

Proposed changes to the Inforum and the collection

Edward W [edwud@hotmail.com]

Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2018 7:11 PM

To: Wendy Duff

Cc: Nalini Singh; Elisa Sze; Kathleen Scheaffer

Dear FIS Administration,

Once again I have been made aware that there are plans underway to dismantle the Inforum collection and dispense with the bulk of its services in favour of nebulous gains. I am appalled that relevant communities, including the staff (not just the senior administrators) and students of the faculty, were not consulted or informed that such plans were under way, nor has their input been sought from the outset. It smacks of the continuing disrespect the administration has for students, staff, alumni, and the public.

When I was a student at FiS, studying in my now archaic way to become a librarian, the centralization of the collection was a crucial benefit to my learning about the profession, its philosophical and technical requirements, along with the specialist fields of cataloguing and classification. I had opportunity to look for related material in Robarts and Gerstein, but found the distribution of materials more difficult to browse, and the requirements of separate libraries more challenging to navigate. It was the obvious and rational choice to have a library for librarians, archivists, and museum curators, attended by specialist staff familiar with the field, and available to help both faculty and students in the discipline. As an alumni, I continued to use the Inforum for both teaching purposes and to stay current in my professional development - a process made easier by centralized collections and faculty librarians. Attempts to gain similar insight and training at other campus libraries was spotty at best, as staff at those 38 other locations were not so well-versed, nor was their mission one of service to this profession. I have continued to dabble in librarianship in my academic and teaching work while at UVic, and have found the immediate and knowledgeable response of Inforum staff of great value.

The notion that there is either not enough study space, or existing space currently taken up by the collection should be transformed into "lively busy spaces" is, politely, hogwash. The Inforum has sufficient space for student collaboration, Bissell has space for projects, and space for the collection is utilized to a maximum degree. The ever-present identity crisis of FiS will not be solved until someone either takes the courageous decision to sever ties with ALA accreditation (etc.) and be just the iSchool, or acknowledges and confirms that the bulk of students seek formal graduate education in the traditional disciplines, and returns to excellence in those fields. Dispensing with the physical collection, further reducing the staff, and making space for "enabl[ing] possibilities for social and intellectual exchange" makes no sense unless the former option is a goal by stealth and underhanded bureaucratic process.

There is already considerable space in Bissell "social and intellectual exchange" and arguably there always has been. That exchange benefits from centralized collection and specialist staff - I could solve a point of contention simply by wandering into the stacks, or asking Joe or Nalini or Elisa for direct input. Moving the collection and integrating it into the UTL system is counter-intuitive for a library school. It doesn't make it simpler to find materials - it makes it more difficult by dispersion of material into separate locations, different floors and storage. Will I still have access to staff who can tell me precisely where certain works are by memory or whom can recommend related material, or will I be handed a piece of paper and have to waste time searching?

As for the "alumni will now also have access to the entire Robarts collection": I pay for access for the UTL

library system and am happy to do so. My reader card provides me access to Robarts as a matter of course. That the dispersal of the collection and specialist knowledge would somehow benefit me is idiocy. I enjoy being able to shelf-browse in the Inforum collection without added distraction. If I wanted more general works, I go to Robarts, or other libraries. The Inforum collection is a lovely working example of Ranganathan's 4th law: Save the time of the reader. How does adding to the time I will spent looking for and retrieving materials help me? How does the loss of personalized service and specialist staff make my research better?

Lastly, the concern over physical space for study/collaboration is baffling. Half the teaching I do is online, and all of the forums for seminars and discussion are virtual spaces. My students prefer collaboration by electronic methods such as skype, google hangout, or Facebook, which allows them to work from wherever they choose. Has some anarchonism occurred that suddenly makes physical presence necessary? Not last I looked.

I urge the committee to seek and include the community, the staff, and the student's input on these changes, and I reiterate my opposition to making access to the existing collections more difficult, or changing the library space for superfluous meeting spaces.

Regards,

Edward White
Mlst (UofT), MA (UVic).