



University of Toronto Faculty Association

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July 23, 2010

Professor Meric S. Gertler  
Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science  
Room 5063, Sidney Smith Hall  
100 St. George  
University of Toronto

Dear Professor Gertler:

On behalf of the librarians at the University of Toronto, the Librarians Committee of the University of Toronto Faculty Association wishes to voice its concerns about the recent recommendations released on July 14 in the Faculty of Arts & Science Academic Plan that would amalgamate the East Asian, German, Iberian and Italian departments into a proposed School of Languages and Literatures and, in addition, terminate the Centre for Comparative Literature, Centre for Ethics, and Latin American Studies.

The Librarians Committee is concerned about the long-term effects of these recommendations. If they are implemented as stated, they are bound to have irrevocable consequences for some of Canada's most valuable research collections and, in turn, for the academic librarians who have built, nurtured and developed these rich collections, and who are affiliated with the University of Toronto Libraries and, specifically, the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library, the Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library and the Petro Jacyk Central and Eastern European Resource Centre.

Therefore, the UTFA Librarians Committee would like to raise several points of concern:

1. We are concerned that librarians were not consulted or represented on the strategic planning committee.
  - The absence of any consultation or discussion with the academic librarians involved in the development of these resources raises questions about professional collaboration and collegiality at our institution.
  - The academic librarians who work with these area collections understand the theory and practice of developing specialized collections, their particular goals and priorities, the specific research needs of the users, the appropriate balance between traditional and e-collections and the task of collecting in all formats as appropriate for specific collections. Moreover, our librarians understand the academic and pedagogical values of items selected for these collections.

2. We are concerned about the long-term impact that these recommendations may have on the renowned library collections at the University of Toronto.

- The recommendations, made without consultation with those involved in building the long-term resources in the libraries, appear to be short-sighted and raise questions about the knowledge base on which these recommendations were determined.
- Area collections of such scope and magnitude take decades to build. When the building of these collections ceases, they become obsolete. Continuity is vital, from many perspectives, for the on-going value of research collections.
- The repercussions of diminished support to area and subject specific collections have an impact beyond their respective disciplines. This is something that is not always remembered. For example, the area of ethics, while important within philosophy, also serves as a vital resource for medicine, law and business, areas which may see their access to resources diminished should these recommendations be accepted.
- It must also be remembered that these collections are used not just by the UofT community, but by colleagues nationally and globally, as the statistics on inter-library loans, visiting scholars and the users of neighbouring universities demonstrate. The Library's membership in the Center for Research Libraries provides access for its member institutions to our wealth of materials as we have some of the largest collections in Canada.

3. The endowments, gifts, and special funding from donors that have helped to build these collections might be jeopardized. As these departments are amalgamated, and more generic collection goals are sought to appeal to a varied group of interests, the specific interests of donors are more difficult to accommodate.

- Placing these groups under one administrative unit could diminish the financial and human resources available to support the special collections. Our academic librarians, through many years of skilled relations with our donors, vendors, organizations and communities have ensured the growth of these valuable collections. The specialized network of relationships established over the years reflects the University's standing and reputation in the global environment.

In terms of the subject specific and area collections that are involved, here are a few highlights of why we are concerned and what might be jeopardized in the future should the recommendations of the Faculty of Arts & Science be implemented. These statistics have been compiled from reports made publicly available in the last few years:

- Many of these special collections are multi-discipline. For example, 60% of the Slavic material obtained from Central and Eastern Europe falls outside of the debated subjects of language and literature. Supporting area studies provides our community with a comprehensive scope of materials.
- The specialized Slavic Collection comprises over 600,000 volumes with more than 70 newspapers in the vernacular languages of Central and Eastern Europe, and live

television from Moscow is available daily as well as relevant documentaries and feature movies from the region.

- The field of ethics represents an important part of the large philosophy collection at UofT. In bioethics alone there has been a growth rate of 25% in the last few years, with a subject specific collection of more than 25,300 titles, demonstrating our community's active research activity and user needs.
- The Department of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto is the largest such department in North America, and Italian language and literature has been taught at the University of Toronto since the end of the 19th century. The department offers the only M.A. and Ph.D. programmes in Italian studies in Ontario (the M.A. is also offered at McGill, with a Ph.D. programme at Alberta). The Italian collections at the University of Toronto are surpassed only by those at Harvard and Yale. Donors have contributed generously for decades to this significant collection, to the great benefit of Canadian researchers.
- In 2001, the University of Toronto's holdings of German language and cultural materials numbered fourth and sixth after Library of Congress, University of Michigan, University of Chicago, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Illinois-Urbana. The Iberian and Ibero-American collections of the University of Toronto rank fourth among major North American libraries with over 1.5 million titles.
- In the specialized areas of the Iberian collections, the Catalan language and literature areas, Spanish history, and Spanish literature post-1961 are ranked as the top major library collections in North America.
- The East Asian Library collection alone contains more than 470,000 items and is the largest in Canada. The breadth and scope of this collection extends far beyond the study of languages and literatures, encompassing many historical and cultural fields.
- These special collections are used not just by those directly engaged in the subject areas but indirectly by other communities. For example, the data collected by the East Asian Library and the Slavic Collections provide up-to-date information that is otherwise impossible for researchers, economists, sociologists and other members of the respective communities to obtain directly for political reasons. The importance of maintaining these collections goes far beyond current pedagogical curriculum needs.

We urge the University to seek consultation with the academic librarians who are involved in the management of preserving, maintaining and developing these collections and who maintain contact with researchers and users around the world. This letter is intended to be an expression of our commitment and concern for all faculty and staff who might be affected by these changes and the institution as a whole.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Librarians Committee of the University of Toronto  
Faculty Association,

*H. Sonne de Torrens.*

Dr. H. Sonne de Torrens, MSt., Ph.D., L.M.S.  
Chair, Librarians Committee

Cc:

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