for our students, using a combination of carrels, shared smart tables, lounging areas, and two to three person collaborative cones. This proposal anticipates having space for around 150 students to work comfortably, configured to enable working in a variety of ways – alone or in groups. The furniture would be designed and installed such that it could be slid away to create a substantial open space for events. Any space for print collections (reference and other non-circulating items) would need to be around the perimeter, so that the space could be fully opened up, as needed.

Smart Collaboration Pods

One rich property of the Inforum is its soaring spaces and its natural light. Any redevelopment of the space should take maximum advantage of this feature. Collaboration spaces are heavily used now and must be preserved. We propose constructing five smart collaboration spaces as soundproof glass “pods” – a few round and a few square – placed across the 4th floor. Four of these would be 20 NASMs each (slightly larger than the current Bissell 416) and one would be 35 NASMs (about the size of Bissell 418). These glass pods would provide bookable workspaces for student collaboration and incorporate a range of technologies such as interactive digital touch tables, smart walls (and white boards), and provide access to an array of digital tools for collaboration and project delivery. Printing key terms on the glass walls would enable sharing of information under discussion.

Research and Learning Laboratories

The 5th floor of the Inforum holds some 308 NASMs. This is space enough to house three research and learning labs, with smart glass walls enclosing them, including at the balcony end. To keep the labs open to multi-purpose opportunities, they could be assigned as: Digital, Digital/Physical, and Physical. The work of the laboratories would be tied to the research focus of one or more faculty members and aligned with their teaching in ways that would provide students experiential, experimental, and research-centric learning opportunities, support the inverted classroom, and engage students in dynamic collaborative research. Our goals would be to bind each laboratory with a vibrant research agenda, which as well as delivering learning opportunities for students, would provide a platform to support bids for research funding and then the conducting of the funded research.

We might consider linking a portion of each incoming doctoral cohort with the laboratories through allocating research assistant hours to the laboratories. However, funding attracted by researchers linked to a particular laboratory could be used to support engagement of masters students or postdoctoral fellows in the research being conducted in the laboratories. In addition, the laboratories would provide a framework to attract MITACs awards.

To determine what the focus of each of these will be, we will (a) establish an iSchool Laboratory Selection and Review Panel (iLSRP), (b) establish a set of selection and biannual review criteria which the iLSRP will apply to select and then review the contribution of the labs to the educational and research progress of the Faculty, and (c) create a call of proposals for new laboratories. The selection criteria
might include: (i) the focus of the laboratory is aligned with the research agenda of one or more faculty members; (ii) the laboratory’s focus supports teaching in either a key Information domain, or even better, in a concentration; (iii) there is sufficient evidence that the laboratory will play a core role in providing an experiential and experimental learning environment for our students and that the proposing faculty member has a track record in engaging students in research as part of their MI, MMSt, or PhD; and (iv) there is a clear pedagogical advantage in teaching and learning being partially or entirely conducted in a laboratory setting. Regularly, for instance every two years, the success of each laboratory on delivering its research and teaching objectives would be reviewed by the iLRSP. The allocation and management of laboratories would be overseen by the iLRSP and the policies which the iLRSP would implement would be approved by Faculty Council and monitored by our Information Services Committee.

**Services**

Within a new partnership agreement with UTL, we propose the following new structure for delivery of the core services provided by the library staff in the Inforum. The services provided by the IT staff and the Career Officer were not included in the scope of the Working Group’s mandate.

More of the Inforum space would serve the students and researchers as 1148 NASMs would be assigned to research, teaching, collaborative and experiential learning purposes. We propose moving the course reserve collection to Robarts Library, where students would have access to borrow these materials.

The management of the collection and its maintenance would be transferred to Robarts and integrated in the stack collections. This would enable the Faculty to take advantage of the efficiencies of scale which UTL has pioneered in such areas as selection, cataloguing, collection management, and circulation. One key step in the selection and acquisition of materials is the process of creating approval plans and these would be established through close consultation between faculty and iSchool librarians. It would also ensure that the collection was accessible for substantially longer hours than currently is possible. Both current reserve and stack holdings would be re-classified to follow the Library of Congress system to enable amalgamation of the collections.

Looking to foster community within the Faculty and to build on its reputation as the “heart of the Faculty”, the Inforum would continue as a venue for events, e.g. conferences, seminars, iTeas, exhibitions, and academic celebrations. Inforum staff would participate in recruitment opportunities, both of prospective students and new faculty members.

Hours of opening would be supported by student staff, who would be engaged in project work and mentored by the librarians. The opportunities for students to intern in the Inforum have proven to be a valuable contribution to the Faculty and to the preparation of a professional. Librarians would be scheduled and/or book appointments for research consultations and would continue to support a personal librarian program for the iSchool student cohort. Also, UTL libraries provide a live chat-based information service, in conjunction with other Ontario university libraries, managed by the OCUL Scholars Portal staff, which is available 12 hours day on Mondays-Thursdays and shorter hours on weekends. The Inforum staff would continue to support instructional services, including the very
successful iSkills co-curricular program of workshops, and to look for opportunities to collaborate on new co-curricular programs with SGS or elsewhere in the University.

Course support, for reserve readings and the “syllabus service” supporting course readings in Blackboard would be provided through the UTL Scholarly Communications and Copyright Office and the Course Reserves service at Robarts Library.

Tech loans for classes and for individual use are an important service which needs to be maintained within the Faculty. It is possible to imagine loans and returns of the wide array of equipment through a dispensing machine (much like those used for book collections), which could be located in an area which is accessible at all hours.

Conclusion

This document recommends a reconceptualization of the Inforum as crucial for its continued service toward maintaining the iSchool at the cutting edge in the fields of Information and Museum Studies. It is time for these recommendations to be examined in consultations with faculty, staff and students, as we move towards a foundation for entering into an agreement with UTL.

Next Steps and Process

As this is a document for discussion and comment, we have proposed two consultation Town Halls, and if there is a demand we will add more. These two consultations will held Friday January 9, 2015 from 9am to 11am and Monday January 12, 2015 from 4pm to 6pm. Both will take place in Room 728 in the Bissell Bldg. They will be chaired by an independent external facilitator.

We have re-activated an email address to ensure that if you have comments that you wish the UTL/iSchool New Partnership Work Group to take into consideration you can submit them. Comments can be sent to ischool.review@utoronto.ca from now until 15 January 2015. All comments received will be put before the Work Group.

As was originally planned once the UTL/iSchool New Partnership Work Group has completed its work the recommendations will presented to the Information Services Committee (ISC) and the Dean.