

INFORUM COLLECTION VALUE AS IDENTIFIED IN SCHOOL/FACULTY REVIEWS & BY THE SCHOOL/FACULTY ITSELF: SOME HISTORICAL INFORMATION, COMBINED WITH AN ARGUMENT

The value of an on-site information and museum studies collection, housed in a specialized academic library, curated by a subject specialist collections faculty librarian in consultation with the library's core user groups, has been periodically raised and examined over the life of the library of the Faculty of Information and its predecessors.

When coffers and cupboards appear bottom-line bare, the Inforum and its predecessors sharpen into focus as a site of organizational belt-tightening, especially given its proximity to one of the top academic libraries on the continent. This scenario is nothing new for academic branch libraries, and is in keeping with the cost-saving driven closures of academic branch libraries still in evidence over twenty years since Madison, Fry, and Gregory (1994) on behalf of ACRL, compiled criteria for opening, maintaining, or closing branches in a systematic, evidence-based manner. Library and information science libraries have been in decline for many decades. (Searing, 2016, 2012).

I wish to offer some of what I have come across in my archival examination of the Inforum's history thus far. I have focused on some of the many program and administrative reviews the Faculty has undergone since its early days. For the most part, all reviews laud the excellence and value of the Library to its faculty and student researchers. In almost every case, the focus is on the value of the Library's collections.

A proviso: I wish to point out that although the historical documents to which I refer were written in the library school context, I believe that they translate well to the mission of an iSchool, with its much greater curricular reach. The Inforum collection policy has changed as the Faculty's areas of concentration have changed. Material is acquired to support Faculty areas of study as the Inforum is mandated to do, with the understanding that other libraries in the UTL system are as key to students of the newer concentrations.

THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

The Inforum has undergone significant collection downsizing in the last two decades, relegating the majority of its monographs and print periodicals to Downsview, the University's offsite storage facility, in order to free up more space for key needs of today's academic libraries – research, collaboration, group and individual study, and events. The streamlined collection offers easily accessible, current literature of the information disciplines and museum studies as covered by the faculty's curriculum.

Current and recent past periodical literature is readily accessible online through UTL's extensive online holdings, supplemented by interlibrary loan. In terms of historical research, essential access to bound volumes is handily only two days away (Downsview off-site storage turnaround time). An important casualty is the ability to browse the shelves.

Publisher output in the monographic literature of information and museum studies shows no sign of slowing down, as witnessed by publishers catalogues. Many titles still have no digital equivalents, though. Ready access to a physical collection, acquired in a systematically and

comprehensively curated process over decades, continues to be invaluable for graduate-level research today, as it was in the past. Web-based grey literature, especially the kind issuing from professional associations, falls outside of the purview of approval plans, but is considered too unstable to catalogue. Acquiring print copies often available for purchase, therefore, is an important knowledge preservation act.

This brief compilation of some reviewer and faculty statements on the purpose and value of the Faculty's Library collection is an argument in favour of maintaining the collection on site.

Indeed, the two most recent assessments of the Inforum (Ridley, 2013; UTL Working Group, 2015) recommend that the collection should remain on-site. The area that would be freed up (Feasibility Study, 2017) to serve as undergraduate study space, in light of the following evaluative comments, appear to be but a small gain in the face of the loss of such a resource. Historically, the large 'F' Faculty has supported its library collections as key to its teaching, learning, and research mandate.

PROGRAM REVIEWS: A SAMPLING

Beginning in 1937, the American Library Association accreditation process addressed the Bachelors, then Masters program, moving to a regular seven-year cycle beginning in _____ and continuing to the present day. The School also participated in ALA's Continuing Review process from 1966 to 1991, in which annual reports were submitted to ALA. Although a separate library school library was not a requirement for accreditation, Section F of the Continuing Review Report Form pertained to Library facilities and services. Emphasis in the following quotes are mine.

From the Faculty response to the ALA COA Visiting Team Report (1980, July)

"The U of T in recognition of the need to support collection development, made available a special appropriation to support library collections, including the Faculty of Library Science, late in 1979 after the Self Study had been submitted. This was reflected in the updated budget information supplied to the Team. **The Faculty recognizes the importance of this recommendation [1] and will make every effort to see that it is implemented.**"

From the School's Continuing Review submission to ALA (1981/82)

- "It has always been the Faculty's practice to allocate part of any carryforward to its Library's budget for collections."
- "As an indication of its priorities, in 1981/82, the Faculty by internal budget adjusting, increased the allocation for book purchases by \$3000."

The Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) regularly carried out reviews of the PhD program and the Masters program. In the early 1970s, the fledgling PhD program was also subject to an intensive review by the Ontario provincial government, which had set out to conduct a discipline-by-discipline examination of doctoral programs, in a process known as the ACAP Discipline Assessment.

From an OCGS appraisal of the PhD program (1981)

“Toronto’s Faculty of Library Science has an **unusually fine library science library, both in terms of its collection and in current budgetary support.** Since the main University library adjoins the school, library resources could scarcely be more conveniently arranged for doctoral students. The University library is very adequate, indeed, in its holdings for research in library and information science ... This reviewer has no doubt that the doctoral program of the Faculty of Library Science should be continued.”

—Russell E. Bidlack, *Dean of the School of Library Science at the University of Michigan*

Supporting letter to OCGS from U of Toronto’s Associate Chief Librarian (1981)

“The Faculty’s own library **constitutes the University’s special collection in the field of library science** and is one of the largest and richest of its kind on this continent.”

—David G. Esplin, *Associate Chief Librarian, University of Toronto*

From an OCGS appraisal of the PhD program (1989)

“Simply put, the library resources are excellent – **certainly they are among the very best found in support of a LIS program anywhere in North America.** Not only is the collection impressive in its size (70,000 volumes, 1340 serial titles) and diversity, but the staff, the location, and the access policies make this library a major asset for the PhD program.”

—Jeffrey Katzer, *founder of the doctoral program at the School of Information Science, Syracuse University*

From an OCGS review of the PhD program (1989)

“The library collections and services are truly superlative. **Collection development has been done with great care over time and the result is a collection unparalleled elsewhere in Canada and competitive with the oldest collections in the US.** I had brought a list of important but relatively difficult to obtain items to check (technical reports, series, etc.) and found that the FLIS library had 100% representation.

“... Staffing of the FLIS library is outstanding... Simply put, the FLIS Library is extraordinarily strong. I could find no concerns about which to comment. **This is a national treasure for advancing information science and library science knowledge.**”

—Kathleen M. Heim, *Dean, School of Library & Information Science, Louisiana State University*

Supporting letter to OCGS from U of Toronto’s Associate Chief Librarian (1989)

“The Faculty of Library and Information Science Library is the **University’s special collection in the field of library and information science** and is one of the largest and best collections in North America. It is able in itself to support MLS and PhD studies and research in most areas of library and information science ... The Faculty’s Library is supported in general and augmented in specific areas by holdings of other libraries in the University of Toronto’s Library System.”

—Carole Moore, *Chief Librarian, University of Toronto*

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEWS: A SAMPLE, INCLUDING WHY A SEPARATE COLLECTION IS KEY

Administrative reviews included Provostial (Decanal) reviews, conducted near the end of a dean's usual 5-year term. In addition, the University found itself dealing with strong budgetary pressures in the 1970s and asked academic units, including FLS, to submit their objectives to Governing Council's Planning and Resources Committee. The Faculty did so at the end of 1974, and subsequently, the Office of the Vice President for Research and Planning issued comments and recommendations in *The Faculty of Library Science: Summary*.

In this summary, the resources put towards the Faculty's Library was questioned:

More than one-half of the support staff is assigned to the Faculty's library collection ... Are there means by which the services required to maintain the Faculty's library collection could be otherwise provided for, thus releasing more support to attend to non-library demands? Is it possible that some of these services could be provided through the facilities of the Robarts Library? . [UTARMS A2008-012/1004 (#12: Planning 1974-1978)]

It asked the Faculty to "focus on the role of the library collection in the Faculty's programme" and said that the Faculty's programme objectives for the collection "should be stated and defined."

This was a time, as pointed out by the Library and Instructional Media (LIM) Committee Chair, where "considerable attention is currently being paid to departmental libraries ... In a time of tight budgets, an approved statement of Library goals and objectives is particularly important." [UTARMS A2008-012/1002 (#6: FLS Council 1975-76)]

Therefore, the LIM committee composed and approved a *Statement of objectives: Faculty of Library Science Library*, approved by FLS Council in 1976. The statement said that the Library's primary goal was "to support the teaching, learning, and research activities of the faculty and students", and secondarily, "to serve as an information centre for the University and the library profession in library and information science." [UTARMS A2008-012/1002 (#06: FLS Council 1975/76)] The objectives (emphasis mine) included:

- 1) To **collect**, in depth, materials to support research in library science
- 2) To organize all parts of the **collection for efficient access and retrieval of materials**.
- 3) To provide appropriate research, information and **loan services** to faculty, students, the profession, and others working on library problems.
- 4) To serve as an example of an operational library, performing all functions in the service of a specialized clientele. [UTARMS A2008-012/1002 (#06: FLS Council 1975/76)]

Two months later, the committee was in the final stages of preparing a collections policy, noting at a subsequent Council meeting that this policy "was viewed as flowing from the *Statement of goals and objectives [of the Library]*." [UTARMS A2008-012/1002 (#06: FLS Council 1975/76)]

From the Faculty's response to the University (1977/78)

The Faculty responded with strong statement in support of its library: "It has been a continuing philosophy of this Faculty that a separate library is an essential part of its academic program, and **even in the early years when the Faculty's budget was very limited**,

funds were devoted to the library's collection ... In designing the present building [140 St George Street] the library was planned as the centre of the building as it was central to the teaching program.”

The summary section was succinct: “The Faculty of Library Science Library is an integral part of the teaching programme. The services it offers in support of the teaching programme **would not be possible without a separate library collection, staff, and quarters. Maintenance of its library is a high priority for the Faculty.**” [UTARMS A2008-012/1002 (#11: FLS Council 1977/78)]

From the Report of the [Provostial] Committee for the Review of FIS (1995)

“The Faculty’s Library is widely recognized by peer institutions as **the best of its type in North America** ... The Committee agrees that the Library is a superb resource for, and should **remain an integral part of**, the Faculty.” While collections are not specifically mentioned, it goes without saying that collections are a crucial part of what the Library offered.

ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

Finally, I want to call attention to the role of the library in the School/Faculty as articulated in 1966 by the School/Faculty’s third director, R. Brian Land

The library school library which is well-stocked, attractively furnished, and up-to-date in its equipment and methods, can provide the student with a first-hand opportunity to see the embodiment of the ideas and ideals proclaimed in the classroom. The library school library, therefore, **should be a model library**. At Toronto, the faculty is unanimous in its conviction that a library of professional literature in the form of books, periodicals, pamphlets, microforms, and audio-visual materials is **basic to the success of the program** of teaching and research and should be located within the library school.” (pp. 74-75)

For work at an advanced level, individual library reports, manuals, surveys, and research reports are invaluable to the library school library and frequently are **not the kind of materials readily acquired or easily serviced by a large research library**. The library science collection in the main library of the University of Toronto is of a general nature and has been selected without reference to the specific needs of the School of Library Science.” (p. 75)

Space for the library...requires the most careful planning of all.” (p. 77)

Some of Land’s key points about the Library and its collections are as relevant to an iSchool, as they were then, when the Faculty was a library school.

- Integral to the success of the teaching & research program of the school/faculty
- Subject specialization of the collection
- Importance of ready access
- Concept of model library [2]

SOME IMPACTS OF COLLECTION DISPERSAL

If as the Feasibility Study (2017) proposes, the collection is moved to Robarts, it will be dispersed over all 4 Robarts stacks floors, and will be a collection no longer. Timely access to students will suffer, given the sheer volume of books cycling through the Robarts loans process – quick shelving is just not possible in such a large library.

Will time-crunched iSchool students take the time to engage in thorough graduate-level research, or just rely more on what they can find on the web? The current Inforum collection is a **collection**, easily browseable, accessible, and convenient for to its core user groups. It is a hybrid collection, partly online, and partly paper-based.

It would be hard to conceptualize the Faculty's library as a library, without a physical collection. No other U of T professional graduate faculty has a digital-only library. No other U of T library is digital only. Paper-based information containers still matter in an academic environment, and information scholars and practitioners still need to engage with information in all its formats.

With the collection absorbed into the Robarts stacks, access for some user groups becomes difficult. Alumni, information and museum professionals, scholars, and others working on information problems, would not be able to browse the collection. We would no longer be a community resource, after decades of serving in this role.

I have not touched on impact on other services, but as reference librarian for almost two decades, I can say that the reference services I can provide without ready access to our specialized physical collection, will be of lesser quality. I also regularly review new acquisitions in order to know what exists. A catalogue record of a new book is a poor surrogate for the actual book, in a reference sense.

In summary, given what has gone into building such a world-class collection, it seems unbalanced in terms of gains vs. losses to not only to remove it, but to disperse it. There are other sites in the Faculty that can provide study space.

The new revitalization plans, with the exception of stacks removal, are exciting, and will bring new life, new opportunities and possibilities, and a whole new generation of students into the Faculty. Keeping the collections onsite should be part of the key services we can offer – promotion and effective use of the collections can form part of the Inforum's work in reaching out to this new core group of Inforum users.

NOTES

[1] Recommendation to expand the collection, especially in light of the growth of information science studies from the early 1980s onward. The collection budget was significantly increased with funds from both the central library and the Faculty to build up holdings in information science.

[2] The laboratory aspect of the Faculty's library was an earlier, rather than later, mandate, as reflected in reports and statements from the 1970s. [add citation].

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Primary source references are embedded in the text.

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