Information Services Internship Report

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1 Introduction

In the spring of 2010, the Faculty of Information’s Information Services (IS) unit created two summer intern positions for returning Faculty of Information students. These positions, which ran from May 3 - August 27, 2010, were created with the intent to provide an opportunity for students to gain first-hand experience working in a fast-paced academic library setting, the Faculty of Information’s Inforum. Additionally, the internships were conceived as an opportunity for students to mentor with Information Services staff, develop professional skills, and explore potential career paths. Angie McHodgkins and myself were the two successful applicants for the positions. The two 2010 summer intern positions were directly supervised by Kathleen Scheaffer, Librarian and Outreach and Instructional Services Coordinator with the Faculty of Information’s Information Services unit.

This summary report serves two purposes. First, in section 2 Summary of Work, I summarize some of the key tasks and projects I completed this summer as an Information Services Intern. I also describe projects that are ongoing through the fall 2010 and winter 2011 terms. Then, in section 3, Intern Experience, I provide short a short personal account of the value of this internship in terms of my professional goals and prospects, my understanding of academic librarianship, and my overall experience at the Faculty of Information.
The Information Services summer intern positions were split between special projects (including the 2010 student survey report, a range of promotions and outreach projects, etc.) and Information Desk duties (including reference and information services, circulation services, technical support, etc.).

Information Desk Duties

As mentioned above, almost half of my time as a summer intern was spent as part of the Inforum’s Public Services Team at the Information Desk. My duties at the desk included: providing circulation services; assisting with reference questions; providing technical support for the printers, photocopiers, scanners, and computers; and providing general backup for the Public Services team.

The intimidating move to the “other” side of the desk was facilitated by the excellent training received from Anna Oh, Circulation & Public Services Technician, and Nalini Singh, Librarian and Reference & Public Services Coordinator, as well as by the ongoing support and knowledge of all IS staff members. Whether it was solving a technical problem, answering a cataloguing question, or setting up a new borrower card, members of the IS team consistently provided me with excellent advice and trained me on the best ways to help our users.

What I appreciated most about working at the Information Desk was connecting directly with members of the iSchool community, learning about their particular information needs, and helping to provide them with the best resources for their work. Working at the desk and implementing the initiatives of the Public Services unit has shown me what it means to provide a high level of service to an academic user community.

I will continue to work as a student assistant at the Information Desk between September, 2010 and May, 2011. I look forward to developing my reference skills, increasing my knowledge of Information Services’ services and resources, and building my relationships with our community of users.
Special Projects

1) Information Services User Survey 2010

Each year, the Faculty of Information conducts a survey among the iSchool students to evaluate Information Services and identify ways to improve. This year, the 2010 Information Services User Survey, was administered electronically via SurveyMonkey.com between March 30 and April 11, 2010. The survey itself consisted of three open-ended questions in which student respondents were asked what they liked (Q3), what they didn’t like (Q4), and what other information they wanted to share with the Information Services team (Q5). Responses varied from one word to longer paragraphs of up to 100 words or more.

My roles in the project were threefold:

(1) Under Kathleen’s direction, Angie and I compiled the quantitative data from the survey. We also compiled and analyzed students’ responses to the three main questions using qualitative data analysis methods to sort the survey data into themes, assign codes, and analyze them using NVivo 8 software.

(2) Angie and I collaborated to produce an internal report for the IS team with a summary of the survey results for discussion and follow-up. Specifically, we identified survey comments relevant to each unit and discussed ways to address students’ concerns.

(3) Finally, I worked with Angie and Kathleen to coordination follow-up meetings with all IS units and produce an action plan and report for the iSchool the community as a whole.

The results of the open-ended survey provided us with a rich description of students’ understandings of the work done by the Information Services team on which to base the IS action plan. What was particularly satisfying about this project was the enthusiasm on the part of IS team members to address student concerns. The Information Services 2010 User Survey and Action Plan, was released to the entire iSchool community on June 27th. It can be located on the Faculty of Information web site.

2) Promotions and Outreach: Print and Electronic Materials

Work on IS promotion and outreach initiatives comprised a core part of my summer activities. I participated on the Promotions and Outreach committee and helped develop and implement initiatives designed to connect students and faculty with the services and resources available at the Inforum. My primary role as part of the committee was to design a range of promotions and outreach materials (both print and electronic) to support the initiatives of the committee. These materials included pamphlets, posters, computer backgrounds, and slides for the LCD screens in the Faculty of Information. See Figure 1 for some examples of poster designs.
In response to comments in the 2010 Information Services User Survey that indicated that students were not aware of the resources and materials available to them, I worked with Kathleen to develop a display and a series of signs to inform users about the resources and services to which they have access and direct them to the Information Desk for more information. See Figure 2 for samples of the desk signs created.

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Figure 1. Samples of promotional materials used for IS contests and events

Figure 2. Desk signs used to increase users’ awareness of the resources available
3) IS Communications Materials

In addition to work for the Promotions and Outreach committee, I worked with the entire IS team to design and produce various communications materials for the broader iSchool community. These materials included simple information handouts for use at the Information Desk, a tri-fold brochure distributed to all incoming students (see Figure 3), and a 12-page booklet intended to provide a more detailed look at IS’s contributions to education, research, and professional development at the Faculty of Information as well as its vision as an innovative information centre and academic library.

The 12-page IS booklet was the most significant of the communications and design projects of the summer. While I was responsible for the overall design for the booklet, the booklet itself is truly a creation of the entire IS staff. It contains all original images (taken by IS staff and interns) and content generated and written by IS team members. It will be available in October, 2010 in digital format on the Faculty of Information web site.

4) Web 2.0 in the Library

Another component of my work as IS intern involved participating in Information Services’ initiatives to actively engage student users in the iSchool community through web 2.0 applications such as Facebook and Twitter. The IS goals for the use of social networking applications were to be active and relevant to students’ daily activities, to create and maintain a strong sense of community with
our users, and to maintain a network of institutions, professionals, alumni, and students. Towards these ends, I worked with Kathleen and Angie to ensure that any and all relevant information (such as contest and event announcements, the arrival of new resources at the Inforum, or even news items of interest to information studies) were distributed via these applications. Additionally, I developed and ran a short, 15 minute training session on Twitter in Academic Libraries for the IS staff training day in August to encourage all IS staff members to contribute to the IS Twitter account.

Ongoing Projects

As mentioned above, I will continue to work as an Inforum student assistant between September, 2010 and May, 2011. Several of the special projects I started this summer will also continue through the fall and winter terms.

1) Serials Evaluation Project

Early in May, 2010, Angie and I were trained to participate in Collections Coordinator, Elisa Sze’s serials evaluation project. The aim of the project is to evaluate all our electronic serials subscriptions in order to decide whether print subscriptions of the same serials can be weeded from the Inforum collection. The evaluation process involves examining the range of electronic sources available in the UTL catalogue and evaluating the quality and types of electronic files provided. This evaluation will form the basis for any decisions about future print subscriptions. Working with Elisa to understand and compare our print and electronic journals has been a real eye-opener. The serials evaluation project has given me a much better understanding of some of the resources we have, the complexity of managing e-resources, and the methods and rationales behind collections development strategies and policies. I look forward to completing the remainder of the journals who’s titles start with “J” this fall.

2) Lib Guide for the Critical Information Studies Path

Something I struggled with when I first transferred to the Faculty was trying to get a handle on the scope of literatures in information studies. What is information studies? What does it encompass? The scope of the field of information studies is huge but learning where information studies scholars and professionals publish their work is a key first step to understanding a field. Because of this, working with Nalini on a library resource guide for students was a great opportunity. This summer, I got a good start on a library guide for students in the Critical Information Studies (CIS) path at the iSchool. I based my resource layout on the Lib Guide format used by the Cornell University Library, and assembled a collection of types of resources for students in this path. I look forward to doing some testing and selecting a collection of particular resources that serve students in the CIS path well.
3) Inforum Directory Project

In response to comments in the 2010 Information Services User Survey that indicated that students were having difficulty navigating the Inforum spaces, locating resources, and finding quiet or study space, the Promotions and Outreach committee established the need for a directory for the Inforum. The vision for the project is to create a comprehensive and accessible way-finding system (including a directory and corresponding directional signage) for the Inforum to help students navigate through our spaces and find the resources they need. My role in the project so far has been to assemble an initial collection of reference resources on way-finding design for libraries in an annotated bibliography. I look forward to continuing to work with Kathleen and the rest of the Promotions and Outreach committee to implement a design strategy for this project. There is also some interesting research that explores the potential of providing way-finding strategies for web-based mobile devices will be interesting to explore as we continue to look for innovative ways to connect with the user community and provide access to IS services and resources.
3 Intern Experience

I entered the MI program at the Faculty of Information having completed an MA in anthropology and having spent five years in the non-profit sector. From the outset, my goal was to work towards a career in academic librarianship. When I saw the job posting for the Information Services summer intern, I knew this would be an amazing opportunity to learn more about the profession and to find out what goes on behind the scenes in an academic library.

From the very beginning, Kathleen included Angie and I in everything (from staff photos, to IS staff meetings, to the Promotions and Outreach committee) and gave us the freedom to work on new projects, generate new ideas, and approach things in our own way. However, it was Kathleen’s dedication to advancing innovative instruction and outreach initiatives in academic libraries that provided some of my most important insights of the summer. I realized that engaging constituents, anticipating and responding to their needs, and creating a sense of community are among the most important roles of library staff. This knowledge base (and set of related skills I gained this summer) will be vital as I head into the competitive library job market. Indeed, I have already been offered a part-time student assistantship position at the Royal Ontario Museum due largely to the experience I gained doing communications, design, and library outreach at the Inforum.

For me, this internship was about bringing my academic background and professional skills to bear in a library context where service orientation is the focus. My professional experience in the non-profit sector included everything from office administration, fund-raising, budget management, writing, communications design, community outreach, and research. However, I had very little library experience. The IS internship has helped me establish clear links between my previous academic and professional experience and a profession in the academic library context.

Ultimately, my experience at the iSchool will be much richer for the knowledge, experience, and friendships I gained working as an IS summer intern. I have gained practical experience that I can apply to theoretical course work in my final year and I have connected with far more faculty members and student colleagues that I would have otherwise. I look forward to continuing with the IS team for the remainder of my time here as a student.