

**The University of Toronto
External Review of the University Library
November 2008**

Executive Summary

The University of Toronto Library enjoys international recognition for the strength of its collections, and the University's commitment to above average annual increases in the materials budget is an acknowledgment of that excellence. Support for collections alone, however, is insufficient to ensure that information services are matched to the aspirations of a world-class university. The University of Toronto Library has enhanced its physical environment through the creation of the Academic Learning Centre on the UT Mississauga campus, the transformation of the St. George Library and the construction of the Downsview storage facility. Some changes have been made in Robarts and the planned further renovation should be a high priority. The greatest weakness in the Library stems from budget reductions which, over a decade, have significantly eroded staffing in the Central Libraries. Although total staff, compared to most other North American institutions, remains high, there is a need for the infusion of new skills and perspectives that would be best met by the strategic investment in a few targeted areas, such as support for new modes of teaching and learning. There is also an urgent need to improve management of the collections. Bringing order to the stacks would be a quick and relatively inexpensive win that would please academics and ensure that the University gets the best value from its investment in its collections.

The Library reflects the larger environment in which it operates. The sharp growth in the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses and corresponding expansion of library and information services contrasts with the retrenchment of the Central Libraries and brings some tensions. The relationships among the campuses should be fostered, with opportunities for exchange of ideas and shared planning increased. In addition to internal collaboration, the Library should continue to build on the success of the Scholars Portal by exploring ways in which partnerships with other institutions could benefit the University, the province, and the nation.

The University of Toronto Library is poised for a major transition. Following many years of continuity in the excellent leadership of Carole Moore, the Library will soon experience the inevitable shift in direction that comes from a change at the top. The University should be uncompromising in the recruitment of the next university librarian to ensure that this great library has one of the top librarians in the world at its helm.

Introduction

The external review of the Library at the University of Toronto was carried out in the context of the Terms of Reference provided to the review team by the Office of the Vice President and Provost. The general charge was to conduct "an overall assessment of the Library relative to the best in Canada and internationally, including areas of strength and weakness." The areas identified for specific attention included:

- the Library's relationship with the academic programs

- the quality of service for faculty and students
- the support for teaching and research in a networked world
- the Information Commons and University Help Desk
- the appropriateness of the Library's performance measures
- the effectiveness of the relationship of the central library with the tri-campus, divisional and federated libraries
- the appropriateness of the decision making structure
- the effectiveness of the operational and financial models
- the Library partnerships with other universities and organizations
- the administration and management of the Library, particularly planning, staff morale, communication, and staff development
- the policies and procedures for handling gifts-in-kind

The Review Team visited the University on September 29-30, 2008. The Team was provided with a well-organized and informative binder of background information prepared and shared ahead of the visit. In addition, the Review Team received confidential written communications from various individuals and groups at the University focused on specific matters to be considered in the review. A series of meetings was organized with individuals and groups from within the Library and from across the University, including students, faculty, and academic administrators. The documentation and the discussions were substantive and candid, and provided the Review Team with a productive database from which to draw conclusions and offer findings and recommendations.

The Review Team has organized its report into six major sections. In the first section, several items raised in the 1999 external review of the Library are revisited, and the significant and sustained progress of the Library over the last nine years is referenced and applauded. This is followed by a section which outlines some key characteristics of the 21st century academic research library. This served as a lens through which the Review Team assessed the state of the Library at Toronto its readiness to advance its support for teaching, learning and research at the University. The final sections speak to specific observations and advice in areas where expanded attention is required.

1. Comments on Progress Since Last Review

A review of the Library at the University of Toronto was conducted in October 1999. The current Review Team highlights several areas raised in that report:

- 1.1 The commitment of the central administration to protect the purchasing power of the acquisitions budget against the impact of inflation and currency fluctuation has been sustained and has enabled the Library to continue to build strong book collections while also expanding significantly access to essential electronic resources.
- 1.2 Development of the Information Commons in the Library has enabled a strong service program particularly for students who require dependable access to technology, assistance, and tools.
- 1.3 The need for staff renewal and reconfiguration, particularly under the impact of staff reductions and staff retirements was recognized. These conditions persist, and the need for expanded investment in staff development and training, and for innovative approaches to structures and staff assignments is critical.
- 1.4 The need for a systematic program of assessment to make sure that service quality is improved was cited. The Library has embraced the ARL LibQual methodology and has analyzed and addressed many of the issues raised in these studies, while also advancing other strategies for gathering input from users.
- 1.5 The need for stronger internal and external collaborations as a way for the Library to extend and enhance services was emphasized. New frameworks have been implemented within the library system and with academic divisions, and the Scholars Portal initiative is a model program of provincial cooperation.
- 1.6 The need for a long range space plan and for the renovation of Gerstein was seen as critical to management of library collections and services and to the provision of quality user space and staff work areas. Master planning for library space has proceeded and priority needs have been identified.
- 1.7 The expanded role of the Centre for Academic Computing and its support for instructional technology at the University was encouraged, and has in fact been advanced, but important budgetary and governance issues require attention.

The 1999 review described the Library at Toronto as “in the front ranks of the university research libraries in North America” and as “healthy and strong as it enters a new era of development.” The 2008 review team continues to concur generally in this overall assessment. The Library at Toronto has comprehensive collections of breadth and depth, has made substantial investment in electronic resources and digital library development, has a strong commitment to quality service, and has constructed innovative partnerships within the University, the province, the nation and the world. But as the University has expanded, and there has been a significant erosion in operational and service capacity due to staff reductions over an extended period, we are concerned about the ability of the Library to address critical challenges and opportunities over the next decade and to sustain its excellence.

2. The Twenty-First Century Academic Research Library

The Library at the University of Toronto will need to evaluate carefully its current priorities and pursue new directions in order to sustain its relevance and impact, and to continue to support well the academic and research needs of the University, the provincial and larger scholarly communities. The Library, along with its peer institutions across North America, is facing a shifting context which includes the following elements:

- the customization and personalization of the library in response to individual styles, preferences and needs
- the openness of the library programs, delivering content, services and tools to all users as if they were working at a distance
- the demand for self-service, the ability of users to access, control and use information on their own
- a sense of mutability, of constant change, and of innovative and hybrid approaches and structures
- an expanding focus on successful graduates and productive faculty as key measures of success
- a commitment to usability in developing services and technologies which establishes an iterative process of testing and evaluation
- the expanding social environments in which libraries will need to work in order to support their users and deliver content and services
- the culture of assessment and accountability which requires constant surveying and conversation with users about the quality and utility of library programs
- the need to market content and services and to raise their awareness and availability through better penetration of existing user communities and through expansion into new markets
- the recognition of the essential importance of collaboration at all levels across the campus and the university, the province and the nation with libraries, and with the scholarly community, government and business
- the embracing of the reality of competition for funding, for collections, for staff, for donors, for political attention and for visibility

These examples of contextual change illustrate the trends confronting library development. They do not set aside the continuing core library services provided by the academic research library. These include: information acquisition, synthesis, navigation, discovery, dissemination, interpretation, understanding and archiving. But they do emphasize new roles for the library in such areas as: information aggregation, publishing, teaching and learning, research and development, business development, and policy advocacy. The academic research library will

be legacy, continuing to manage large quantities of traditional collections while embracing born digital resources. The library will be infrastructure, providing essential space, technology, and expertise in support of the education and research communities. The library will be repository, preserving and archiving access to centuries of analog records as well as all formats of new digital media and tools. The library will be portal, serving as an intelligent gateway, a readers advisor to information of relevance and quality. The library will be enterprise, characterized by innovation, experimentation and entrepreneurial initiative. And, the library will be public interest, advocating for policies in such areas as scholarly communication, copyright, privacy, intellectual freedom and telecommunications.

The library as place will remain an important aspect of identity, but it will take on more of a trompe l'oeil character, with more of a commitment to learning space, social space, intellectual space and collaborative space with maximum flexibility and adaptability. The library services must be increasingly untethered from the physical library, as the library professional works more routinely in the classroom, in the laboratory, and at the bedside.

The Review Team carried out its assessment looking for the understanding and readiness of the Toronto Library to advance this future vision. We see the following elements as defining the strategic focus for the 21st century research library:

- distributed electronic access to content, tools and services
- high quality physical spaces
- high quality virtual spaces
- special and distinctive collections
- global collections
- archiving a digital and analog content
- innovative applications of technology in support of learning and research
- high quality technology infrastructure
- professional and administrative staff with deep and diverse expertise and strong service ethic
- staff development and professional engagement
- leadership in information policy
- integration into the academic fabric of the university
- new knowledge driven by research and development
- innovative resource development capacity

3. Collections and Services

- 3.1 The University should continue to invest in the development of the collections at a rate of annual increase (most recently 4.2 percent) that will enable the Library to sustain its acquisition of critical academic and research resources in all formats, but with an expanding commitment to licensed specialized electronic resources. However, since even an increase of 4.2 percent is insufficient to keep pace with inflation, the Library should expand its resource sharing strategies.
- 3.2 The University should invest strategically and selectively in the growth of Library staff. After a decade of staffing erosion in excess of 200 positions, it is essential that several areas be addressed. Two urgent priorities have been identified. There is wide enthusiasm among the faculty for integrating the librarian into the classroom as part of an expanded University information literacy curriculum enhancement. But the program is not scalable and will not be successful without new staff with appropriate professional, teaching and disciplinary credentials.
- 3.3 The conditions in the collection stacks were repeatedly described as “relentless chaos” and no topic evoked more concern than the inability to locate materials in the physical collections. Clearly, expanded staff support is needed to maintain order in the stacks and to enable more rapid reshelving and regular collection maintenance.
- 3.4 With an aging staff and constant budget reductions sharply curtailing the ability to introduce new staff, there has been limited ability to create a dynamic environment in which there is a mix of new ideas or promotional opportunities. This is especially so in the central library, where the greatest reductions have occurred. The vitality of the organization, despite the best efforts of its leadership and dedicated staff, is draining with each successive cut. This has implications for the Library’s ability to offer creative and agile solutions to the demands of the modern scholar in the information society, and the damage to the institution’s reputation will surely make it difficult to recruit a distinguished successor to Carole Moore.
- 3.5 The gift-in-kind policy and practices of the Library were found to be well-documented and well-developed. The acceptance of collections is evaluated in the context of academic priorities and collection strengths, and in close consultation with the faculty. Competition among research libraries for the purchase or gift of major special collections is increasing. A critical element is the securing of financial support from the donor or from funding sources to enable the timely processing and effective preservation of the materials.
- 3.6 The Library is a leader in the mass digitization of its collections, working with the Open Content Alliance to expand access over the web to a growing body of out of copyright works. The Library should continue to build capacity in this area, and extend efforts to embrace as possible special collections and other formats. The Library should also have in place a plan for archiving of digital content and for disaster preparedness to protect electronic assets.
- 3.7 The Library should explore innovative strategies to market and support the development of T-Space, the University institutional repository. There is strong interest across the faculty in this capacity to make available over the web the intellectual and scholarly accomplishments of the Toronto faculty and students. But awareness and understanding is mixed, and ability and willingness to contribute content is constrained.

- 3.8 The Library should explore opportunities to further integrate its collections and services into course web sites, leverage social networking tools, and innovate new approaches to online learning. The Resource Centre for Academic Technology is a critical opportunity for transformative collaborations and activities for the Library in teaching and learning.
- 3.9 The Information Commons has been a very successful initiative to support the technology access and service needs of students. The Library should use this experience to expand its research commons capacity with faculty and students to increase activities in the areas of scholarly database development, e-research and science cyberinfrastructure, electronic texts, digital media, electronic data, and spatial data/GIS.
- 3.10 The system of Library liaisons and subject librarians is widely embraced and celebrated among the Toronto faculty and students. It has served effectively the research collection and research services mission of the Library. This commitment to professional and disciplinary expertise should be sustained in the face of pressure for expanded staffing in other areas.

4. Physical and Technology Infrastructure

- 4.1 The Library has a fundamental print archive role and an important component of this activity is a well-designed and serviceable offsite shelving facility for the effective housing and preservation of low use but historically important collections. The University needs to invest as early as possible in the additional shelving required in the current facility.
- 4.2 The Robarts facility is a very heavily used library, and investment in its refurbishment needs to be advanced as a very high priority. The expansion of the building would be very beneficial to University community and should become a central and priority element in future capital fundraising efforts.
- 4.3. A visit to the Mississauga campus highlighted the extraordinary use being made its library facility, with the prospect that similar conditions are being experienced at the Scarborough campus. Plans for expanded student populations, for new academic programs, and for student and faculty work that will increasingly encourage the use of collaborative spaces, all point to the need for priority attention to the regular refreshment and prospective expansion of the library spaces on these two campuses.
- 4.4 The Library is heavily invested in technology, hardware, software, systems and peripherals. It is essential that a budget for timely upgrades, replacements and expansion of technology be put in place.

5. Partnerships and Collaboration

- 5.1 The Library system at Toronto is expanding the level and quality of information flow across the campus, divisional and federated University libraries. There is a spirit of cooperation and a commitment to working together with new substance and rigor. In this favorable environment, now is the time to identify ways to formalize these working relationships and to embrace the stakeholder roles and shared investment that is needed to make the entire

community of libraries stronger. This will mean involving staff from all locations on standing committees and task forces, creating a directors forum for regular discussion of policy and project initiatives, and new approaches to shared collection development responsibilities.

- 5.2 The recent creation of a CIO position at Toronto offers a new opportunity for forging a renewed cooperative framework with the Library on information technology matters and for addressing governance and budget issues. The role of the Library in the areas of instructional technology, research computing and digital library development should be affirmed.
- 5.3 The Ontario Scholars Portal is a successful and powerful collaborative initiative across the academic libraries of the province. The content, services and tools enabled through the Portal are of extraordinary benefit to the students and faculty at Toronto. These resources enable the Library at Toronto to invest in areas that expand further electronic collections and functionality. The electronic archiving of licensed content, the document delivery capacity, the seamless searching across multiple databases, and the expansion into social science survey data, in combination with the massive collections of electronic journals and books, make this one of the leading regional consortiums of its type in the world. The challenge is to demonstrate the value of the Scholars Portal to the students, faculty and administration of the University.
- 5.4 The University of Toronto Libraries are positioned well to be leaders in new arenas in the province and indeed, in Canada. With arguably the best collection in Canada and with a new storage facility beginning to be populated, the Library has the possibility of establishing itself as a repository for print to back up other institutions where print journals may be discarded in lieu of electronic versions. The University of Toronto should explore a business model that might receive support from other libraries or provinces in return for its commitment to retain the print for the nation.

6. Administrative and Resource Issues

- 6.1 The responsibility center funding model is challenging to implement for central service units that do not have dependable and separate sources of revenue. The budgetary structure for university-wide cost allocations like the Library seems to be working well. It will need to be monitored carefully as the University faces economic and funding constraints. The Library as a shared resource and as a key element of Toronto's distinction and leadership needs to be protected in the new budget environment but always with the expectation of efficient use of University resources.
- 6.2 The fundraising culture at Toronto is competitive and schools and academic divisions carefully control their alumni and donors. This can make it difficult for the Library to develop an annual giving and major gifts and endowment capacity. The university development office needs to continue to develop with the Library a professional fundraising capacity, including appropriate access to prospects, donor outreach partnerships with the schools, an expanded grants capability, and the prominence of Library needs in campaign priorities.

- 6.3 The Review Team received a significant number of communications with concerns about the administrative culture in the libraries, and the need to open channels of consultation and information sharing. It would be desirable to regularly carry out a communication and cultural audit to discover areas where improvements are needed.
- 6.4 The Library needs to take an expanded leadership role at the University in coordinating conversations and actions on important scholarly communication and information policy developments. There was clearly hunger among faculty and students for expanded understanding and participation in arenas that are driving new approaches to scholarly communication and copyright, for example.
- 6.5. The Library faces turnover in leadership at the senior and middle management levels that requires careful thinking and preparation for succession planning, for organizational review, and for new leadership recruitment. What type of leadership, expertise, and personal attributes will be needed by Toronto. The University should put in place a process to evaluate these requirements and to prepare for the searches that will need to proceed over the next two years.

The Review Team thanks all those who met with and provided information for their valuable contributions to the review process. In our view, the staff of the Library at Toronto, with the support of the University administration, faculty, and benefactors, has sustained the collections, services and leadership of one of the world's most distinguished academic research libraries. This has taken place during periods of noteworthy budgetary stress but also rich opportunities to innovate through technology, conditions that will only escalate over the next several years. The recommendations and the view of the future of the research library outlined in this report seek to position the Library at Toronto as a continuing leader across the University, the province and North America.

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