



**Response of the Chief Librarian to the
External Review of the University of Toronto Library
November 2008**

The External Reviewers have provided a helpful summary of what has been achieved since the last review in 1999, highlighted areas that need further attention, and recommended strategic directions for the twenty-first century academic research library. In consultation with senior library managers, I have reflected on their recommendations, particularly in light of the increasingly constrained economic situation, and my response follows.

In general, I am in agreement with the report. The reviewers underscored the erosion of staffing after years of budget reductions and the need for an infusion of new skills and perspectives. Unfortunately, the financial climate makes hiring of new staff extremely challenging in the current year. Turnover from retirements should make it possible to implement this recommendation in the next few years.

In addition, the reviewers pointed to the need to bring order to the overcrowded stacks. Fortunately, in conjunction with the Robarts renovation project, substantial progress has been made already in moving lower use materials to the Downsview preservation facility and shifting the remaining collection so that it can be more easily maintained by staff and accessed by students and faculty. This project will continue over the next year and by 2010, both the collection shelving and the study space in the stacks will be dramatically improved on all five floors.

Increased collaboration among the three campuses has also begun through regular meetings of the senior management of the libraries. Opportunities for further collaborative efforts have been identified, which support both research and instruction. Tri-campus collaboration on the digital research repository is one significant new direction, and more coordinated information literacy programs are underway.

It is encouraging to have the reviewers' recognition of the importance of the Scholars Portal as a model for provincial collaboration, and the further recommendation that additional partnerships could be built upon its success.

The reviewers noted the progress made by the Resource Centre for Academic Technology and the need to address governance issues. A review of the RCAT has now been scheduled by the Provost's Office.

In a section entitled **The Twenty-First Century Academic Research Library**, the reviewers provided a useful summary of the shifting context in which we operate. In their list of trends, the following are particularly significant in guiding future strategic directions:

- the *openness of library programs*, delivering content, services and tools to all users
- the *demand for self-service*, the ability of users to access, control and use information on their own
- an expanding *focus on successful graduates and productive faculty* as key measures of success
- the *culture of assessment and accountability* which requires constant surveying and conversation with users about the quality and utility of library programs
- 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 *new role of the library in areas such as policy advocacy*

The Library's plan needs to address these emerging trends and shift resources as appropriate.

In sections 3-6 the reviewers made a number of specific recommendations. My responses follow.

3. Collections and Services

- 3.1 The reviewers' first recommendation was that continued *investment in the collection* be sustained at a level to enable acquisition of critical academic and research resources in all formats, with expanding commitment to licensed specialized electronic resources. They noted that the recent level of 4.2% was not sufficient. Unfortunately, in the current financial environment the University has not been able to maintain even the past level of support. Thus, cancellation of existing resources will be necessary. It is hoped that with an improved financial climate, this support can be improved. Expansion of resource sharing will be pursued, but the possibilities of doing so within Canada are extremely limited, as our Library is already the net lender.
- 3.2 The recommendation to invest strategically and selectively in the growth of Library staff is a good one, and I agree with the priority given to expanding our support of the University information literacy curriculum objectives. For the present, this will be done with existing staff as much as possible. However, it will be considered a top priority for new staff.
- 3.3 Improvement of conditions in the Robarts stacks has begun through a two-year effort. Staff resources have been provided to accomplish the necessary shift of over 5 million volumes. Approximately 1 million volumes are now shelved at Downsview, available on request within 48 hours. The renovation of the study space on floors 9 through 13 will also contribute greatly to an improved environment. The recently completed test apex with 96 new seats was immediately filled to capacity.
- 3.4 The need for staff renewal and revitalization as soon as possible is clear.

- 3.5 The reviewers note the increasing competition for the purchase and gift of major special collections. The Library will pursue vigorously the need to secure financial support from the donor or other funding sources to enable the timely processing and effective preservation of the materials.
- 3.6 The reviewers endorse the Library's leadership in mass digitization of its collections. This effort has been supported thus far through external funding and further progress will undoubtedly depend on finding continuing support. The Library is working with other major Canadian libraries to secure such funding to support a national program. At the same time, together with the Ontario university libraries, we are actively pursuing a plan for archiving of digital content.
- 3.7 The recommendation to explore innovative strategies to develop the T-Space research repository is important. The Advisory Committee on the Library System is considering this issue. In addition, a committee of Dean's will be convened to explore how such development could support academic divisional priorities.
- 3.8 The Library and RCAT staff have been active in jointly facilitating integration of collection resources into course web sites and Blackboard. However, there is clearly much more that should be done to provide innovative and convenient approaches to learning for our large community of students and faculty. Our expanding program on information literacy will address this recommendation.
- 3.9 The Library agrees with the need to expand support capacity in new areas of scholarly database development, e-research, electronic texts, digital media, electronic data, and spatial data/GIS. At present we have some limited staff expertise in all of these areas and have worked in collaboration with interested faculty on grant-supported initial projects. The facilities for GIS services are currently being improved through the Robarts renovation project. Through the Scholars Portal, we have projects supporting electronic data and electronic texts. Working with Humanities faculty, we have supported their database and research tool needs. Curation of digital media, in support of research, teaching and learning, is clearly the Library's future. We expect to work more closely with faculty in this effort to meet the varying disciplinary needs, and with the Faculty of Information in advancing research and methodology.
- 3.10 I agree with the recommended priority given to sustaining and further developing the system of Library liaisons and subject librarians.

4. Physical and Technology Infrastructure

- 4.1 The need for additional shelving at Downsview is critical for continued progress on maintenance of the Robarts stacks. The Library is actively pursuing funding.
- 4.2 The first phase of the Robarts renovation is underway and funding for the planned addition is the Library's top capital priority. University student surveys continue to place more quality study space at the top of the list of needs. Robarts serves the needs

of expanding numbers of graduate students, who are the most intensive library users, and the huge undergraduate community, with many commuter students requiring study space between classes.

- 4.3 The Library concurs with the ongoing need to plan for refreshment and expansion of the new library facilities at the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses, which are intensively used by their growing student communities.
- 4.4 The recommendation to plan for technology upgrades and replacement needs to be addressed. The digital information environment requires appropriate equipment even in a constrained financial climate.

5. Partnerships and Collaboration

- 5.1 The recommendation to continue expanding the level of collaboration across the campus, divisional and federated University libraries is an extremely important one. The Library agrees with the need to formalize working relationships and “to embrace the stakeholder roles and shared investment that is needed to make the entire community of libraries stronger”. We will pursue the suggested means of involving staff from all locations on standing committees and task forces, creating a new directors’ forum for regular discussion of policy and project initiatives and new approaches to shared collection development responsibilities.
- 5.2 The new CIO has recently identified current priorities and an organizational structure that will enable the Library to work effectively in partnership with information technology units on the three campuses. The Library’s role in the areas noted, instructional technology, research computing and digital library development, will continue to be based on collaborative efforts.
- 5.3 The reviewers commended the Ontario Scholars Portal as one of the leading regional consortiums in the world, which offer content, services and tools of extraordinary benefit to the students and faculty at Toronto. Our Library is the service provider for the Ontario Scholars Portal, and the other Ontario universities provide funding to extend the service to their students and faculty. The reviewers pointed out that the benefit of this collaborative arrangement for the University of Toronto is not well understood on campus. Thus, the Library will endeavor to make the Scholars Portal value more apparent to the students, faculty and administration of the University.
- 5.4 The recommendation to establish the University of Toronto as a print repository for the province and/or the nation is a timely one. The Advisory Committee on the Library System has expressed support for this direction. Library staff will work with other interested institutions to explore potential business models.

6. Administrative and Resource Issues

- 6.1 The Library agrees with the need to continue to monitor effects of the implementation of the new budget model, in particular, in the current constrained funding climate.
- 6.2 The comments regarding the need to continue to develop greater fundraising capacity within the Library and/or centrally are well taken. The Library will review the options to address this issue with the Vice President and Chief Advancement Officer, in conjunction with planning for the next campaign.
- 6.3 The recommendation to improve communications, consultation and information sharing coincides with university-wide initiatives in this area. As a result of the Speaking Up survey, the Library has begun to focus more effort on both internal and external communications, with the assistance of Human Resources and Strategic Communications staff. We will expand this effort in the coming year.
- 6.4 The need for the Library to take an expanded leadership role in the University “in coordinating conversations and actions on important scholarly communication and information policy developments” is important and timely. While considerable expertise does reside in various areas of the Library, staff with responsibilities in this area could be better organized to coordinate activities and assist faculty and students. The Library will consider reorganization to fulfill this role more effectively.
- 6.5 The Library will focus greater effort on assessment tools and information that will assist the University and Library staff in preparing for succession planning, organizational review, and new leadership recruitment. In recent years we made it a priority to actively encourage staff to participate in leadership training and staff development programs. We will continue to do so.

In summary, the Library greatly appreciates the analysis and recommendations of the two reviewers. Both are experienced leaders from distinguished institutions with outstanding research libraries. As such they clearly face many of the same issues and challenges as the University of Toronto operating in an era of constant change. The economic climate has worsened considerably since their report was written. Thus, although I agree with the substance of the recommendations, it is clear that we will have to prioritize our own internal resources and activities to accomplish as much as possible. I also concur with their conclusion that today’s environment provides rich opportunities to innovate through technology. We must focus some of our efforts on recognizing such opportunities and realizing the benefits for students and faculty.

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