EXPLORE THE UNIVERSE OF INFORMATION CAREERS

Blast off to a job at Google U.S.

Join Toronto’s start-up scene

From Bay Street back to school (and vice versa)

Researching “Platform Jobs”
As my last year as Dean gets underway and I start to contemplate retirement, I’m happy to say that it’s full speed ahead here at the Faculty of Information. In keeping with our new academic mission and interdisciplinary approach, which has its roots in our 2008 designation as an iSchool, we’ve made many significant changes in recent years and are now seeing the results.

This June, our first cohort of User Experience Design (UXD) students are graduating. The UXD concentration, which was overhauled three years ago to reflect changes in the field, has proven extremely successful. And as you’ll read in these pages, our UXD specialists are now making their mark in the working world.

Thanks to the popularity of the UXD concentration, we have hired two new faculty members who are specialists in the field: Olivier St. Cyr (see page 3) and another associate professor yet to be announced. Our third exciting new hire this year is Jia Xue who is a joint appointment with the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. She will teach in a new Master’s concentration, Human Centred Data Science, which should be introduced in the fall of 2019.

As if all that is not enough, we are introducing a new Bachelor of Information (BI) program, which – pending the final official stamp of approval – will admit the first cohort of BI students in the fall of 2019. The BI is a second-entry professional undergraduate degree that we believe will help meet the growing demand for information professionals.

At the PhD level, we plan to introduce a specialisation in Media and Technology in the fall of 2019. We’re home to the McLuhan Centre for Culture and Technology and many of our faculty members — including those with graduate appointments from the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses — have expertise in this field so adding Media and Technology as a specialisation is a natural fit.

Under the leadership of Sarah Sharma, the McLuhan Centre has been an extremely lively place this year. Monday Night seminars have been packed, and the Log Out! conference it hosted (see page 18) on the “platform economy” trended on social media last March. Finally, I want to thank Associate Professor David Phillips, who is retiring this year, for his key role in developing the BI program and getting it approved right up to this very final stage. David leaves the Faculty on a high note, setting an example for me as I try to accomplish as much in my final year as he did in his. Congratulations, David, you will be missed.
The Bachelor of Information (BI) is a second-entry professional undergraduate program. The BI considers the interactions between social worlds and information technologies, providing students with the conceptual tools and practical techniques necessary to understand and effect change in a data-intensive society. The program integrates design thinking, critical scholarship, and experiential learning.

**Sample Careers**

- Archives Assistant
- Business Analyst
- Design Researcher
- Digital Archivist Assistant
- Information Specialist
- Information Management Coordinator
- Knowledge Management Specialist
- Privacy Analyst
- Policy Analyst
- Social Media Strategist

admissions.ischool@utoronto.ca
ischool.utoronto.ca/areas-of-study/bachelor-of-information/

**Bachelor of Information**

Olivier St. Cyr, who has been teaching at the Faculty on a limited term appointment since 2016, will take up his new permanent position as Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream effective July 1 of this year. Before returning to the world of academia, St. Cyr, who is a specialist in User Interface Design and human-computer interaction, spent eight years working in industry on UXD-related projects in areas including medical software and devices, data replication software, and news wire communication systems.

Over the last two years of teaching full-time at the Faculty, he has worked closely with the first full graduating cohort of UXD students, who will be receiving their diplomas in June. He had a big influence on two students, whose UXD work is chronicled in this issue of Informed: Henry Tran (below) and Aditi Bhargava (see page 10).

St. Cyr has a BA in Computer Science and Psychology from York University, an MSc in Systems Design Engineering from the University of Waterloo, and a PhD in Industrial Engineering from the University of Toronto. Along with U of T, he has also taught at York University and OCAD University. His research interests are in the areas of human-computer interaction education, user interface/user experience design, and human factors for safety critical systems.

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Along with integrating relevant content throughout required curriculum, a new graduate course on Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) was offered and taught by Cara Krmpotich, the director of the Museum Studies program. The workshop course was designed to help GLAM (gallery, library, archives and museum) professionals learn how to listen differently.

“Graduate school tends to emphasize critique, assessment and immediate response, but I learned two important lessons from people and projects at Six Nations of the Grand River and Woodland Cultural Centre,” says Krmpotich. “A survivor of the Mohawk Residential School explained that she didn’t need people to ask questions and respond to her experience, she just needed people to listen.” Additionally, a collaborative beadwork project—which eventually became the “Opening the Doors to Dialogue” exhibit—provided participants an opportunity to learn to bead while listening to stories of reconciliation.

Building on the idea that keeping your hands busy can help keep your ears open, Krmpotich’s class made a quilt to honour Lee Maracle—professor, author, poet, recipient of the Order of Canada and a leading voice in the University’s response to the TRC. Quilting instructor Johanna Masko taught everyone, including the professor, how to quilt as the class listened to and watched relevant documentaries. Students also conducted research to help the Canadian Museums Association survey initiatives that work toward reconciliation among Indigenous and GLAM communities.

BLANKET EXERCISE
In January, staff and faculty participated in the Kairos “Blanket Exercise” facilitated by Dawn Maracle and Zoe Arden. This innovative exercise—where blankets represent the land and participants take on the roles of Indigenous peoples in Canada—is designed to educate and increase empathy. Participants are drawn into the experience by reading scrolls and carrying cards which ultimately determine their outcomes. Will they be sent to residential schools? Will they move to a city? Will they lose their Indian status?

When it was over, participants formed a talking circle to recount what they had learned and felt as a result of the “Blanket Exercise.”

BERTHA BASSAM LECTURE
The Faculty invited Indigenous scholar Camille Callison to deliver its 16th Bertha Bassam Lecture in Librarianship in November 2017. Callison, who chaired the Canadian Federation of Library Associations’ Truth and Reconciliation Committee, offered her perspective on what can be done to decolonize cultural heritage institutions.
REIMAGINING THE BISSELL BUILDING

Built in 1971, the Library School, as it was then known, was a prime example of that decade’s Brutalist architecture.

The plans were discovered deep in the bowels of the Faculty of Information. They show a Bissell Building with windows where there are now concrete slabs, a front entrance with a courtyard at the northeast corner, and fourth floor access to the Robarts Library. But somewhere along the way, for reasons that no one can recall, these original building plans were changed. Now, with the entire Bissell Building being reimagined, everything old is new again.

The first big step on the road to change was the extensive renovation of the Inforum in 2016. Then a master plan for the revitalization of the Faculty of Information was drawn up and the superkül architectural firm was hired to carry out a feasibility study. Among other things, the architects are looking at the possibilities of removing concrete panels and replacing them with windows to let in more light, creating a new front entrance on Sussex Avenue, and locating a Museum Studies exhibition space on a redesigned first floor.

“The Bissell Building has no front door, leading to a lack of identity and frequently confused visitors.”

As part of the planning, which is still in the earliest of stages, the Faculty invited superkül to host what’s known as a ‘design charrette.’ In April, students, staff and faculty came together to discuss their relationships with the Brutalist Bissell Building — everything from the amount of time they spend within its concrete walls to the way they interact with each space.

By reimagining the space, the architects hope not only to make it more welcoming and intuitive but also to provide the Faculty with better visibility. One of the Bissell Building’s current problems is that it has no obvious front door, leading to both a lack of identity and a stream of lost looking visitors.

“The best design comes out of collaboration,” said Meg Graham, one of the principals of superkül and a leader of the design charrette. “We may know more about the mechanical systems at this point, but we want to see how you use the space.”

Her colleague Andre D’Elia, also a superkül principal, chimed in, “You’re the ones who spend the most time here — you know the building better than we do so we’re trying to extract that information.”

The Brutalist style of the building kept coming up. “I’m not crazy about this type of architecture, but it’s part of the history … I think it’s good to keep as a souvenir of the era,” said one student.

“I think [the Bissell Building] is so interesting and dynamic, and I want to love it,” said another student. “It’s just so uninviting. We should design it so we want to explore the building.”

After the opening discussion forum, participants split into two groups. They were presented with photographs of different spaces and asked to prioritize and describe the images based on their impressions. From there, they used existing floorplans to sketch out new features, and propose and present redesigns. When framing their ideas, the students cited the Faculty’s reputation as being a space of innovation and for connection. Both groups proposed a more welcoming main entrance with more signage, a community hub, and exhibition space.

In terms of their role, the superkül architects see themselves at the intersection between vision and logistics. “We work as a group in our office — we’ll go back and discuss what we feel came out of this, extract key issues, problems and how to deal with that,” said D’Elia. “It’s a balancing act between the university and the student perspective. We’re not rigid. It’s a process to extract a vision out of this.”

According to Graham, “This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to manifest the iSchool’s mission and transformation, reinforcing the Faculty of Information’s values.”

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The Inforum was extensively renovated in 2016.
Faculty of Information experts both work in the information economy and study it.

In the pages that follow, you’ll read about a grad who landed her dream job at Google, another grad who co-founded an AI start-up, and two successful Bay Streeters, who headed back to school to earn Master of Information degrees.

Our Faculty has a long history of graduates who innovate on the job as Jean Weihs, who was recently named to the Order of Canada for her library work, can attest.

And finally, we’ve included a special report on last winter’s Log Out! conference hosted by the McLuhan Centre for Culture and Technology. Academics from around the globe discussed what happens when the information economy’s lowest paid workers fight for better conditions. It’s a good example of the cutting-edge research taking place at the Faculty.
For years Aditi Bhargava (Class of 2017) had wanted to learn design thinking – how to improve products and services with experimentation and by putting yourself in consumers’ shoes. She hoped to work for Google but thought a Bachelor of Arts wasn’t enough to get her there. “Anyone who wants to work for a big tech company like this needs to realize it doesn’t happen overnight,” she says.

She applied to University of Toronto’s Master of Information program, specializing in knowledge media design (which in 2016 was revamped and renamed the User Experience Design concentration to reflect changes in the industry). The two-year program mixes theoretical and practical lessons in design for platforms ranging from mobile to wearables and 3D interfaces. The training is meant to mould students into marketable UX designers or researchers by graduation.

Bhargava’s friend and classmate Yashvi Shah knew Aditi had worked cut out for her if she wanted to be hired by Google (now a subsidiary of Alphabet). “It’s kind of like dropping your application in – not even a pool – an ocean,” she says.

One of Bhargava’s first steps was to make a ‘milestone plan,’ a roadmap for the next three years. “Naturally we wondered about what we would do after our master’s,” Shah says. “The world was our oyster. There were so many opportunities, but picking the right one at the right time is so important.” Bhargava put a date to her ambitions to join Google: spring 2017.

Then she got to work. “I applied my own UX design and prototyping philosophy to the application process,” Bhargava recalls. Using the design principles she had learned in class, she “modeled” what she would talk about in an interview (her projects, strengths and values), sketched notes and storyboarded her presentation.

Her first test came last fall when she had two rounds of phone interviews with Google managers and designers. “I thought this is so wild because Google has always been my moonshot job,” she says.

Her faculty mentor Olivier St. Cyr, an assistant professor, teaching stream, helped her prep for the interview during office hours by telling her what questions to expect: How would you describe your design thinking process? What technologies did you learn? And how is your program relevant to the job? Bhargava isn’t allowed to describe the interviews in detail, but says the recruiters posed many questions based on case studies. “You have to be ready to be tested at any point,” she says.

She had a good feeling after the first hurdle, but heard nothing from Google for months. Just when she was about to start looking for other jobs, she received an email from the company inviting her to Google HQ in California for a presentation and full-day interview. Again she consulted St. Cyr for advice and a UX portfolio review: “You have to tell a story when you present your portfolio,” he said.

She seemed nervous, as anyone would be interviewing for a big company, he recalls. But he told her, “Google isn’t interested in whether you used this icon or that (in your portfolio), but in how you think.”

Aditi Bhargava is based in Mountain View in Silicon Valley. Google sponsored her work visa.

In February, she packed her interview outfit for the big day in Mountain View, California: black jeans, a white tee, sneakers and salmon-coloured blazer that she had worn to the interview that helped her get her first-ever job. “It didn’t feel like the typical (interview) outfit that people on the internet would advise, but it was comfortable,” she says.

In her meetings with Google recruiters, she emphasized a capstone team project she did with the MuR5 Discovery District, a UX review and redesign of their online resources for budding entrepreneurs and startups.

“Working at MuR5 really opened up my eyes to how innovation works,” Bhargava recalls. Weeks later, she was in class at U of T’s iSchool when she received another call from Google. She stepped out with her friend Shah to take the call.

“Honestly I remember it being like in the movies,” Shah says. “We were both squealing, we were just so excited.” The company sponsored Bhargava’s U.S. work visa and she joined a Google team responsible for researching communication products including Android Messages and Dialer. She traveled around the U.S. conducting interviews and leading focus groups, looking for ideas to build the products’ popularity. As of the spring of 2018, her focus had shifted slightly to the Dialer and the telephony space.

St. Cyr says Bhargava’s achievements prove graduates of the UXD concentration in the Master of Information program have the training they need to succeed. “If a student wants to get into Google or another highly sought-after job by taking our program they can.”
Up until his last term at the Faculty of Information, Faisal Ahmed (Class of 2017) worked part-time developing software for a financial analytics company. His current business partners were in men’s bespoke tailoring. Then, the three unabashed serial entrepreneurs did what serial entrepreneurs do: They spotted an opportunity in the booming video interview business and pivoted.

Ahmed describes their new start-up company, Knockri, as an AI job recruiter. Using artificial intelligence and videos, instead of humans, Knockri quantifies soft-skills and qualities like empathy and confidence in the early stages of the hiring process. It promises to cut talent recruiting time significantly and come up with a shortlist of ‘best-fit’ candidates. As an added bonus, the process promotes diversity by eliminating unconscious bias, says Ahmed.

He and his two co-founders chose the video recruiting business because they saw it as a hot sector projected to grow into a $4.4 billion market by 2020. In fact, anyone who’s recently been active on the job market has probably had at least one automated pre-screening video interview.

What those candidates probably don’t know, unless they read the fine print, is what prospective employers do with the videos once the job hunters log off. The answer is that they’re almost always analyzed with machines and algorithms.

As the Chief Technological Officer at Knockri, Ahmed’s role has been to try to create an AI model that not only hires better than humans—who have been proven to make biased decisions— but can also beat out competitors in the video recruitment space. Those include the UK-based Human and HireVue, which is headquartered in Utah.

Instead of seeing these other companies as a threat, Ahmed prefers to view them as confirmation that his startup is onto a good thing. “For us, seeing other similar companies validates that employers are really looking for this kind of solution,” he says. “And no one is dominating yet.”

The different companies all have their own secret sauce. Knockri screens the videos using a combination of different technologies including a proprietary one that analyzes interviewee’s facial muscular contractions and “micro-expressions.” This is done based on what’s known as the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), which identifies some 200 landmark positions on a face including eyebrow raises, cheek raises and nose movements. Knockri’s algorithm looks for FACS-based facial landmarks and then correlates them to a range of emotions. Another proprietary program is used to deduce emotions from audio signals.

Knockri uses IBM Watson to help convert speech to text and then analyze the text for personality insights and relevance of response.

“The knowledge I gained from the iSchool enabled me to be an entrepreneur,” says Ahmed.

“At the end of the day our technology sees things you should be seeing in a candidate,” Ahmed says. “It’s not at all as complicated as it sounds. You don’t need a team of 100 people to put this together.”

With a Bachelor’s in software engineering earned in his native India and two years of work experience as a software developer at Sony’s Bangalore office, Ahmed decided to continue his schooling after he immigrated to Canada. He eventually settled on an M.I degree in Information Systems and Design, which he earned in 2017.

“The knowledge I gained from the iSchool enabled me to be an entrepreneur,” he said, singing out Professor Eric Yu as someone who offered up many insights into the way organizations work.

Ahmed is impressed by Toronto’s vibrant start-up scene and the resources available to innovators, the likes of which did not exist back in India. Knockri’s office, for example, is located at 185 Spadina Avenue in IBM’s innovation space. The space houses startups that show high growth potential and leverage IBM technologies. Knockri, whose name is the Urdu word for job as well as an allusion to the idea that opportunity knocks, also succeeded in getting a grant from Ontario’s SmartStart Seed Fund and has attracted angel investment.

The company’s first clients were in the retail and fast food sectors, where high employee turnover is a perennial problem and the Knockri team had contacts that got them in the door. They quickly learned, however, that those businesses weren’t the best potential customers for Knockri’s offer because they tended to be seeking employee longevity rather than overall fit.

“Our value really comes in when there are hundreds of applicants for one position,” says Ahmed. As a result, Knockri did another pivot, this time a mini-one, and is now focusing on attracting what they call large enterprise clients or ‘whales,’ as they’re known in the current sales lingo. For these types of companies, which often have strict diversity targets, hiring can be both an expensive and time-consuming process.

Knockri’s message is that it will cut the time required to fill a position by 75%, reduce costs by 88%, and increase diversity by 38%. Its first major customer will be IBM in the U.S. And three more customers are in the later stages of coming on board. “We’re well placed for the coming year,” says Ahmed.

Beyond that, he’s frank that the team might consider a potential exit, selling out to a bigger player in the hiring and HR field. “In the last decade, tech companies have gotten so big they acquire everything new,” he says.

Besides, if Knockri succeeds, everyone there will be ready for another pivot.
Bay Street Connection

Employed in Toronto’s financial industry, these two students came back to school part-time to sharpen their understanding of information systems and design.

Neither Sukanya Srichandra (Class of 2018) nor Shawn Jung (Class of 2019) studied business for their undergraduate degrees, but they both ended up working in Toronto’s financial services sector immersed in data. And when they later decided to go back to school part-time to acquire additional skills and upgrade their credentials, they both chose the University of Toronto’s Master of Information (MI) Program.

As home to Canada’s big five banks, the vast majority of foreign banks operating in the country, and the Toronto Stock Exchange, Toronto is North America’s second largest financial centre and a major employer of university graduates.

With a degree in economics and international studies, Srichandra landed her first post-university job in 2010 at the Investment Funds Institute of Canada before moving on to Franklin Templeton Investments and then to Central 1 Credit Union where she is now a securitization and funding manager.

After completing his undergrad in math and philosophy, Jung started work as a business analyst at CIBC in 2010, where he has since climbed his way up the ladder to a senior manager position in the bank’s private wealth management division.

Jung originally contemplated further studies in computer science but while looking for a summer course, he discovered the Faculty of Information by “pure luck.” After some further research, he decided the Information Systems and Design concentration was the right program for him. While Jung enrolled in 2014, he also became a father along the way which has limited his study time. He’ll graduate in 2019.

Srichandra, who’s also in the ISD concentration, was attracted to the MI program because “it had the computer science component and it also had the humanities component.” Both she and Jung had done coding courses and picked up further programming knowledge in their jobs, but neither of them wanted to move completely to the tech side.

Describing the MI program, Srichandra says, “It’s given me what I need to understand information systems design process. The Python course really formalized some of the concepts that I knew a bit.”

In her current role at Central 1, Srichandra has been heavily involved in process automation, drastically reducing the amount of time needed to perform certain tasks from days and weeks to mere hours. She sees herself as a bridge between finance and IT at a time when “a lot of the roles are becoming a lot more data and information focused.”

Jung makes a similar point, emphasizing that companies are looking for candidates who “can narrow the gap between business and technology” by communicating the business side’s needs and understanding how a data project might be implemented by IT. “I enjoy dealing with the data,” he says. “I feel very happy if what I produce plays a role by bringing down costs or supporting campaigns. I see my role as more supportive.”

“Any issue that arises these days is never solely business and never solely technology,” Srichandra says, describing herself as a “hub” or “node” and stressing that she doesn’t want to lose her “interdisciplinary mindset.”

Both she and Jung have appreciated the new perspective that going back to school, after years in the workforce, so often provides. But getting a Master’s degree is not without its stressful moments. Finding a course to fit the work schedule. Juggling life with a young family as Jung did. And completing the program in two years as Srichandra did.

With graduation now on the horizon, the pair are imagining what it will be like to get their lives back, and how much easier working on Bay Street will be without homework.
Students often work as part of their education at the Faculty of Information, which helps them land a job upon graduation.

1,111 * Full-time, part-time and volunteer jobs posted on the Faculty of Information’s Job Site

60 Co-op Placements
92% of students in the MI co-op program obtained relevant, professional, full-time co-op jobs with major employers

4 Number of continents where co-op students worked. They completed their co-op requirements in Canada, France, Germany, China and South Africa

102 Practicum Placements
Students completed 105-hour or 45-hour projects in a range of organizations

48 MMSI internships
Opportunities included Museum of Vancouver, Ontario Science Centre and Northern Life Museum

90 Employers offered 138 job shadowing opportunities

132 Alumni offered mentorship opportunities

6 Career panel and networking opportunities attended by 65 professionals and 10 associations

14 iSkills Workshops offered including:
- How to Network
- How to Interview
- Know Your Strengths
- Leveraging LinkedIn
- Resume & Cover Letter
- UXD Portfolio
- Professional Communications

94% † of recent MI graduates found work in their field within 1 year

83% † of recent MMSI graduates found work in their field within 1 year

$67,000 Average salary for full-time employment

†According to a 2017 Alumni Survey
In March 2018, academics and tech workers from around the globe came together at the Faculty of Information to discuss what happens when the tech economy’s lowest paid workers fight for better working conditions. The conference—entitled Log Out! Worker Resistance Within and Against the Platform Economy—was hosted by the McLuhan Centre for Culture and Technology.

Alessandro Delfanti, an assistant professor at the Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology at U of T Mississauga, was one of the organizers and a speaker at the event. Delfanti, who researches labour practices at Amazon, holds a graduate appointment at the Faculty of Information. He spoke with Romi Levine of U of T News about the perils of the so-called platform economy and what consumers should be paying attention to.

In her research, Levine said Amazon Mechanical Turk workers—a platform owned by Amazon that is based on online work so you can buy a service from Amazon Mechanical Turk and a mass of online workers distributed across the globe will perform it for you. She has experience as a worker and an organizer on that side of Amazon.

There’s also the tech workers coalition—that’s a coalition of workers from the Silicon Valley—they’re going to talk about the conditions labour is facing in the Silicon Valley on the engineering side.

Why was it important to you to bring together academics and representatives from the tech industry?

Having workers participate in this conversation is crucial if you want to know what’s going on in the field and if you want to know what the problems and the claims are. For Foodora and Deliveroo riders, they want to stop working in a piecework setting. Rather, they want to have an hourly wage or some guaranteed hours they can work every week so their salary is constant over time.

What kinds of changes are taking place in the platform economy?

It’s very interesting because we see what Silicon Valley calls disruption as being very big, quickly changing markets, quickly modifying the rules of the games within labour relationships. But what’s interesting is that workers also have been very quick to pick up on these challenges and provide their own reaction and/or response to this.

In other moments in history when there’s been a dramatic technological reorganization of labour like the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, it’s taken decades for workers to find new ways to mobilize within that new environment and find ways to improve their conditions within a new technological paradigm.

With digital labour, it’s happening very, very quickly. In a matter of a few years, we’ve seen a wave of worker struggles and new forms of mobilization. So disruptive also in terms of the speed at which this phenomenon is emerging.

Do you think it’s important for consumers of the platform economy—users of apps like Uber and Foodora—to know about the underlying issues facing workers?

I think so. If you only approach these companies or the platform economy as a consumer, you only see something very efficient or possibly cheap and convenient, but you don’t see the underlying labour relationships. This labour is hidden from our view so, from a consumer perspective, you will miss out on many important things that happen that are hidden because of the way labour is organized.

When you order something from Amazon, you don’t see what happens in those gigantic warehouses where people perform this super physical, exhausting labour, moving, picking and sorting commodities around. In some cases it’s more visible—when you order a pizza through Foodora, you’ll see the rider—same for Uber. But what you don’t see is the day-to-day struggles they have to deal with.

Can you tell us about some of the conference speakers?

Callum Cant is a Deliveroo rider (Foodora-like delivery app) so his research is based on his own experiences, being part of mobilization to improve the conditions of Deliveroo or Foodora riders in the U.K.

Krsty Milland, who is from Toronto, is an Amazon Mechanical Turk worker—a platform owned by Amazon that is based on online work so you can buy a service from Amazon Mechanical Turk and a mass of online workers distributed across the globe will perform it for you. She has experience as a worker and an organizer on that side of Amazon.

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Conference speaker and PhD researcher Callum Cant from the University of West London has worked as a rider for Deliveroo rider, which is a Foodora-like delivery service. His research is based on his own experience fighting to improve conditions of food riders in the U.K. Among other things, he’s interested in how strike actions can affect the platform economy.

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Krsty Milland, who is from Toronto, is an Amazon Mechanical Turk worker—a platform owned by Amazon that is based on online work so you can buy a service from Amazon Mechanical Turk and a mass of online workers distributed across the globe will perform it for you. She has experience as a worker and an organizer on that side of Amazon.

There’s also the tech workers coalition—that’s a coalition of workers from the Silicon Valley—they’re going to talk about the conditions labour is facing in the Silicon Valley on the engineering side.

Why was it important to you to bring together academics and representatives from the tech industry?

Having workers participate in this conversation is crucial if you want to know what’s going on in the field and if you want to know what the problems and the claims are. For Foodora and Deliveroo riders, they want to stop working in a piecework setting. Rather, they want to have an hourly wage or some guaranteed hours they can work every week so their salary is constant over time.

Conference speaker and PhD researcher Callum Cant from the University of West London has worked as a rider for Deliveroo rider, which is a Foodora-like delivery service. His research is based on his own experience fighting to improve conditions of food riders in the U.K. Among other things, he’s interested in how strike actions can affect the platform economy.
Jean Weihs (Class of 1952) first became interested in the topic, which would become her specialty, back in the sixties when she kept encountering non-book collections at Toronto-area libraries. The libraries had everything from extensive uncatalogued slide and picture collections to sound recordings and minerals. But because none of these collections were catalogued, the public didn’t know they existed.

Weihs approached the East York Board of Education, where she worked at the time, with an offer, “If you will pay my way to the ALA, I will find out how to catalogue this stuff because they will know.” But when she got to the American Library Association conference, cataloguers told her, “We don’t know. We have no idea.”

Sumner Spalding, the head of cataloguing at the Library of Congress, invited Weihs out for lunch, charmed her and then said, “Stop making all this fuss.” He explained he had had two weeks funding to write the rules for non-book materials and had not had time to consult anyone. He felt a change in the rules would be prohibitively expensive. Weihs, who felt his rules for non-book rules were “ridiculous” decided to ignore him.

On her return to Toronto she invited all the city’s school districts and two commercial cataloguing firms to a meeting where the idea of developing rules for non-book materials, which could be filed in the same catalogue as books, would be discussed. The plan they eventually came up with worked, others heard about it, and Weihs became a rock star librarian fielding calls from all over the world. “People in South America wanted to translate it into Spanish. It exploded,” she says. Later, she became the Canadian representative and eventually chair of an international committee which integrated non-book cataloguing into the rules for book cataloguing.

When it came time for Sumner Spalding to retire, he suggested Weihs apply for his job. But she turned him down for family reasons. Eventually she moved from the East York school board to Seneca College, where she headed up the library technicians program until 1986. After that she became a consultant lecturing at the British Museum, the University of Pretoria, and UCLA among other institutions.

In December 2017, Weihs was named to the order of Canada for her national and international contributions to library sciences, notably to the standardization of the non-book cataloguing system. For Weihs, who was widowed young and used her library science degree to support herself and her child, there were some extremely difficult periods on the road to her eventual success. “I’d sit with my son and catalogue. It was just what I had to do,” she recalls. “And it turned out to be a glorious career. Who would have known?”

Jean Weihs’ library science degree allowed her to support her son after she was widowed at a young age.
When Richard Laurin (Class of 2017) was hired on as a “kit developer” at the Manitoba Museum in the fall of 2015, he had no idea that just two years later the gig would lead to a Governor General’s award and dinner at Rideau Hall. At the time he was still finishing his thesis and happy to be back at the museum, where the year before he had worked a summer internship, arranged as part of his Master of Museum Studies program.

Over the next two years, Laurin both completed his thesis and became a key player on the team developing the innovative Spirit Lines educational tool kit, which merges Indigenous heritage and museums expertise. The kits contain everything from replica artifacts, including sculptures and beaded watch pockets created by Manitoba artisans, to books and audio recordings which retell histories and legends in both oral and written Cree, Ojibwe-Cree and English. To aid writing in the Swampy Cree and Ojibwe-Cree dialects, the kits feature Cree dictionaries and programmed syllabic keyboards complete with instructions. “These books and replicas can easily be brought into the classroom instead of the classroom being brought into the museum,” says Laurin, who trailed the kits behind him in special suitcases on wheels when he headed north to get feedback and deliver basic kit training to schools.

With Spirit Lines, Laurin was responsible for the day-to-day development and progress of the kits. “We actively sought out and ensured participation by Elders, language specialists and school board administrators and teachers,” he says. “They all played a critical role in shaping the eventual kits.” Laurin’s team eventually built two versions of the kits—one for Norway House Cree Nation and another for Garden Hill First Nation—which were delivered in March 2017 and have already been successfully used in schools.

In announcing that the Manitoba Museum had won the Governor General’s History Award for Excellence in Museums, John McAvity, CEO of the Canadian Museums Association, called Spirit Lines “an inspiring work that captures the very essence of Reconciliation.” By working with Indigenous communities, the Manitoba Museum has been able to create educational tool kits that re-introduce into schools cultural heritage that may have otherwise been lost,” he said.

As an invited guest at the presentation last November, Laurin watched his colleagues officially accept the award on the museum’s behalf, attended the gala dinner, and “bounced around Ottawa seeing a side of the city you aren’t usually invited to be part of.” He was also able to meet officials from the Museum’s Assistance Program, which funded his contract. “I was afforded an opportunity with really great people and partners,” Laurin said. “I’m just happy I was a part of it.”
Letter from the FIAA president

As I wrap up my first year as President of the Faculty of Information Alumni Association, I can say that it has certainly been an active one. Your 2017/2018 executive and committee members have been hard at work planning activities that reach both current and future alumni (current and prospective students). We strive to provide the community with both forums for networking and access to learning opportunities to improve our knowledge as professionals.

With the goal of providing impactful alumni benefits, the executive dedicated $1,000 to further our members’ educational development by offering access to the Education Institute Webinars through the Ontario Library Association. We also held a Webinar Day at the Faculty, which served as a full day of learning and networking. In speaking with the participants, we found that professionals are in need of learning and development opportunities that are more accessible in terms of cost and timing.

Another priority is our programming that connects alumni with fellow alumni and alumni with students. The Job Shadowing program runs each year and provides current students and interested alumni an opportunity to visit over 90 hosts within the field. Then there’s our year-round mentoring program, “Ask an Alum,” which offers participants the opportunity to share interests, ask questions, and hear personal stories from more than 100 information and museum professionals.

In the fall of 2017, we partnered with the Faculty of Information to host the marquee Bertha Bassam Lecture on delivering information services to Indigenous populations and the role of Canadians and librarians in the process. This event brought together more than 100 attendees from the community.

Realizing that so many of our alumni are based in different locations, we have turned our minds to engaging with you in different ways. We recently enhanced our monthly meetings by adding the ability to join via Google Hangouts so that interested alumni can participate in the meetings remotely (and there’s still the option to dial in via the conference line). We are also holding alumni events in different regions including one in Halifax in May hosted by our VP, Sooin Kim.

As always, I want to thank everyone who helped make this year both fun and valuable to our members. I’d also like to invite you to our AGM in June and all of the upcoming meetings later this year. Look out for information and announcements on our activities via Social Media and in your inbox.

And one last note, yes that is me in the photo on the left. Your FIAA team is everywhere it seems, even looking over you on campus.

RIP Clare Beghtol

Clare Beghtol, alumna and Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Information, died peacefully at home on March 3, 2018.

After receiving her degree in library science in 1981, Beghtol was hired as the Chief Cataloguer/Indexer in the CBC’s Current Affairs unit. She worked with the team who set up The Journal, starring the famed broadcaster Barbara Frum. Beghtol stayed on part-time at the CBC when she embarked on her doctoral studies back at the University of Toronto.

After defending her 1991 thesis — “The Classification of Fiction: The Development of a System Based on Theoretical Principles” — Beghtol was appointed to a tenure-track position at the Faculty of Information Studies, as it was then known. Between 2002 and 2004, she served as the Faculty’s Associate Dean.

When Beghtol transitioned from Professor at the Faculty of Information to Professor Emeritus in 2009, the journal Knowledge Organization put out a special issue in her honour.

Current Dean Wendy Duff remembers co-teaching one of her very first classes with Beghtol, who, she said, “discussed the theories of classification with brilliance and clarity. She was the most amazing scholar and a deeply caring human being. One could not have had a better role model.”

1980s

Congratulations, Renée van der Avoird

Renée van der Avoird (Class of 2012) has joined the Art Gallery of Ontario’s Department of Indigenous and Canadian Art in Toronto in the role of Assistant Curator of Canadian Art.

Her first major project at the Gallery is to assist with the reinstallation of the J.S. McLean Centre for Indigenous and Canadian Art. Curators have selected over 80 exceptional works — both new and familiar — from the Indigenous and Canadian collection, and put them into conversation with each other to better reflect the nation-to-nation relationship which Canada was built upon.

The new Centre is set to open July 1, 2018. Van der Avoird comes to the Gallery from the MacLaren Art Centre in Barrie, Ontario, but she is not new to the AGO. She did an internship there in 2012 after finishing her Museum Studies degree. That first time around she worked in the Director’s Office, acquiring valuable insights into what goes on behind the scenes at a museum.

Van der Avoird also published a book on Canadian artist David Craven in 2014.
IN MEMORIAM
Frances Georgina Halpenny
(1919 - 2017)

By Richard Blackwell

“Her life was a world of words: spoken, written, sung, and made into books which she lived and loved every day.”

So reads the last line of Frances Halpenny’s obituary, crafted by her family in whose presence she died on Christmas Day 2017 at the age of 98.

Halpenny spent almost her entire working life at the University of Toronto where she was a long-time senior editor at U of T Press, the editorial force behind the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, and Dean of the Faculty of Library Science (now the Faculty of Information) from 1972 to 1978.

She led, in many ways, a type of life that is no longer possible in the 21st century.

“[She] was probably the most pre-eminent dean we ever had,” says current Dean, Wendy Duff, who described Halpenny as “an incredible force of nature.”

Halpenny played a key role in the post-war expansion of Canada’s book industry, helping to cement the University of Toronto’s position as a centre of academic publishing. She acted as a mentor and role model for women in academia and publishing. And outside of work, she continued to feed her love of the theatre by participating in amateur productions and taking her nieces and nephews on regular visits to the Stratford Festival. She led, in many ways, a type of life that is no longer possible in the 21st century.

Born in 1919 in Ottawa, Halpenny moved to Toronto with her family some 10 years later. At school, she excelled at English but barely scraped through the mathematics requirements. With a scholarship, she enrolled at U of T’s University College, in a newly created English language and literature program. She joined the UC Players’ Guild and performed at Hart House, as well as writing and directing.

Halpenny graduated in 1940 shortly after France fell to Hitler’s Nazi army. “It was a very anxious and dreadful time,” she said in reminiscences recorded in the last years of her life. All her male colleagues knew they would soon be in uniform.

After studying for a master’s degree, then working for a little over a year in a junior position at the U of T Press, Halpenny decided to enlist in the Royal Canadian Air Force. “I felt very strongly that everybody’s effort was needed,” she said. After basic training, she was posted to Newfoundland, working in a meteorological office north of St. John’s where she developed weather forecasts to help guide Allied aircraft and warships. Later she served briefly in Summerside, P.E.I.

After the war, Halpenny returned to Toronto, and to U of T Press, which was short of staff but about to begin a dramatic expansion. Universities were booming, and U of T President Sidney Smith wanted it to become a force in the academic world. “A biography of famous Canadians by year of death, in English language and literature program,” he said. Halpenny played a “critical part in the project,” which also helped build the reputation of the Press, he said.

Among her many awards and honours, Halpenny received 11 honorary degrees, and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1979 and Companion in 1984.

After retirement, she continued to write papers related to publishing and read voraciously. She leaves her brother Arthur, and nieces, nephews and their children.
Thank you to our donors

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The late Brian Land
(First Faculty Dean)
and his late wife
Edith in 1970