

Speech – exit report 28th July 2011

Presentation :

2 questions :

1. Who I Am?

2. Why I am here with you at the UofTLibraries?

Nicolas Simon from Paris, France.

I am student in library and information science in a master's degree program of 2 years at the École des Bibliothécaire Documentalistes.

This year was my first year, not my first approach of the world of libraries, but the first time in the BackOffice.

This summer, students have to do an internship in a library.

Why Toronto?

It was an opportunity to have an experience in a foreign English-speaking country.

Why particularly University of Toronto Library? I wanted to see a large Library system and how projects are implemented. And to be honest, because UofTL accepts me!

Two months: June and July

Maybe the hottest time in Toronto!

It was summertime:

And visiting the UofT Libraries in summer is like visiting Dubai during the month of Ramadan: huge (and sometime incredible) buildings with many facilities and services but desperately ... empty.

It is hard for me to imagine what the libraries are during the school year. But, it was quiet time ...

In fact, the perfect time to observe librarian handling projects for Fall when student come back to libraries.

During these two months, I was involved in the Collection Development Department with Caitlin Tillman at the 6th floor of the Robarts.

I followed many meetings, I met professionals who were always glad to explain their job, I worked for the gift section, I visited a lot of libraries of the UofT.

So, I am not the best person to introduce the UOFT Libraries system. I am just here since June and many of you must know better than me how the libraries live.

So, instead of a brief presentation of UTL, as a summer visitor, I will report my experience here at UTL and especially at Robarts Library.

I had the opportunity to visit many libraries of the campus; not all (I am not sure it is really possible!),

What was on the schedule:

John P. Robarts Research Library where my desk is 9 at the sixth floor at CDD)

Thomas Fisher Rare books

Map & Data library,

Media Common,

East Asian Library,

Gerstein Science Information Centre,

Engineering and Computer Science,

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education a.k.a. O.I.S.E.,

John W Graham Library, Trinity College

E J Pratt Library, Victoria University (my favourite),

John M Kelly Library, St. Michael College

Dentistry library,

UTM Library (Mississauga campus)

+ Internet Archives at the Robarts

In 7-8 weeks, I have maybe seen more libraries than a majority of librarians here.

So that's why, I will summarize my experience

First, I have noticed common evolutions

1 - Almost everywhere, reference desk will disappear or partly disappear. References books, dictionaries, indexes or bibliographies are less and less used and users can find them easier online or by Google.

I saw the same tendency for the journals stacks. A subscription to J-Store or ScienceDirect doesn't need shelves as printed journals ---- but, computer. That's explain

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... 2 - The increase of very quiet study room with Video projectors and computers. I felt like in corporate meeting rooms!

3 - I have noticed more and more cool and casual places for reading with armchairs beautiful and wooden furniture and even a fireplace in Mississauga (in summer, it doesn't need to work!). Sometime, we are like in an airport lounge for first class.

4 - At last, the use of technologic tools: computers, in some libraries, in Victoria or Mississauga, users can borrow laptops for free, and tomorrow iPad?). In Mississauga library again, new technologies will be promoted. Users will play with technologies like in Sci-Fi movies. Now, who could say that libraries are still boring?

Corporate meeting rooms, airport lounge, Sci-Fi movies: Am I talking about libraries? Yes, books are always here. But, we learn so far that a library is not just books' stacks. It is also a place for studying, for having a rest,

Two years ago, a new library opened in the Latin Quarter of Paris, "the campus of Paris" (Bibliothèque Sainte-Barbe). Librarians purchased many books but they 'forget' to provide enough studying spaces for students of the Latin Quarter. So, everyday, this library is busy and students have to wait long and long minutes in a long queue to enter in the library.

Can we create a library without books? It is our future?

No, because physical books are always useful. I have some reasons to think that.

- Even though digitization is a work in progress, too many information are still in printed books.

- It is easier to have a headache reading on a computer screen than reading a printed book

- Books must be seen from outside in order to show to students, faculty members and pedestrians that it is a library. And, never forget the aesthetic value of the books

- Last but not least, I am also persuaded of the capacity of serendipity (the capacity to find something that you don't expect to find) of books on the shelves.

Indeed, a library is not Wikipedia where users can click anywhere traveling in less than 30 seconds from an article on Toronto to another on Superabsorbent polymer. On the Web, everything is too fast.

If I want to have a look on a book on Toronto and another one on Superabsorbent polymers, I have to walk 5-10 minutes between Robarts and Engineering and Computer Science Library and spend time to retrieve the books in the stacks.

But in reality nobody browses at the same time books about so different subjects!

Users want documents about related subjects. It is possible going to the stacks.

They can have a look on the others documents next to the book they find on the on-line catalogue.

Don't believe that I am reluctant to the information and communication technologies.

I am in Toronto to learn in particular about electronic resources and e-books.

I discovered the Web at the end of the 20th century (It is now along time ago). I have been always fascinated by Web search engines and on-line catalogues. It is too easy to find information and documents, even though many results are completely irrelevant.

Libraries must explore new ways for finding information. I think that UofTL is willing to improve the users' research online.

I think of some projects like Serial solution, Summon search or Focus (the goal of this last project also to promote faculty's works).

I am particularly interested by Summon search because it could be in the future the only way to find information. Alongside books, Summon search can find articles from subscribed databases or from the Web.

I am not sure it is the best way, but it is, in my point of view, the better way. Libraries must adapt to public use. Nowadays, libraries' users are fanatics of Google.

According to me, we mustn't be afraid of the 'Googolization' of the Libraries. If libraries are able to build their own Google, a more relevant Google, the future of Academic libraries could be better than the dark scenario. Meanwhile, librarians must provide IL courses to learn how to browse by other ways specific information.

I would like to finish this short experience report by underlining the benefits of partnership between Academic libraries.

Today, with the rise of expensive electronic resources, cooperation between academic libraries has become essential. Thanks to OCUL consortium, UofT and smaller scale Academic libraries of Ontario can provide a lot of articles and data to users. Moreover, cooperation can help students and faculty member to find more documents. A library can't hold all the books of the world since the invention of writing. Even if the UTL is one of the biggest academic library system in North America, students and faculty members don't have access to the documents that they would like. That's why Libraries need to have interlibrary facilities.

At UofT, interlibrary loan is free for books. In my point of view, it is a good idea, because in France, users must pay!

The next project should be a shared catalogue for academic libraries in Ontario or in Canada, or maybe, if we are utopists, for all North America. The experience of a shared catalogue in France for all Academic libraries could be a successful example. Thanks to the proximity of libraries in Paris, it is easier to search by this catalogue than by each Academic library catalogues.

Thank you everybody!
For welcoming me
For helping me
For touring me in your libraries
For answering me my questions