

Faculty of Information

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To: Vivek Goel, Vice-President and Provost
From: Brian Cantwell Smith, Dean
Date: March 26, 2008

Re: **Faculty Name Change**

At its meeting of March 25, 2008, the Faculty of Information Studies Council passed the following motion:

*That FIS Council recommend to the Academic Board that the name of the Faculty of Information Studies be changed to the **Faculty of Information**, effective June 30, 2008.*

A • Background

In 2008 the Faculty celebrates its 80th anniversary. Founded in 1928 as the *Library School*, its name has changed several times—in 1972, to the *Faculty of Library Science*; in 1982, to the *Faculty of Library and Information Science*, and in 1994 to the *Faculty of Information Studies*. Each of these changes reflected—and responded to—changes in the profession within which the Faculty operates, and, more importantly, the ongoing expansion of topics covered the Information field. While we maintain our reputation as a professional school of choice for Librarians and Archivists, we have also (as you know) developed the Faculty into the only Canadian member of the Information Schools (“i-schools”) movement. In so doing, we have expanded our academic offerings to include new fields of study—such as Museum Studies, information policy, and inclusive design. Information itself, *qua* phenomenon, is also an increasingly valid subject of academic study. Overall, we have far outgrown the community’s connotations of the simple acronym ‘FIS.’

This proposal to change our name to the more elegant **Faculty of Information** has been a long time in the making. I first mentioned it during deliberations around our 2004–10 Academic Plan; and have informally talked about it with the Faculty community over subsequent years. I raised the issue and notified the community that I would be bringing this motion forward at each of our four Faculty Council meetings this year, and have repeatedly spoken of my intention to bring this proposal forward to all of our audiences (see below). In addition, it has been my understanding from informal conversations with both you and the President of the University of Toronto that the University as a whole would be favorable to this modernization and vitalization of our identity.

B • Consultation

Technically, the name change is merely a shortening of our name—to drop the word ‘Studies.’ In reality, a name change is an important symbolic act—important to internal self-conception and to external image and reputation.

Because of its significance, I felt that it was important to engage in a broad consultation process with all affected stakeholders before bringing forward a formal proposal. In particular:

- I. After numerous informal discussions over the past year, I brought the proposal forward at a recent faculty meeting.¹ All present were in unanimous agreement to proceed.

¹Feb 15, 2008.

2. Meetings were held with the Presidents of each of our three student societies, with very favourable results. The President of the FIS Student Council (by far the largest group) not only wholly endorsed the proposal, and said that the students were united behind it, but asked how she and the student body more generally could help see the motion pass.
3. We held a successful ‘Town Hall’ meeting—announced by email to our listserv, posted on the Faculty’s website, and advertised on posters throughout our buildings—on March 18, 2008. An excellent discussion took place, which wrestled with the substantive changes we are undergoing in becoming an information school, but with virtually no opposition to deleting the term ‘Studies.’
4. The topic of the name change was the single item of discussion at a meeting of the Faculty’s Alumni Council, which also met on March 18. Again, while opinions were not completely unanimous in recommending the change, overall the motion was very substantially supported.
5. At the March 25 meeting of FIS Council, the proposal was greeted with smiles, met no opposing discussion, and passed by an overwhelming majority.²

Interestingly, in both of the last two meetings, virtually all critical comments that were made centred not on the term “Studies,” but on the question of whether ‘Information’ was an adequate label for our collective work—even though that term (a) is already in our name, (b) does not figure in the proposed change; and (c) is in increasingly common use.

C • Rationale

Reasons for shortening our name include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. No prominent academic units (Faculties or departments) have ‘Studies’ in their names. The word ‘Studies’ is intrinsically weak. It suggests a Faculty unsure of its status and place, rather than one that is confident.
2. Rather, the standard custom is for academic units to have names designating *the field of study that the unit addresses*, not (at a meta-level) *the study of that field*. Thus in each of the following cases we use the names on the left, not the names on the right:

<i>Faculty of Medicine</i>	not	<i>Faculty of Medical Studies</i>
<i>Faculty of Law</i>	not	<i>Faculty of Legal Studies</i>
<i>Faculty of Architecture</i>	not	<i>Faculty of Architectural Studies</i>
<i>Physics Department</i>	not	<i>Department of Physical Studies</i>
<i>Department of Philosophy</i>	not	<i>Department of Philosophical Studies</i>

3. We have been struggling to integrate Museum Studies, our emerging inclusive design program, etc., into a “larger” FIS—and therefore to change the denotation and connotation of the familiar name in informal speech, in alumni/ae and student councils, etc. In particular, we want our name, in people’s imaginations, to encompass a far wider range of people, activities, programs, and groups than it has historically come to evoke. Moreover, we have continuing plans to expand—including opening or integrating our graduate programs with one or more undergraduate efforts. It will be vastly easier for the new name “Faculty of Information” immediately to connote the entire expanded academic unit, than it would be to change the connotation of the term ‘FIS,’ which has become entrenched in imaginations and habits.
4. Within our local community, our Faculty is known as ‘FIS.’ This acronym has no broader connotation, however; nor does it mean anything. While it has served as a proper name for our particular unit, it neither conveys anything to someone who doesn’t know us already, nor does it locate us as

²In fact there was just one solitary negative vote.

a member of any broader movement. In addition, the acronym has other meanings, even at UofT (where it is also used to name the “Financial Information System” component of the administrative computing network).³

5. Very importantly, the new name will signify our membership in the emerging community of Information Schools (“i-schools”). There is a movement within this group to adopt such simple names as *Information School*, *School of Information*, etc., in order to establish Information Schools as a type—i.e., a cohesive and recognizable unit for granting agencies, patterns of allegiance, rating systems, public discussions, etc. For example:
 - a. The University of Michigan calls their i-school by the simple name *The School of Information*, as does the University of Texas.
 - b. The University of Washington uses the equally simple name *The Information School*.
 - c. In 2006 UC Berkeley changed its name from the “School of Information Management and Systems (SIMS)” to the simpler *School of Information*.

Of the 19 Universities forming the Information School Caucus,⁴ just 4 others continue to have ‘studies’ in their names. Several of these 4 are also contemplating name changes—to the simpler “Information School” or “School of Information.” Among other reasons, one consideration driving this movement is that since these schools are increasingly known as information schools (i.e., ‘information school’ has become a common noun), it makes sense to have the formal designation reflect universal behaviour.

D • Discussion

A number of additional considerations explain the context of this proposed name change:

1. If our name becomes “Faculty of Information,” we will no longer be known by an acronym (“FIS” or ‘FI’ or anything else), but simply as *Information*. Note that we all currently say the following sorts of things:
 - a. “She is an associate professor in Nursing.”
 - b. “Architecture is having a party at 4:30 tomorrow.”
 - c. “He is studying Medicine.” (i.e., the word used to name the Faculty is the same word that we use to designate the object of a student’s study)
 - d. “We need to include representatives from Engineering, Pharmacy, and Arts & Science.”

If our name were “Faculty of Information,” then similar things would be said about us. This practice would have the substantial merit that people would know what we are, what we stand for, etc.⁵

2. Faculty names have no direct impact on the names of programs or degrees. So changing our name in this way will not have any impact on any of our courses or degrees. Down the road—perhaps in conjunction with the on-going curriculum review—we may want to consider changing the name of the MIST degree to the simpler *Master of Information*. We recognize, however, that obtaining approval for such a change involves an entirely different process.

By the same token, we realize that the 3-letter prefix ‘FIS’ with which some (not all!) of our

³When I arrived at UofT, almost everyone I spoke to around the rest of UofT assumed that ‘FIS’ meant the financial system. I had to explain that it was *also* the name of a Faculty.

⁴<http://www.ischools.org/>

⁵Note: While someone might object that saying “he is studying information” is almost vacuously true at a University, the same is true of ‘education.’ It is simply a question of what one is used to. Saying “she is doing a PhD in education” confuses no one. Over the next years, we believe, “he is studying information” will become a similar commonplace.

courses are identified is again an independent issue. That too, is something we may want to review. But again, any change to Faculty course prefixes would come out of a separate process.

3. Some have asked what will happen to our logo—an abstract representation of the 3-letter combination ‘FIS’. Somewhat coincidentally, however, our decision to change the name of the Faculty coincides with the University’s visual identity process, in which individual Faculties, departments, and programs are being asked to set aside individual logos, and to unite under a single “graphical brand.”

You will note that the masthead of this memo presents an indication of this new brand. We trust you will agree with us that the new name is both crisper and more confident, as befits our expansion and development.

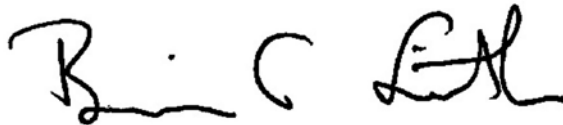
E • Launching the New Identity

If the motion is passed by Academic Board, it will be appropriate for the Faculty to “launch” a new phase in its existence under its new name. A proposal for an appropriate staged roll-out of the new identity (including new visual identity) is under preparation. We anticipate integrating this launch with the celebration of our 80th anniversary.

F • Conclusion

For all of the reasons cited above, we at the Faculty believe the time has come to put this change into effect. Although the new name may initially strike some as odd, we are confident that it will very quickly become so natural that it will seem odd that we were ever called anything else.

I will therefore be pleased for a motion to come forward to the Academic Board calling for our name change, and look forward to serving the University as a Professor in the Faculty of Information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. C. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Brian Cantwell Smith
Dean and Professor, Faculty of Information (Studies)