Strategic Directions for Research at the iSchool  
(Draft)  
November 26, 2010  
Revised December 18, 2010

Introduction

The Faculty of Information – the iSchool – at the University of Toronto, with twenty-four full-time faculty appointments, conducts rigorous, interdisciplinary, and innovative research that contributes to society, and helps shape the field and scholarly discourse of information. As Table 1 illustrates, the iSchool ranks competitively with other Social Science professional faculties in its participation in Tri-Council funding programs, and, with the exception of 2007-08, consistently exceeds the percent participation for all social science faculties, combined. In addition to securing

Table 1
Participation in Tri-Council CRC-Eligible Programs  
(Professional Faculties – Social Science)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty/School</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>Percent of Eligible Faculty Participating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>Percent of Eligible Faculty Participating</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>Percent of Eligible Faculty Participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iSchool</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OISE/UT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Faculties (Social Science)</td>
<td></td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

grant funding from Tri-Council and other agencies, such as the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, Delmas, and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), members of full-time faculty publish regularly in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals, present papers at prestigious refereed conferences within North America and internationally, and are invited to serve as assessors on major granting agency competitions annually. Over the past eighty years, the Faculty of Information has evolved from a professional school with a primary focus on teaching, to a community of scholars fully integrated into the research fabric of the University of Toronto. It
leads in information-related research within Canada, and is competitive with top-ranked iSchools in the United States (see also Appendix X – Faculty Research @Toronto’s iSchool 2010-2011).

The development of a strategic direction for research offers an opportunity to enhance both the profile, and the relative position of the iSchool within the University of Toronto and beyond over the next six years. A research plan offers specific trajectories for ensuring that the iSchool has in place the requisite infrastructure, resources, milestones, and assessment mechanisms for building on current successes to support its research vision.

As the Faculty of Information continues to grow in terms of numbers of full-time faculty, and graduate students (MI, MMSt, PhD), and as it adds to its roster of programs, an undergraduate degree in Interactive Digital Media (offered jointly with UTM), it is in a unique position to explore new areas of strategic opportunity. Such initiatives will build on, and contribute to core strengths within the Information disciplines that are reflected primarily in current iSchool curricular “paths”, i.e., Knowledge Management and Information Management (KM/IM), Information Systems and Design (IS&D), Critical Information Studies (CIS), Library and Information Science (LIS), Archives and Records Management (ARM), and Museum Studies (MSt).

Transformative areas for exploration include, but are in no way limited to, digital preservation and data curation, digital economy, information analytics, cyber intelligence, computer forensics, and cultural heritage studies. As a participant in eight collaborative graduate programs, and with membership in a number of EDU-C Institutes (i.e., Coach House Institute; Identity, Privacy and Security Institute; Knowledge Media Design), the iSchool has access to scholars across disciplines, and, consequently, additional resources to foster innovation and to extend the research vision.

**Strategic Directions for iSchool Research**

The University of Toronto is committed to supporting excellence in research and scholarship (Goal 1: UT/SRP Draft, June 9, 2010; p. 4). To this end, the Faculty of Information’s strategic directions for research will focus on distinction in two key criteria – research quality, and research output – as both relate to current strengths in iSchool research, and are applied to emerging transformative areas for exploration. These criteria can be assessed, in part, by some of the following measures:

**Research Quality:**

- Papers published in highly ranked (A/A+) refereed journals in the Information field;
- Papers published in highly ranked refereed journals in the cognate disciplines;
- Papers published in highly ranked refereed journals outside of the Information or related disciplines;
- Citations to faculty research in scholarly publications;
- Refereed conference proceedings – international venues;
- Funding from competitive, peer-reviewed grants;
- Participation of iSchool graduate students (Master’s and PhD) in publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals;
- Presentation of papers at peer-reviewed conferences by iSchool graduate students (Master’s and PhD);

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1 See also ERA Australian Ranking of Journals: [http://www.arc.gov.au/era/tiers_ranking.htm](http://www.arc.gov.au/era/tiers_ranking.htm)
- Publication in refereed conference proceedings, of papers presented by iSchool graduate students (Master’s and PhD); and,
- Impact of iSchool research on policy making at regional, national and levels and the shaping of research agendas.

Research Output:
- Increased funding from national peer-reviewed competitions (e.g., SSHRC; NSERC; CIHR);
- Increased percentage participation in Tri-Council programs by eligible faculty;
- Increased funding from international peer-reviewed competitions (e.g., NSF; DOE; IMLS);
- Contract research – national and international;
- Community-based research initiatives;
- Collaborative research initiatives – with other disciplines at UT; with other universities;
- Increased proportion of iSchool graduate students (Master’s and PhD) engaged in research, whether student- or faculty-led research;
- Partnerships with public and private-sector institutions that may lead to faculty and graduate student (Master’s and PhD) research initiatives; and,
- Engagement with research consortia for information or cognate disciplines within the GTA, provincially, nationally, internationally.

Research Vision
The strategic vision of the Faculty of Information to achieve ‘International Excellence in Research and Education in Information’ is reflected in the Faculty’s research vision to attain greater preeminence in research and scholarship so as to situate it as the leader among iSchools internationally, and as exemplary among comparable faculties within the University.

In order to frame that vision, and to set a focused trajectory for its realization over the next six years, four strategic themes and their respective objectives have been identified as follows:

I. Research Environment

Our pursuit of research excellence depends upon continued investment in engendering a conducive and collaborative research environment underpinned by a robust infrastructure. Outstanding research requires a culture of scholarly inquiry and collaboration. Our goal is provide a context for this kind scholarship through promoting community, delivering infrastructure and support that cultivates creativity and fosters achievement both individually and collectively.

Achieving this goal will necessarily engage the following objectives:

- To engender an research culture which promotes the research capabilities and capacity of our academics from early career onwards;
- To promote a research culture from graduate students through professors based on effective mentoring, collaboration, interaction, and grant getting;
- To provide flexible researcher accommodation and infrastructure which is appropriate to the needs of our scholars; and,
- To underpin scholarly activity with efficient and effective research support systems and processes and technology.
II. International Excellence

Research questions in information and activity are international in context, focus, and value. The Faculty of Information is strategically constructing the linkages between its researchers and those at academic and commercial organizations outside Canada to promote borderless collaborative scholarship. In pursuing international excellence, the iSchool will be guided by the following objectives:

- To exercise international leadership in setting research agenda in information fields in which researchers in the iSchool are active;
- To ensure that research originating in the Faculty of Information is disseminated widely and influences research, policy, development, and commercial activity internationally;
- To grow our numbers of doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows from outside of Canada; and,
- To foster international research partnerships with academic researchers and industrial collaborators.

III. Interdisciplinary Research

The iSchool, by its very nature bridges a number of diverse disciplines, situating it as both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in breadth. Over the life of the past two academic plans, the Faculty of Information has formed alliances across the University of Toronto through its affiliation with eight collaborative graduate programs. Through such connections, as well as through the intersections afforded through disciplinary practices in libraries, archives, and museums, critical information studies, information policy, knowledge management, and information systems design, the iSchool is well positioned to take a proactive approach to furthering the agenda of interdisciplinary research. This trajectory will pursue the following objectives:

- To increase funding of interdisciplinary initiatives by targeting partnership grants awarded by national agencies, such as SSHRC, NSCER, and CIHM;
- To increase faculty and student engagement in the research, as well as the teaching, initiatives offered through existing collaborative programs;
- To seek out additional collaborative initiatives with other disciplines, within the University of Toronto, and with other universities locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally;
- To foster collaborative contract research with industry partners engaged in interdisciplinary ventures; and,
- To establish a forum (e.g., colloquia; visiting scholar program) for showcasing innovation in interdisciplinary research.

IV. Knowledge Transfer

While the iSchool has been highly successful in securing funding to support faculty and graduate students in their research, there has been less accomplishment in terms of research that has applications of either a commercial nature, or with broad-based dissemination beyond academic or disciplinary boundaries. To foster greater knowledge transfer, the iSchool will pursue the following objectives:
➢ To create an infrastructure and focused direction for securing additional contract research;
➢ To foster research that could result in legal patents, product licenses, etc;
➢ To engage with community-based organizations that require research towards tangible, demonstrable benefit;
➢ To support opportunities for extending intellectual property initiatives to established or start-up companies, or to iSchool and private/public sector partnerships;
➢ To develop an iSchool incubator for nurturing green shoot initiatives through to final design, execution, and, where appropriate, product development;
➢ To encourage graduate student coop experiences in innovative public- or private-sector enterprises engaged in dynamic research and development initiatives
➢ To promote collaborative industrial doctoral possibilities; and,
➢ To grow our reputation as a provider of research and development that supports evidence-based policy development.

Next-steps and Summary

While the Faculty of Information has set an ambitious trajectory for its strategic research directions, there are areas where a solid foundation has already been established on which to refine and build, other areas where considerable work remains to be done, and some new initiatives which will be targeted specifically during the timeline for the plan. Yet other serendipitous opportunities may arise to which the iSchool will want to respond as appropriate; we aim to be nibble and responsive to emerging prospects.

One piece that will be crucial to determining the relative success of objectives within each of the four strategic research themes, will be the establishment of specific, credible, and realistic measures. While increases in “quantity” are readily determinable, research outputs must necessarily be balanced with research quality. As the iSchool attaches particular activities or actions necessary to achieving objectives within each theme, specific, appropriate measures will also be determined that take into account both research quantity and quality. An annual review of progress within each of the four strategic research themes will provide milestones for progress, and help to identify areas where further emphases or additional resources may be required. The iSchool has established the position of Associate Dean (Research) to provide the leadership needed to deliver these strategic research objectives.3

Finally, in pursuing our strategic research directions, the iSchool will operate in alignment with the overall plan articulated for the University of Toronto as a whole and for the Faculty of Information in particular (UofT iSchool Strategic and Academic Plan 2010-2015). The Faculty is committed to positioning itself unequivocally as an equal partner in research among a diversity of disciplines within a preeminent academy of scholars that is the University of Toronto.

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2 In pursing this objective the Faculty’s iSchool Institute will play a critical role.
3 The first Associate Dean (Research) is Professor Lynne Howarth, who took up her five year appointment on 1 July 2010.