Information Services: 
A Response to the External Review Report

The time, expertise, and insights of the review committee are very much appreciated. However, there were some errors due to misunderstandings and omissions of information that leave the areas of the External Review Report canvas that is related to Information Services in need of restoration.

The attached Information Services Response to UTQAP: Full Version is the detailed version of the areas highlighted below.

- The 2013-2014 iSchool Self Study included information concerning the Task Force Report and appended the full report; however, the External Review Report omits any mention of this report and recommends a re-visioning of the Inforum.
- The Inforum is a piece of the UTL puzzle not “next door to one of the best libraries in North America” (2), but, in fact a part of it, both in terms of the librarian’s service on UTL committees and the development of the University’s collection
- Mentions of the services that Information Services provides were omitted. There was nothing on our:
  - Teaching, research, and learning support through our extensive amount of workshops, events, IT, reference, outreach, public services, and mentorship through employment
- Our dedicated IT team was built as a result of a report, FI IT Report produced by Marden Paul and Patrick Hopewell; thus, less than 5 years ago central assessed our Faculty’s IT needs and created 2 new IT positions.
- Librarians in relationship to professional development and scholarship
  - We have created, presented and organized professional development workshops for librarians at UTL
  - We produce, present and publish research
- Collections
  - Our collections ARE open to the public
  - Regardless of classification system, we would still need some form of staff monitoring
- The Inforum is a multi-use space that hosts a variety of services, resources, and facilities are reflexive of collaborative active learning pedagogy, not solely a space for collections and study.

Attached:
1. Information Services Response to UTQAP Review: Full Version
2. Articulating Our Contributions to iSchool Goals.
Information Services Response to UTQAP Review: Full version

Part A. Clarifications & corrections

1. ON REVISIONING THE INFORUM

“The review panel was impressed with the strong role that the Inforum has historically played...” (p. 9), and “The review panel senses that a re-envisioned Inforum has the potential to contribute in a more fundamental way to the strategic needs of the Faculty” [p.9], and mentions “…reimagining the space with an eye toward the future of the information professions and library services [p.10]”

We would have preferred the phrase ‘historically played’ to be ‘currently plays’

Lack of reference to the IS Task Force Report

The reviewers appear to have overlooked the Dean’s commission of the Task Force on Strategic Directions for Information Services Report in 2013. The very recent work that went into the Task Force report provides our Faculty with a blueprint for action, despite recent changes that have altered the landscape since the report was issued. (ISI move to SCS, lack of funds for a director). Indeed, some of the recommendations have been/are being implemented.

- The work on space renovations and downsizing of the on-site collection are already underway.
- Co-curricular learning opportunities coming from different areas in the Faculty have been coordinated by Information Services under the iSkills banner.

See also the document: Articulating our Contributions to iSchool Goals which charts IS completed and upcoming work in relation to both the Task Force recommendations and the FI Strategic Plan: Pathways to our Future 2012–2017

Relationship with Robarts Library

Recommendation #17: To commission a study of the Robarts/Bissell complex for reimagining the space and resource allocation.

Another study seems unnecessary, given the extensive work of the recent Task Force, whose recommendations make it clear that a separate library and information centre for the Faculty is desired.

Many professional faculties at U of T have their own libraries with customized, focused services to their particular user group

- Music, Law, Dentistry, OISE for their teacher-training program, Engineering, Architecture, Landscape, & Design, are some examples of this model.
Our users often comment, through annual surveys, and other feedback modes, that one of the things they most like about the Inforum, and about their FI experience, is that we are small, customized to their needs (e.g. technical, professional development, and research workshops, research consultations), and separate from busy and more generic Robarts. The following quote exemplifies this sentiment:

I like that the iSchool has its own library that is small, intimate and separate from Robarts. This is a great unique feature of being a student here. – Master’s student, 2012 IS User Survey.

2. ON IS SERVICES

Any mention of IS services is completely lacking from the report: the services provided embody our integration into FI’s teaching mission

UTQAP terms of reference speak of opportunities for learning beyond the classroom, and quality of the educational experience. Our services are part and parcel of this. A few selected example of our services and their impacts:

- **On-site IT resources & the student experience:** The Tech Fund purchases + IS delivery model delivers tech to students in an efficient and effective way. Other libraries on campus are still catching up to us in this respect.
- **Teaching, research, & learning support to faculty members:** in-class instruction, course support, course-specific information resources; consultations re: course assignments; research & reference assistance for courses as well as faculty research projects
- **Embedded instruction:** Benefits students by its focused, point-of-need delivery nature
- **Our many services to students:** as outlined in the self-study report
- **iSkills workshops:** Enhance and support the educational experience in numerous ways, and the commitment to continuous development of new workshops to address emerging needs. Incoming students are introduced to academic life at the faculty through the workshops in our Orientation Series. The vision of the Orientation Series is to adequately prepare incoming iSchool students for graduate academic success at the iSchool. Information Services curates this portion of the iSkills workshops, and as such, aims to address competencies that all iSchool students must possess, while also facilitating new students’ navigation of the physical and digital iSchool linkages available to them
- **The Fall and Winter iSkills workshops series** is built upon the groundwork laid by the Orientation Series. Together with the MI and MMSt curricula, the iSkills workshops are the venue where iSchool graduate students develop, enhance, and refine their social networks and research, professional, and technical knowledge.
- **Librarians deliver a professional experience component:** Librarians deliver this via guest lectures in courses (bibliographic control, technology use in libraries, reference ethics) and in consultations with students.

- **Site for project investigations:** KMD1001, reading courses are recent examples.

- **Practitioners-in-residence:** IS librarians offer mentorship and modelling in multiple ways.

- **IS work opportunities:** Experiential learning components are essential to any professional program. Information Services has a long history of employing, teaching, and mentoring current students, and alumni through part-time and contract positions, such as those of Information Desk Student Assistants and instructors in the iSkills workshops.

”Thanks for being dedicated to the student experience. It is clear that Information Services really aims to provide students with all the necessary resources, services and facilities to be successful.” – Masters’ student, 2011 IS User Survey

In addition, professional staff are integrated into the faculty as a whole in a way that librarians at other UTL libraries are not. FI librarians sit on standing committees of Faculty Council, task forces, working groups, and this synergy is one of many benefits. UTL librarians must work harder to liaise with their faculty members and departments in order to fulfil the teaching, learning, and research mission of the UTL system with the University. Our structure is integrated and nimble, benefitting all, in terms of services, integration, curricular relevance, etc.

### 3. ON RESEARCH, OUTREACH & PARTNERSHIPS

**iSchool research & outreach activities are broader than those mentioned in the report:**

Librarians are/have:

- Involved in research and have presented research locally and internationally.
- Collaborated with faculty and with non-iSchool librarians on research.
- Published in A ranked journals
- Been featured on CBC and in the Huffinton Post
- Engaged the external community in workshops. E.g. Teaching Prezi to private sector companies; teaching seniors and youths about ebooks for the Toronto Public Library.

**MMSt thesis option:**

- There has actually been a recent MMSt graduate to produce a thesis. See Vanessa Fleet’s paper (2011).
- Some MMSt theses proposals have recently been approved by the Committee on Standing. See report to Faculty Council, presented at the June 6, 2014 Council meeting.
Collaborations with other units
The reviewers state that the rest of the university “...do not seem to be sufficiently aware of the strength of FI, its programs, and potential for further collaborations as reported by representatives of other academic units” (p. 7). We believe that IS does make contributions in this area, in particular, to the UTL unit

- As described in the Self-Study document, the IS librarians collaborate and are part of the larger UTL librarian community, engaging in UTL committee work, peer-led workshops (e.g. Prezi), event organization, sharing of work products (e.g. UTL web style guide) and more.
- Our librarian-in-residence collaboration brought a UTL librarian specializing in digital humanities to interact with our users at the Inforum reference desk.

Low profile in the University community
The reviewers comment that the iSchool has a relatively low profile at U of T (p. 10) However, some IS work goes towards a higher profile in the university community, for example:

- Outreach events include food and clothing bank drives that benefit the U of T student community
- Orientation events: eg. Clubs fair, Street Fair, and the Student Life Pride Committee
- Our open access bibliography is inserted into a Scholars Portal LibGuide every October during Open Access Week
- Our events and exhibitions are promoted through library-wide, and sometimes, university-wide mailing lists.

4. ON COLLECTIONS

Information Services has always, and continues to be, about more than just collections
The reviewers show a lack of understanding of IS operations. For instance:

- Unlike what the report suggests, the bulk of IS service provisions are not based around the Inforum collection.
  - Collections is only one of the core services we provide.
  - There was no mention of other core services: reference, research assistance, course support, instructional services, and IT.
  - None of the IS staff members are assigned solely to collections-related work.

Inforum collection is open to the public
Contrary to the reviewers’ statement about the collection:

- The collection is not maintained exclusively for the iSchool; it is, and always has been, open to everyone including the general public.
Our collection draws undergraduate students, alumni, non-alumni information professionals, and members of the public into the Bissell building. Our annual statistics support this fact.

We even offer a rush-cataloguing service to alumni and UTL librarians.

We house unique material used by others in the U of T community, e.g. the U of T librarian community, UTAC, and others.

OISE promotes our collection to its teacher and teacher-librarian users.

Other libraries in Canada and USA continue to request material from us through interlibrary loan. Last year, we even had an international request. (Again, this is recorded in our annual statistics.)

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I often find material in the iForum unavailable elsewhere in the UofT library system. A recent example is a particular volume that is not available in the UofT system or in any of the regional library systems; if it weren’t available in the iForum, I would have had to request an interlibrary loan from a major US library – Heather Pigat, Collection Manager at UTAC
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**Inforum collection is not freestanding**

The reviewers state that “the Inforum contains a relatively small, freestanding collection of materials.” Our collection is part of the 44-library UTL system.

**Misunderstanding over the cause of “substantial” staff costs**

The external reviewers incorrectly portray the use of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) for organizing the print collection as a substantial cost to the Faculty:

- Classification systems are merely methods of organizing a physical library collection according to an intellectual framework.
- Any choice of classification system (whether Dewey, Library of Congress, Colon, etc.) would still require, at the very least, some form of staff monitoring.
- DDC is a system of classification, not a cataloguing system.
- OISE Library also uses DDC, so we are not alone.
- With the exception of the classification system, the Inforum follows the exact same cataloguing standards as Robarts and other U of T Libraries:
  - Description is based on a hybrid AACR2 (2nd level description) & RDA format
  - Encoding is based on MARC 21
  - Subject cataloguing is based on Library of Congress Subject Headings
  - Name headings are based on RDA
  - Same Sirsi policies and procedures for cataloguing, because we are part of the same union catalogue

**Allocation of human resources**

- Our ordering, receiving, and cataloguing procedures are more streamlined, and less “silo-ed”, than at the central library
Years before the central library began its recent reorganization and internal audit of acquisitions procedures, the Inforum had already implemented procedures that meet the financial accountability requirements of the university.

5. ON FACILITIES

Our space is multi-use, serves the whole faculty, and is used for external events: it is not only 2 floors dedicated to collections and study space.

The reviewers refer to our “...value as an informal gathering space, a place to study, and a facility to support group collaboration” (p. 9). We are more than this. Our space is used for activities/events that involve the FI community, and beyond:

- **Large-scale social events:** These include: annual Convocation Reception; Welcome teas, end-of-term teas
- **Academic events:** To name a few: Annual iSchool Graduate Student Conference; exhibitions of student work emanating from MMSt courses, including summer internship work; the MI practicum course, and the Management of Corporate & other Special Information Centres course (Connecting@theiSchool)
- **Professional development events** that enhance linkages between students and various professional communities: annual Employers Showcase; small panels/roundtable sessions for both MI and MMSt programs.
- **External community events:** The book launch for the Toronto District School Board – Baldwin school, was the most recent example of this type of event.

The space also functions as a site for praxis, mentorship, and course-related investigations, e.g. KMD1001 in 2013/2014. The electronic classroom (Room 417) is used for classes.

Proposed renovations

Reviewers propose “adding an entrance to the Inforum from the Robarts Library on the 4th floor [to] provide an additional opportunity for visible linkage and collaboration” (p. 10)

- The feasibility and ROI of this proposition is questionable, both structurally and financial. Bissell’s main stairwell lies between our buildings. The 4th floor of Robarts is less high-traffic than the main floor, which is already connected. More could be done with the buildings’ main floors to synergize.

- Removing the glass doors and wall that make Robarts and Bissell separate buildings raises more complex security issues, since the two buildings maintain different hours of operation, as is suited to their different purposes.
6. ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The report states that “Further reallocation of human resources for the maintenance of technological infrastructure and the management of the Faculty's website may be considered” [p. 9]. The benefits of local IT personnel and services include:

- **Focus**: We are focused only on iSchool needs: the iSchool is not just another customer on someone's to-do list, and its users are not prioritized behind other University departments or faculties.

- **Local**: Because we are physically located in the Bissell building, we are always reachable for any IT issue, and can react quickly to emergencies and urgent requests.

- **Flexible**: Since we are focused and local, we can adapt more easily to the changing needs of the iSchool, and we possess the technical infrastructure to do that. We also have years of accumulated knowledge to know what will work and what won't work for the Faculty.

OVERALL

The review mentions cost, but neglects to highlight the value of IS

- Many comments from users of all kinds, about the value we bring to their studies, research, and iSchool experience
- Some say that this is the best experience of any university library they have had.

- I’d like you to know that I enjoy working at the Inforum and appreciate all of your consideration & effort to keep this learning environment as a positive place. It’s a great support for my study – Masters student, 2012
- IS / Inforum really is the heart of our school. I love the staff - knowledgeable, friendly and helpful; I love the place, the iSchool community hub. I will miss both after graduation. – Masters student, 2011

Part B. Points inspired by the review that are worth considering:

3.2 Scope, nature of relationships and partnerships...

The reviewers applaud the iSchool’s strong relationships with alumni and professionals.

We agree. The iSchool benefits from having 3 practitioners in residence (the iSchool librarians) to pursue research and teaching collaborations. These practitioners also
maintain relationships with the UTL community through committee and other work, and the broader community as well.

**The Inforum space is a valuable way of promoting the Faculty.**
We agree.

Similarly, keeping our collections open to the public, and listed in the U of T Library Catalogue, is also in line with the iSchool’s social mission.

Here are some responses that I’ve received about the research and professional value of the Inforum collection. (Note: These responses were either received through email or posted as a public comment on the FIAA facebook wall. For the emails excerpted below, I obtained written permission from the respondents to quote from them.)

- “TPL has some materials, but the in-depth information professional specific materials are only really available at the Inforum, unless we want to purchase them (often unable to justify the high cost).” – Victoria Baranow, MI from the iSchool, currently works at Norton Rose Fulbright

- “LOVE the Inforum's collection - absolutely *the* best (i.e., depth, research level, complete, historical, responsive) in Canada (maybe int’l). Even without immediate access, I use the catalogue to 'check the universe' of LIS related work all the time. For library based research, keep the holdings (in-depth), I use the periodicals on site a couple of times a year. I also use research methods.” – Mary Cavanaugh, PhD from the iSchool, currently Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa

- “Library purchases and holdings are subsidized through taxpayer funds. It is therefore important that the collection is open for browsing (in-library use) by all taxpayers, whether they are current students, alumni, or members of the general public.” – Michael Dick (current PhD candidate)

- “As a PhD student this is less important to me, but as an MIST student this kind of resource was so important. There are few places that emerging heritage professionals can turn to for information about professional development that is specific to heritage fields. I did contact the career services people on campus, but their advice was generic and at times, misguided. The Inforum was the only place that provided relevant and up-to-date materials that helped me understand the competencies that employers were seeking and pertinent resources to assist with developing these competencies. This is absolutely vital.” – Rebecka Sheffield (MIST from the iSchool, current PhD candidate)

- "[The free external user's card] is also a great way to extend the benefits of UofT beyond the degree and helps alumni consider the benefits of giving back to the
Faculty when they are thinking about financial donations. A great resource for alumni and a tool for advancement.” – Rebecka Sheffield (MIS from the iSchool, current PhD candidate)

Broaden the vision of collections beyond the limited scope presented by the reviewers
The reviewers encourage developing strategic directions in research related to digital preservation and data curation, and cultural heritage studies (among other topics).

Here’s an example:

The Inforum holds valuable works about the history of libraries and library education. It also holds ephemeral material that are primary sources of information. The iSchool should pursue opportunities to make these special collections digitally available. Benefits of pursuing these opportunities:

- Provides hands-on experience for students that tie in with the intellectual content of course work
- Reveals hidden collections
- Creates a vehicle for promotion
- Brings Faculty history to life
- Strengthens relationship with alumni
- Provides tangible outcomes that Advancement can promote when talking to prospective donors

– submitted by K. Scheaffer, N. Singh, E. Sze
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