

FW: Moving the print collections in the Inforum

Elisa Sze

Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2018 3:44 PM

To: Nalini Singh

From: ischool-fac-reg-l: ischool FacultyRegular [ISCHOOL-FAC-REG-L@listserv.utoronto.ca] on behalf of Alan Galey [alan.galey@UTORONTO.CA]
Sent: February-23-18 11:07 AM
To: ISCHOOL-FAC-REG-L@listserv.utoronto.ca
Subject: Re: Moving the print collections in the Inforum

Dear colleagues,

I'm very grateful to the Inforum librarians, and especially Elisa, for the way they've supported my own subject area through collections development over the years. Going forward, it does seem clear that they should be more directly involved in the strategy for the Inforum as an evolving library, and beyond a consultative role. Yesterday I discussed my reservations about the process with Wendy, so here I'll just focus on a possible solution, which I hope is constructive.

I've been trying to imagine a strategy that reconciles the different perspectives on the Inforum's print collections. The Inforum is a library, and should have some form of browsable collection of printed books that reflects the expertise of Inforum librarians. Just last year we emphasized this idea in the evidence we presented for our ALA accreditation (see pp. 210-15 in the final self-study, posted here: https://ischool.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/UoT_iSchool_ALA_Self_Study_Feb_10_2017_final.pdf). As we said in that self-study, "The collection's focus has evolved over the history of the Faculty to accommodate changing needs" (p. 212). Elisa's recent notes indicate how much thought and work goes into shaping that collection *as* a collection, and not a semi-random aggregation of books (which describes my bookshelves at home). The question now seems to be how the print collection should evolve going forward.

Essentially, all I want from that collection is for my students -- and everyone else's students, including those in the newer MI concentrations -- to be able to stand in front of easily browsable shelves with a selection of the most important titles in the subjects they need to learn about. Not an exhaustive collection -- that's what the full UTL system is for -- but a carefully selected set of the most important starting points. I already do this virtually in most of my syllabi (see p. 2 of my latest Intro to Book History syllabus, posted here: <https://ischool.utoronto.ca/course/introduction-to-book-history/>).

I've linked 10 "start here" titles from this syllabus, and UTL has all of them digitally, which is great. But as we know from visiting each other's offices, nothing beats a physical bookshelf for ease of browsing and the basic sociability of sharing knowledge through tangible objects. As a book historian, I don't categorically love books -- that's a distraction, as I tell my students -- but I do respect the simple power of bookshelves, and the social relationships they can help to build.

I'd like to see the Inforum continue to provide a browsable print collection that serves the fullest possible range of our students. What

I'm imagining is Costis's suggestion for shelving around the outer walls, wherever we can find space, combined with an expanded notion of what counts as course reserves. Maybe the right term would be "teaching collection," in a more general sense, even if the books are categorized as course reserves in the UTL system.

The organizing logic would begin with syllabi for our required courses and regular electives, which hopefully would allow fluidity and avoid encyclopedic category-creep. For our students -- and for all Inforum patrons, since this is a U of T library -- it would be like walking around Bissell's upper floors and seeing a snapshot of the shelves in faculty offices. A student walking around that outer wall would see museum studies books, archives books, project management books, data analytics books, book-history books (lots of those), design books, information policy books, and other kinds -- but few enough, and selected carefully enough, that they fit within the space and make sense as a collection. Space is a hard constraint, but that's why bookshelves are epistemologically useful: they force us to choose. The bigger point is that students would encounter chosen works from our different areas within the same space. And no labels for categories on the shelves, just spines, titles, and call numbers, all within the field of vision of the students working at those tables.

There would be challenges regarding shelf space vs scope and classification, but this is why it's key to have the Inforum librarians and their expertise. There are probably lots of flaws in this idea that I'm not seeing because I'm not a librarian, but in the spirit of Costis's suggestion about the shelving, I think it helps to put ideas on the table that others can build on. (The table, real and metaphorical, being another type of sociable infrastructure like the bookshelf...)

All the best,
Alan

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Alan Galey
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On 2018-02-20 11:04 AM, Elisa Sze wrote:

> Thank you, Jenna, for taking the time to write about how having an
> Inforum that includes a library collection has supported you in your
> role as a faculty member.

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> To add to Jenna's message, over the weekend, Kathleen, Nalini, and I
> have been hearing back from various iSchool stakeholders, who have
> shared with us how important the Inforum collection is to them. The
> truth remains that once removed and dispersed from the Inforum, the
> collection will no longer be a collection.

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> I do want to add a few words of my own.

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> Although I have been on research leave since July 1, 2017, I have found
> myself returning to the Inforum throughout my leave because I have
> needed to refer to the Inforum collection as part of my research
> process. Despite the fact that I'm also a cataloguer, and a frequent
> user of the UTL catalogue and the UTL's online subscription resources,
> many of the background sources that I have found for my project have