

**FOR INFORMATION**

**PUBLIC**

**OPEN SESSION**

**TO:** Committee on Academic Policy and Programs

**SPONSOR:** Nick Rule, Vice-Provost, Academic Programs  
**CONTACT INFO:** (416) 978-0490, [vp.academicprograms@utoronto.ca](mailto:vp.academicprograms@utoronto.ca)

**PRESENTER:** See above  
**CONTACT INFO:**

**DATE:** February 2, 2026 for February 10, 2026

**AGENDA ITEM:** 5

**ITEM IDENTIFICATION:**

Review of the University of Toronto Central Library System, 2024-25

**JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:**

““The Committee...has general responsibility...for monitoring the quality of education and the research activities of the University....The Committee receives annual reports or such more frequent regular reports as it may determine, on matters within its purview, including reports on the ...[r]eviews of academic units and programs.” (*Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) Terms of Reference, Sections 3, 4.9*)

**GOVERNANCE PATH:**

- 1. Committee on Academic Policy and Programs [For information] (February 10, 2026)**

**PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:**

Governing Council approved the *Policy for Approval and Review of Academic Programs and Units* in 2010. The *Policy* outlines University-wide principles for the approval of proposed new academic programs and review of existing programs and units. Its purpose is to align the University’s quality assurance processes with the Province’s Quality Assurance Framework through establishing the authority of the University of Toronto’s Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP).

The Vice-President and Provost commissioned the review of the University of Toronto Central Library System (CLS), modeled on but outside of the scope of the UTQAP review process. Because of the unique contribution CLS makes to the University, this

report is being brought forward for information to the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P). Reviews modeled on the UTQAP review process are intended to help assess and improve quality. The *Policy for Approval and Review of Academic Programs and Units* states that “all of the factors that contribute to collegial and scholarly life —academic and administrative complement, research and scholarly activity, infrastructure, governance, etc.—bear on the quality of academic programs and the broad educational experience of students.” (*Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) Terms of Reference, Sections 3, 4.9*)

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

A summary of the external reviewers’ report is provided.

The reviewers affirmed the Central Libraries’ exceptional quality, noting world-class collections, exemplary services, and substantial achievements across digital transformation, research support, and student-focused space renewal. They praised UTL’s leadership, its national role in digital infrastructure, and the strong partnerships it maintains across the University. They also identified areas for continued attention, including communication and coordination across the decentralized library system, digital preservation, and upcoming leadership transition. The Chief Librarian’s administrative response addresses the reviewers’ recommendations.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This item is for information.

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**DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:**

- Review Summary, U of T Central Library System Provostial Review
- University Chief Librarian’s Administrative Response, U of T Central Library System Review (January 16, 2026)

# Non-UTQAP Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

## 1 Review Summary

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<b>Programs Reviewed:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Division Reviewed:</b>	University of Toronto Central Library System
<b>Commissioning Officer:</b>	Vice-President & Provost
<b>Reviewers (Name, Affiliation):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Erla Heyns, Dean and Vice-Provost of University Libraries, University of Wisconsin-Madison</li><li>• Susan Parker, University Librarian, University of British Columbia</li><li>• Barbara Rockenbach, Stephen F. Gates '68 University Librarian, Yale University</li></ul>
<b>Date of Review Visit:</b>	January 27-29, 2025
<b>Date Reported to AP&amp;P:</b>	February 10, 2026

### Previous Review

**Date:** November 29-30, 2018

### Summary of Findings and Recommendations

**The reviewers observed the following strengths:**

- Respected internationally as a top-tier library system
- Strong alignment of UTL's strategic pillars with the University's mission; major contributor to research, teaching, and learning
- Robust, carefully curated digital and print holdings, with standout acquisitions; exceptional overall collection quality
- Notable facility improvements and valued student-focused services
- Highly regarded Chief Librarian; inclusive decision-making
- Staff seen as skilled, innovative, and well-supported
- Strong internal and external collaborations

**The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:**

- Service and user experience gaps, particularly around navigation, accessibility, and emerging technology support
- Organizational and communication challenges due to decentralized tri-campus structure
- Financial sustainability and funding clarity for collections remain ongoing concerns
- Leadership role and staffing models may not fully align with evolving technological and organizational demands

**The reviewers made the following recommendations:**

- Engage the University community to clarify UTL's future mission and strategic direction
- Enhance the user experience through improved spaces, navigation, and expanded services/training
- Strengthen organizational structures, communication, and governance across campuses and federated libraries
- Secure sustainable financial models and formalize departmental funding commitments
- Evolve leadership roles and staff expertise to better align with future needs and technological change
- Advance major initiatives to improve efficiency, innovation, and external reach

## Current Review: Documentation and Consultation

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### Documentation Provided to Reviewers

- Site Visit Schedule
- Terms of Reference
- Self-Study and Appendices
- UTL Strategic Plan 2020-2025
- Previous (2018-19) External Review Report and Administrative Response
- University of Toronto Governing Council Statement of Institutional Purpose
- University of Toronto President's "Three Priorities"
- Comments received from VPAP Web Form

### Consultation Process

The reviewers met directly with the following, in order of meeting schedule:

- Vice-President & Provost
- Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
- University Chief Librarian
- Director of Human Resources
- Deputy Chief Librarian
- Interim Head, Scholarly Communications and Copyright Office
- Associate Chief Librarian for Collections and Materials Management

- Head, Acquisitions & Collections Services Collection Development
- Inclusive User Experience Strategist
- Canadiana Librarian
- Coordinator, Humanities Collections
- Coordinator, Social Science Collections
- Library Assistant
- Client Services & Assessment Librarian
- Student Engagement Librarian
- Collections Coordinator, Sciences
- Undergraduate and Graduate Students
- Associate Chief Librarian for Special Collections and Director of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
- Chief Librarian, U of T Scarborough Library
- Chief Librarian, U of T Mississauga Library
- Director of Scholars Portal and Director for Digital Research Infrastructure Partnerships
- Executive Director, OCUL
- Data & GIS Librarian
- Associate Director, Scholars Portal
- Executive Director, Health Science Information Consortium of Toronto (HSIC)
- Associate Chief Librarian for Science Research & Information
- Dean, Faculty of Information
- Associate Dean, Research in the Faculty of Information
- Department of Art History Librarian, Department of Art History Library
- University College Librarian, University College Library
- Chemistry Librarian, Chemistry Library
- College Librarian, Innis College Library
- Head, Physics Library
- Information Services and Instruction Librarian, New College Library
- Head of the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources (CIRHR) & Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies (CrimSL) Libraries
- Interim Chief Librarian, Victoria College – E.J. Pratt Library
- Director, John W. Graham Library & Trinity College Archives
- Chief Librarian, St. Michael's College – John M. Kelly Library
- Chair, Department of Curriculum, Teaching & Learning, OISE
- Director of Doctoral Programs, Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing
- Interim Dean, Faculty of Music
- Interim Vice Dean, Strategy, Temerty Faculty of Medicine
- Vice-Dean Research and Infrastructure, Faculty of Arts & Science
- Dean, Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering
- Digital Initiatives Librarian, ITS
- Senior Resource Sharing Specialist, Collection Development Department
- Head/Slavic Resources Coordinator, Petro Jacyk Central & East European Resource Centre/UTL
- Metadata and Digital Initiatives Librarian, Music Library

- Resource Sharing and Accessibility Librarian, Collection Development Department
- Strategic Initiatives & Liaison Librarian, UTML
- Instruction & Liaison Librarian, Gerstein Science Information Centre
- Bibliographer/Selector for Italian Studies, Latin American Studies, Philosophy, and Spanish, Collection Development Department
- Manager, User Services
- Manager, Security, Health and Safety
- Head, Eberhard Zeidler Library
- Head, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
- Head, User Services Sean Forbes, Director, Milt Harris Library
- Head Librarian, Music Library
- Head, Dentistry Library
- Head, Engineering & Computer Science Library
- Director, East Asian Library
- University Archivist, UofT Archives & Records Management Services (UTARMS)
- Acting Co-Head and Librarian - Serials Cataloguer, Metadata Services
- Director, Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library
- Assistant Head, User Services and Head, Research & Education
- Digital Preservation Librarian, Service Management (ITS)
- Chief Law Librarian
- Head, Earth and Mathematical Sciences Libraries
- Acting Co-Head, Metadata Services
- Acting Head, Map & Data Library
- Metadata Technologies Manager, Information Technology Services (UTL ITS)
- Director, OISE Library
- Director of Communications
- Research Services Librarian
- Research Data Management Coordinator, Map & Data Library
- Data Support Specialist, Map and Data Library
- Teaching & Learning Librarian, Teaching & Engagement Unit
- Digital Projects Librarian, Scholars Portal
- Web Project Manager and Content Strategy Librarian, Service Management
- Data Librarian, Map and Data Library
- Senior Manager Capital Projects and Planning
- Student Engagement Associate, Teaching & Engagement Unit
- Entrepreneurship Librarian, Gerstein Science Information Centre
- Professor, Department of Economics, Faculty of Arts and Science
- Associate Professor, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, and Deputy Director, Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation
- Dean, School of Continuing Studies
- Professor, Teaching Stream, Department of Computer Science, Faculty of
- Associate Professor, Teaching Stream, Human Biology, Faculty of Arts and Science
- Professor, Vice Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science, Department for the Study of Religion

- Associate Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Science
- Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health and Temerty Faculty of Medicine
- Acting Chief Information Security Officer
- Chief Information Officer
- Associate Director, CTSI
- Director, CRIS
- Director, Academic & Collaborative Technologies and Institutional Strategist for Academic Technologies, CTSI
- Interim Director of Advancement, Central Libraries
- Executive Director, Divisional Relations, Division of University Advancement
- Vice President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives
- Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life
- Associate Vice-President and Vice-Provost, Digital Strategies and Vice-Provost, Innovations in Undergraduate Education
- Associate Chief Librarian, Data Services, Digital Scholarship, and Information Technologies
- Director, Digital Library Applications
- Director, Enterprise Technology, Cybersecurity, and Digital Workplace
- Digital Assets Librarian, ITS
- Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the University Chief Librarian

## Current Review: Findings and Recommendations

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### 1. Strategic Planning (Items 1, 2, 3, & 4 from Terms of Reference)

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Mission
  - ▶ Central Library System (CLS) significantly contributes to the realization of the university's strategic vision and supports an environment of academic excellence, innovation, and inclusivity
  - ▶ CLS is essential in advancing the university's strategic priorities, enabling teaching and learning support, while enhancing research excellence through critical research infrastructure such as Scholars Portal and comprehensive Research Data Management services
  - ▶ CLS plays a vital role in fostering innovative teaching and learning through information literacy programs, digital scholarship support, and initiatives like the Data Library, the library equips students with critical research skills and modern research techniques
  - ▶ CLS is committed to community engagement through open access and cultural heritage preservation, championing open scholarship and digitizing special collections to make research and historical resources accessible beyond the university community

- Priorities
  - ▶ CLS shows substantial progress toward achieving all goals outlined in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan
  - ▶ CLS demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainability through energy-efficient building upgrades and sustainable library operations that support university's overall sustainability goals
  - ▶ CLS is a longstanding partner in technology support and innovation, including through collaborations with the Division of the Vice President, Research & Innovation, and the Centre for Research and Innovation Support
  - ▶ CLS is poised to be a thought leader on AI, with staff actively investigating how AI can enhance library operations, improve accessibility of collections, and support the work of students, faculty, and researchers
- Collections
  - ▶ CLS has exceptional collections
  - ▶ Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library is a globally recognized “jewel” that attracts researchers, offers exhibitions to public programming, and generates its own research through initiatives like the Old Books New Science Lab
  - ▶ CLS is a leader in digitizing collections, particularly through the government documents digitization project, which preserves open access, increases convenience, and frees shelf space for renovations
  - ▶ Digitizing rare collections and providing advanced research tools significantly expands comprehensive access to resources
  - ▶ Collaborative collection building across the libraries, including federated, UTM, and UTSC units, has been highly successful
- Space, Services & Student Experience
  - ▶ CLS provides exceptional services that support the research and learning needs of students and faculty
  - ▶ CLS demonstrates strong adaption to changing needs through expanded digital resources, enhancement of physical spaces, and integration of emerging technologies
  - ▶ User-friendly digital platforms and more inclusive renovated facilities stand out as notable achievements
  - ▶ CLS has strengthened teaching and learning support through digital learning tools and extensive online resources that have been well-received by faculty and students
  - ▶ User-focused renovations in Robarts have transformed transactional spaces into areas that encourage relationship building, digital consultation, and study
  - ▶ Librarians are recognized as research partners, valued for methodological expertise, and actively engaged as collaborators in knowledge generation
  - ▶ CLS is an active participant in developing wellness and student experience initiatives, creating family-friendly study spaces at Robarts and Gerstein that enhance student success and support inclusion
  - ▶ Robarts Common provides functional, attractive, and welcoming environments that enhance productivity, collaboration, and overall user experience

- ▶ Library spaces include thoughtful and supportive amenities including quiet and silent zones, light therapy lamps, and widespread Wi-Fi and power access
- ▶ CLS maintains strong leadership in digital infrastructure by using platforms like Ex Libris to enhance searchability and accessibility, sustaining national resource-sharing initiatives such as Scholars Portal and Scholaris, and advancing open access, digitization, and research support technologies
- ▶ CLS plays a vital role in student success, diversity, and accessibility through wellness initiatives and the creation of family-friendly study spaces

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Priorities
  - ▶ Challenges ahead include finding effective ways to use technology to innovate and create efficiencies within a constrained fiscal environment
- Collections
  - ▶ Long-term preservation of digital materials remains difficult, requiring sustained investment and technological upgrades to ensure sustainability and accessibility, and challenges with integrating emerging technologies into existing systems persist due to interoperability issues and user training needs.
- Space, Services & Student Experience
  - ▶ Some spaces remain underutilized or do not fully meet user needs despite efforts to make them innovative and welcoming

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Priorities
  - ▶ Position CLS as an essential partner in the Digital Master Plan, with a leading role in shaping AI strategy and advancing the user service layer to support accessibility and innovation
- Collections
  - ▶ Continue strengthening collaborative collection building across the libraries to further tailor collections to the needs of specific user groups or constituencies
  - ▶ Explore ways to balance the financial and administrative benefits of centralized collection building with the need to greater flexibility to support localized collection preferences and convenience across the federated, UTM, and UTSC libraries
  - ▶ Maintain strong, ongoing support for the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library given its global research appeal, rich public programming, and innovative research activities such as the Old Books New Science Lab
  - ▶ Formalize partnerships between central and federated libraries to strengthen collaborative collection building and strategically align collection development
  - ▶ Prioritize expanding digitization of government documents and rare materials to enhance accessibility and long-term preservation
  - ▶ Develop additional outreach and exhibition strategies to elevate the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library's visibility as a national and international research destination
- Space, Services & Student Experience

- ▶ Leverage emerging spaces and services like the Map and Data Library to deepen engagement with researchers in areas such as research data management, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence
- ▶ Continue enhancing spaces and programming that support in-person, relational engagement and creative collaboration, building on examples like the 3rd Floor Media Commons and the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Data Library expansion
- ▶ Sustain and expand CLS' leadership in digital infrastructure by advancing open access, strengthening digitization and research support technologies, and building on platforms like Ex Libris, Scholars Portal, and Scholaris to enhance searchability, accessibility, and national resource-sharing
- ▶ Reinforce CLS' contributions to student success and diversity by expanding family-friendly and student-centered spaces and programming across campus libraries in alignment with the strategic plan
- ▶ Continue transforming underutilized areas into dynamic, multi-purpose spaces that promote student and faculty engagement and collaboration
- ▶ Invest in additional dedicated learning environments, such as the 5th Floor Data Services, to support AI, research data management, and digital scholarship
- ▶ Increase seating capacity and improve accessibility in high-demand study locations to better support students during peak periods
- ▶ Strengthen the role of librarians as research partners by expanding methodological support and integrating library services more fully into the research lifecycle
- ▶ Develop structured AI consultation services and integrate AI-driven tools into research and teaching support
- ▶ Expand support for faculty and students in developing data management plans and meeting with funding agency requirements
- ▶ Increase in-person librarian and staff availability to support student and faculty preference for face-to-face collaboration when research needs exceed what remote tools can provide

## 2. Administration (Items 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9 from Terms of Reference)

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Internal/External Relationships
  - ▶ University Chief Librarian has led UTL with distinction since 2011, earning praise for his leadership and his ability to create strong, enduring relationships with librarians, staff, and key stakeholders on campus and nationally
  - ▶ University Chief Librarian is recognized for forging strong partnerships across domains such as IT, study space, and iSchool internship opportunities, and acknowledging the library's significant yet differentiated role across disciplines
  - ▶ Collaborative projects and public events have strengthened the Libraries' role as a community hub

- ▶ CLS is distinguished by a unified catalogue and discovery system, integrated IT systems, and strong collaboration through federation and other agreements
- ▶ UTL holds a unique national role in setting benchmarks for collaboration and accessibility, providing critical digital infrastructure, advancing open access scholarship, and preserving cultural heritage through digitized special collections
- Accessibility & Diversity
  - ▶ CLS prioritizes equity, diversity, and inclusion across services and spaces, supported by dedicated staff training and intentional collection development that reflects diverse perspectives
  - ▶ CLS demonstrates respect for Indigenous data sovereignty by improving resource discoverability through appropriate metadata and supporting community ownership knowledge creation
  - ▶ Efforts to enhance accessibility services ensure equitable access to information and resources for students with disabilities, reinforcing the library's commitment to supporting all learners
  - ▶ CLS is guided by a collection diversity plan that outlines challenges and opportunities, enabling librarians and staff to propose and develop meaningful projects
  - ▶ Funds saved through successful effective license management strategy have supported diversity initiatives, and enabled digitization projects with domestic and international partners
  - ▶ Scholars Portal supports partnerships and shared services that provide an accessible open-content e-portal for users with low vision
  - ▶ Internet Archive Canada digitization team at Robarts provides on-request digitization of any UTL-owned item, making it accessible through a portal for users with print disabilities
  - ▶ CLS demonstrates leadership in sustainable library operations by integrating green initiatives across facilities and programming, aligning with the university's broader commitment to environmental responsibility
- Long-Range Planning and Overall Assessment
  - ▶ CLS is ranked among the top university libraries in North America and is the largest library system in Canada, widely regarded as "a national treasure for Canadians"
  - ▶ Consistent with the prior review team, there is "little to criticize and much to celebrate," with library staff demonstrating high morale across the system

The reviewers identified the following areas of **concern**:

- Organizational Structure
  - ▶ Large and decentralized structure creates challenges for effective, two-way communication and ensuring equitable access to benefits and resources across all libraries
  - ▶ Ongoing challenges with succession planning and position revision, along with siloed work, duplication of effort, and frustration with manual HR processes, reflect broader concerns tied to operating within a large, decentralized organization

- Financial Structure
  - ▶ Limited access to budget information and long-term planning processes raises concerns about financial understanding across the library, underscoring the need for clearer communication on CLS budget priorities and cycles
  - ▶ Reliance of the new Library Services Platform on accurate financial and procurement data creates confusion about budget responsibilities, given the use of multiple systems across acquisitions, operations, and HR functions
- Internal/External Relationships
  - ▶ Challenges reaching and effectively serving all segments of the university community
  - ▶ Reviewers observe some sensitivity and tension between smaller-scale operations of the federated libraries and the larger CLS as well as between campuses; they note challenges, inherent in large system structures, of meeting unique primary user needs while making effective use of shared resources and services

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Organizational Structure
  - ▶ Develop a coordinated strategy for increased involvement of Associate University Librarians (AULs) in communications and outreach
  - ▶ Develop clearer protocols and documented guidelines for federated and non-federated libraries to support more consistent access to resources and services
  - ▶ Implement structured leadership training and succession planning to support smooth leadership transitions
  - ▶ Maintain UTL's leadership in digital accessibility and interoperability by continuing to advance and support key platforms such as Scholar's Portal
  - ▶ Advance AI and Digital Master Plan initiatives by integrating AI technologies into library workflows and supporting digital literacy development for faculty and students
  - ▶ Streamline administrative processes by ensuring CLS remains in the queue for integration into the University's enterprise HR and administrative system, improving hiring, absence tracking, and workload management
- Financial Structure
  - ▶ Strengthen financial understanding across the library by improving communication regarding the CLS budget, its alignment with university priorities, and long-term planning processes
  - ▶ Develop a five-year budget plan that aligns with university cycles, including structured financial literacy programs for librarians
- Internal/External Relationships
  - ▶ Acknowledge the unique identities and priorities of all libraries, while balancing the benefits of coordinated services, collections, and collaboration across the system
  - ▶ Explore revisions to the current collection management structures and develop a strategic plan to coordinate collections across libraries

- ▶ Strengthen communications strategy by increasing the visibility of library success stories in university publications and media outlets
- ▶ Optimize faculty development support with an emphasis on integrating software licensing into instructional resources to maximize value
- ▶ Align the digital master plan with library services to further position CLS as a key technology partner within the university
- ▶ Expand collaborations with academic divisions, IT, and other university units to drive greater engagement and reinforce role of CLS as an indispensable resource
- ▶ Improve internal communication by implementing structured updates from AULs to all staff and creating documentation that clearly outlines decision-making processes
- ▶ Create a clear, publicly available guide detailing services available to federated and non-federated libraries, as well as services that are not included
- Accessibility & Diversity
  - ▶ Expand EDI initiatives by implementing comprehensive staff training and ensuring collections reflect diverse perspectives
  - ▶ Strengthen accessibility services by expanding digital accessibility initiatives and increasing investment in assistive technologies to better support students with disabilities
  - ▶ Further develop family-friendly and wellness-oriented study spaces across all libraries to better support the diverse needs of students
- International Comparators
  - ▶ Expand UTL's contributions to national library infrastructure, open scholarship, and cultural heritage preservation to maintain its leadership within Canadian and global academic library communities
- Long-Range Planning and Overall Assessment
  - ▶ Leverage CLS's strong institutional influence to lead visioning efforts for a 21st century library at the campus level and strengthen internal alignment around a shared future vision for collections, services, and engagement in the research lifecycle
  - ▶ Refine budget and administrative alignment strategies to ensure long-term sustainability
  - ▶ Conduct an external review of the UTSC Library to complete the broader assessment of all three campus libraries and provide valuable insights for planning leadership transitions
  - ▶ Continue prioritizing transition back to in-person work, to strengthen student and faculty engagement, increase librarian visibility, and enhance the sense of community and belonging across the library
  - ▶ Ensure CLS remains central to academic collaboration and capacity-building through continued leadership in digital innovation, student engagement, and research support
  - ▶ Strengthen collaborations with academic divisions, IT, and university leadership to position UTL as an essential partner in digital transformation and student success

## 2 Administrative Response & Implementation Plan



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
LIBRARIES

January 16, 2026

Professor Nick Rule  
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs  
University of Toronto

Re: Administrative response to the External Review of the University of Toronto Central Library System (CLS)

Dear Professor Rule,

I am pleased to provide an administrative response to the External Review of the University of Toronto Central Library System (CLS). The reviewers' positive assessment reflects the significant strengths of the entire University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) system, and the vital contributions the libraries make to the University's academic mission. The assessment also highlights the professionalism and dedication of my colleagues, and I am grateful that their contributions to student success and research excellence have been recognized.

The external reviewers' report was disseminated to librarians and staff in the central, campus, college, and federated libraries, and to the stakeholders who contributed to the External Review process, including members of the *Advisory Committee on the University of Toronto Library System*, the *UTL Student Library Advisory Committee*, and partners across the University. In response to the report's recommendations, and incorporating feedback received throughout the process, the CLS is developing both immediate and longer-term plans to build on existing strengths and ensure sustained excellence in the years ahead. It is worth noting that during the External Review process, which launched in January 2024 with the reviewers' visit taking place in January 2025, the pace of change in higher education and libraries has accelerated significantly. Shifts in the University's financial landscape and rapid technological advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have had an impact. Consequently, some recommendations may carry less weight or are being given less priority as we build towards a less predictable future.

### *1. Organizational structure*

The reviewers made recommendations related to the organizational structure of the libraries, which mirror the decentralized and administrative complexity of the University. Their feedback referred to enhancing communication channels, addressing decentralization challenges, increasing leadership development, and improving financial planning and literacy.

We recognize the importance of transparent and inclusive communication, with members of the University Chief Librarian's Executive Leadership Table (ELT) regularly engaging with their teams to share updates and gather input. In response to this recommendation, members of the ELT have already started to actively seek feedback on where communication may fall short, and what additional channels would be most helpful to implement. These consultations will inform improvements to ensure staff feel informed and connected to decision-making processes.

To help bridge the challenges inherent in a highly decentralized university and library system, the CLS has established mechanisms and protocols for cross-campus collaboration. These efforts rely on inclusive participation and voluntary engagement, which have proven successful in fostering coordination while respecting the autonomy of individual libraries. The University Chief Librarian will continue to strengthen relationships with the Federated Libraries and will explore formal arrangements through existing frameworks, if needed, in response to this recommendation.

We agree that leadership development and succession planning support building for the future. The University and several library associations have structured leadership training programs which the Deputy Chief Librarian will further promote to help prepare staff for future roles, building management and leadership skills and ensuring continuity.

Financial planning and preparation within the CLS is aligned with the University's established cycles and procedures. To enhance staff and librarians' financial literacy, particularly during a period of fiscal restraint, we will incorporate an additional annual financial literacy session into a Senior Staff Plus meeting. Facilitated by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the session will provide colleagues with a deeper understanding of the institutional budget planning process and the University's financial outlook. To support independent and self-directed learning, staff and librarians will also be encouraged to review the financial information disseminated by the University.

## *2. Collections*

Sustained, reliable access to knowledge is an integral part of the research, learning, and innovation infrastructure that makes researchers internationally competitive, and gives students the resources they need to thrive. CLS collections are strategic assets that support every department and campus, reaching all members of the University community. They also form the data that underpins computational and AI-driven research, an area of growing interest across the University. They provide instructors with rich and adaptable materials that foster inclusiveness, engagement, and critical inquiry. The reviewers' recommendations related to library collections focus on strengthening collaborative collection building, expanding digitization efforts, and enhancing special collections visibility.

Collaborative collection development is supported through the tri-campus UTL Collections Committee, which serves as the primary forum for alignment, and includes open participation in working groups. This model has enabled initiatives such as a shared approval plan across the East and West campus libraries, which balances coordination with local autonomy. We welcome

continued discussion on strengthening relationships and, if formal arrangements are required, will explore options through existing frameworks. Developing a tri-campus digitization strategy would significantly advance this recommendation by reinforcing collaborative efforts, and is a priority that the Associate Chief Librarian for Collections and Materials Management will continue to actively champion.

Digitization remains a strategic priority. The libraries, including the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, have been at the leading edge of digitization and digital preservation for more than 20 years. We will continue to build on this legacy. Developing a tri-campus digitization strategy will further accelerate progress, with a focus on government documents, rare materials, and specialized formats such as film to enhance accessibility and long-term preservation.

Led by the Associate Chief Librarian for Special Collections and Director of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, UTL special collections units have long showcased the depth and diversity of our holdings through exhibitions, lectures, and film screenings. In 2025, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections offered more than 250 tours, workshops, and lectures, while the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library welcomed more than 36,000 visitors, for example. To further amplify and celebrate this work, the communications team will be tasked, in collaboration with Fisher staff, with developing additional strategies that elevate visibility and further position the Fisher Library as a premier national and international research destination. Plans could include expanding outreach and exhibition initiatives, and leveraging distinctive themes related to the University's Defy Gravity campaign to increase media engagement and broaden public awareness.

### 3. *Communications*

Effective communication in an administratively complex university and library is a perennial challenge, and we welcome the input of the external reviewers to help make improvements. We agree that strengthening communications is a priority, and note progress is already underway.

The decentralized structure of UTL can make consistent information flow challenging. Additionally, some decisions must remain confidential due to personnel, strategic, or partnership sensitivities. Members of the ELT will explore structured approaches that have been put in place at similar organizations to understand their effectiveness. We also welcome collaboration with the University to develop frameworks that balance transparency with operational realities. Potential initiatives include establishing a comprehensive, searchable archive of Senior Staff minutes and agendas to address current limitations where documents are stored in systems that are not easily searchable. While members of the ELT previously contributed regular columns to the weekly all-library *In the Loop* newsletter, these efforts generated limited engagement, underscoring the need for new strategies to enhance internal communication.

The reviewers also recommended enhancing external communications. We will work to increase the visibility of CLS's successes by better leveraging existing University channels and aligning with

initiatives such as the *Defy Gravity* campaign. Communications fall under the portfolio of the CAO, who will take the lead with support from the Director of Advancement.

We agree that clarity and transparency about services for federated and non-federated libraries are important. Rather than starting with a centralized list, we propose an inclusive approach which invites libraries to identify services they cannot currently perform independently. This will help the CLS prioritize support based on actual needs, avoid setting unrealistic expectations, and uncover opportunities for collaboration. Any resulting guide will therefore be grounded in real demand and reflect a shared understanding of where central support can have the greatest impact.

#### 4. *Diversity and Inclusion*

The CLS has been actively committed to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism and significant work is already underway to support our goals. The reviewers recommended expanding training opportunities, enhancing accessibility services, and promoting inclusive spaces to further build on these achievements.

The UTL Collections Committee is currently revising the EDI statement first developed in 2021 to reflect evolving best practices. This work is informed by broad staff participation and insights from our involvement in the ITHAKA S+R Assessing the Diversity of Library Collections 2024 Cohort which provides benchmarking and actionable recommendations. Led by the Associate Chief Librarian for Collections and Materials Management, we will build on this foundation to further diversify collections and strengthen inclusive practices.

The CLS prioritizes accessibility as a core value and continues to respond to increasing demand in this area. We have seen a rise in complex student requests for accessibility support and have addressed this by implementing ABBYY FineReader, an AI-powered OCR solution that streamlines the creation of high-quality alternate text formats. When needed, we collaborate closely with CNIB, AODA officers, and facilities teams to ensure student needs are met. We also proactively offer initiatives through workshops and training focused on AODA compliance, Universal Design principles, and accessible service delivery. These efforts play a critical role in embedding accessibility into the CLS' operations and culture.

We have prioritized wellness and the overall student experience, even within smaller spaces. While many of our libraries have limited physical footprints, we assess each location for opportunities to incorporate features that support diverse student needs. Where space constraints exist, we explore creative solutions and partnerships to maximize impact. Spearheaded by the CAO, we will continue to look for opportunities to make incremental improvements such as through furniture upgrades, as budgets allow. Many library locations already feature “unstudy” areas where students can relax and engage in activities such as jigsaw puzzles, origami, and positivity walls. We are actively exploring ways to better support students with ADHD and ASD, recognizing their unique social and learning needs. To foster inclusion and belonging, the CLS is investing in intentional community programming

designed to help students build connections. Our commitment to inclusivity continues to drive the development of programs and services that respond to the diverse needs of the student population.

### 5. *Space*

We appreciate the emphasis on optimizing library spaces to enhance engagement and support evolving academic needs. While we share these goals, current financial constraints limit our ability to undertake large-scale renovations or expansions. Within the present fiscal reality, the CLS will prioritize creative, cost-effective strategies, such as repurposing underutilized areas and improving flexibility in existing spaces to foster collaboration and dynamic learning environments. Similarly, we recognize the importance of specialized spaces for data services, AI, and digital scholarship, and will implement incremental enhancements as resources allow. Improving study space availability remains a priority, and the CAO continues to monitor usage patterns to identify opportunities for adjustments within existing footprints. We remain committed to advancing these objectives as funding permits, seeking potential partnerships or phased approaches to maximize impact.

### 6. *Services*

The reviewers noted an opportunity to strengthen research supports services, increase AI and digital scholarship support, and improve research data management (RDM) support. They also recommended a return to more in-person services.

The CLS continues to advance its role as a research partner through initiatives that integrate library expertise across the research lifecycle, including methodological support and data management planning. We are actively exploring ways to enhance AI and digital scholarship services, recognizing their growing importance for research and teaching. In 2025, the Map and Data Library (MDL) and Scholarly Communications and Copyright Office (SCCO) launched a pilot liaison program to build in-house capacity for Open Access Publishing, Copyright, and RDM. The initiative was designed to adapt to the increased demand on RDM and SCCO staff and librarians while expanding support for faculty and students. In addition, MDL has begun implementing curation services through the hire of a data curation specialist. Although additional resources are needed, these services have been successfully introduced, and work is underway to further strengthen and scale RDM support.

We value the feedback provided about increased in-person services, and will rely on comprehensive, multi-modal assessments to guide strategic decisions. These include detailed usage data and pilot programs such as Librarian-in-Residence and faculty office hours, which help us determine the most effective ways to meet user needs. We recognize the importance of personal interactions and our approach is nuanced with an aim to meet the community where they are. We also see opportunities to better promote existing in-person and virtual services to ensure awareness and access.

### 7. *Technology*

We appreciate the recognition of UTL's leadership in digital infrastructure and remain committed to maintaining strong accessibility, interoperability, and the continued success of Scholars Portal. Advancing AI and digital initiatives is a priority, and we will work toward integrating AI tools into

workflows in ways that support research and teaching while promoting digital literacy for faculty and students. While financial constraints require careful prioritization, we remain focused on sustaining core digital infrastructure and pursuing strategic enhancements that deliver the greatest impact. Members of the ELT are focused on effectively leveraging technology to support the University's goal of becoming an AI ready institution.

UTL leverages external funds for the benefit of the U of T community through strategic relationships with national and international peers, particularly for large-scale initiatives. Our partnership with the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) through Scholars Portal leverages UTL's technical infrastructure to deliver robust digital services while achieving economic efficiencies through shared provincial and national collaboration. UTL has led the development of and operates the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN) Trustworthy Digital Repository (TDR), Borealis: the Canadian Dataverse Repository, and Scholaris, a national shared institutional repository service. All these partnerships are designed to maximize impact, minimize duplication, and offer high value to all stakeholders while reducing our direct costs. These initiatives create important partnerships across Canadian universities and with the Federal funding agencies to support Canadian information infrastructure, while also leveraging external funds to enhance services for U of T faculty and students.

The CLS is working with the University's Enterprise Applications & Solutions Integration (EASI) team to implement a vacation tracker for all staff. It will be rolled out in 2026, enabling staff to request vacation time through Employee Self-Service (ESS), with managers approving requests via Manager Self-Service (MSS), improving efficiency and reducing administrative workload. More broadly, we agree that further integration into the University's enterprise-level human resources and administrative systems is essential for equity and operational effectiveness. Led by the Director, Human Resources, we will continue to advocate for the CLS to remain in the implementation queue while exploring interim measures to streamline processes where possible.

#### *8. Leadership Role*

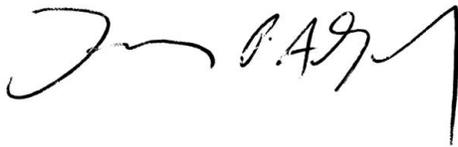
UTL is Canada's largest research library and ranks third in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) standings. We appreciate the reviewers' recognition of UTL's leadership role within the province and at national and international levels. Our exceptional reach, relevance, and resonance with the broader community attracts donors from around the world and strengthens the University's international profile. The CLS remains deeply engaged in national and international initiatives that advance open scholarship, cultural heritage preservation, and shared infrastructure. We will continue to build on these contributions to maintain and enhance our leadership within Canadian and global academic library communities.

In support of the academic mission, the CLS makes informed decisions about collections, services, and spaces guided by our strategic plan, data, staff expertise, and with careful consideration to the advice received through numerous channels. The tri-campus Provostial *Advisory Committee on the University of Toronto Library System* and the *UTL Student Advisory Committee* are formal

consultations mechanisms. The *University Chief Librarian's Executive Leadership Table* includes the Chief Librarians from UTM and UTSC, and *Senior Staff Plus* convenes all library heads across our tri-campus federated system, bringing the perspectives and needs of all campuses to decision making. UTL staff also sit at University tables and on local, national, and international committees of importance. UTL works in close collaboration with faculty, students, administrators, the academic divisions, and communities, and we collect feedback through multiple service points. Input received through all these channels, combined with analysis using collected data offer insights into the immediate and long-term needs of scholars, inform priorities and resource allocation, and enable us to align with institutional priorities and emerging opportunities. Strengthening collaborations with academic divisions, IT, and university leadership remains central to our efforts to position UTL as an essential partner in the academic mission.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the observations and recommendations of the external reviewers. The CLS remains deeply committed to advancing excellence, and we have already begun implementing several recommendations arising from the External Review process. We greatly value the insights provided by our esteemed colleagues, which will serve as a sound foundation as we continue to strengthen the CLS and position it for future success in service of the University of Toronto community and beyond.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry P. Alford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.

Larry P. Alford  
University Chief Librarian  
University of Toronto Libraries