

Good Morning Everyone. Thank you so much for making time to be here today.

I'm delighted to have a chance to offer my thoughts on what I see as priorities for the Content Development and Analysis Department, and about what I might personally bring to the role of Director in helping to advance these priorities.

Twenty minutes is not a very long time, so I've limited myself to talking about, in what I hope is a digestible way, **three key priorities for the next 3-5 years.**

But before I start, I have a request of all of you. As you listen, I ask that you think about how these priorities might apply in the context of your own collections work. I direct this not just to selectors or to those in acquisitions but to everyone here. Because I think that no matter what your role at YUL is, whether you are helping users check out items at a circulation desk, re-shelving a book, or developing an application to track missing materials, we all form the bridge that connects our community with our content. So, if you feel so inclined, I ask that you write down **one idea**--something that you either currently do in your job, or maybe more importantly, one thing that you think we **should** do to advance one of the priorities I will describe. No need to sign your name, and I won't follow up with you unless you want me to (in which case indicate that). But if I land this gig, I would really find these ideas helpful in fixing my gaze beyond the Content Development Department, and thinking about ways to work across the organization. You can put them in this envelope on the way out.

So let's begin.

I like alliteration, and as I veer helplessly towards mid-life, it has the added bonus of helping me remember stuff. So I took some time this week to once think carefully about our strategic plan, and in particular, about the goals listed under **Theme 1**

**Transformative Knowledge Infrastructure and Scholarly Content.** I thought about them in the context of our current realities--both the pressures and the opportunities that are before us, and I arrived at what I'll call the **three As: Analyze, Articulate, Animate.** I'll spend a few minutes unpacking each one of these concepts a bit, and then I'll end with some thoughts on how I might help to advance them as a Director.

**Analyze.** I think that if we are to continue to develop rich content and collections that are responsive to the needs of the York community, we must have a deeper and more holistic understanding of what our students and faculty actually require, and know more about how and why they use our content. Now at this point, you might be thinking: *but don't we do that already?* And this is true, because this has always been part of the work of liaison librarians -- to understand and anticipate needs in their subject areas. I think this disciplinary perspective will remain vitally important in our new structure because as we know, the University itself is organized by discipline, and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

**But, here's what is new.** I think that we need to supplement our disciplinary lenses with systems-wide perspectives. Historically, I don't think we've been so great at this. It was only two and a half years ago that we launched the Collections and Content Group, a development that I think was long overdue. I think we need to spend more time and effort on developing shared processes, tools for analysis, and ways of thinking about the content we acquire so that we can be more responsive to realities and patterns that **transcend disciplinaryity.** I'll offer just two examples of issues that I think would benefit from integrating a systems-wide perspective.

First, we need a broader lens of analysis if we are to think seriously about what a responsible balance between print and electronic content might be for YUL. Let's imagine, for example, that the DLO team is as successful with a capital plan as they've been with our securing library space at the Markham campus. In new or reimagined

library spaces, how we will be able to make thoughtful and deliberate decisions about what materials should remain on our shelves vs stored on a server? What parts of our collection might be good candidates for storage--either locally or as part of a collaborative solution?

## SLIDE 5

And if you secretly harbour ideas about the **death of the print collection**, I draw your attention due south to Arizona State University, which was recently awarded a \$380,000 Mellon Grant for project to reimagine the library's strategy for open-stack print collections.

A systems-wide analysis is, to my mind, even more critical in the context of *Collaborative Futures*. Now more than ever, we need a coordinated approach to content management that balances disciplinary knowledge with an overarching understanding of the costs and benefits of the various paths we might pursue.

Another example. How do we ensure that we are supporting user needs and user engagement with our collections in ways that **transcend the boundaries of disciplines**. And here I'm not just referring to interdisciplinary areas that I would argue, perhaps provocatively, haven't been as well served by our approach to collection development. Areas such as indigenous studies, health, global sustainability come immediately to mind. But I'm also thinking here about how we might move beyond having subject or discipline as the only unit of analysis in collection building. How might we think about other social groups that exist in our community--and I mean this in the sociological meaning of a social group -- ie. people who interact with one another or share an identity or similar characteristics. What if we could begin to better analyze the needs and behaviours of these groups and ask ourselves different questions. Question such as:

- What are the collection needs of an undergraduate student vs a graduate student? Of a first year student vs a fourth year student?
- What about part-time students? What do they need?
- What are the reading habits of millennials vs. mature students and how do we cater to both in our content development activities?
- What materials do our international students need? What about students for whom English is not their first language?

This list goes on, but I think you get the idea. I think we've done a good job with this in some of IL work and at our various service points, but I suggest, again somewhat provocatively, that we haven't been as successful with incorporating these lenses into our collection development practices.

The good news is that this work has already begun. **Bill Denton's Dashboard tools** have begun to open possibilities for analyzing our collections in new and really exciting ways. Our Textbook Project, launching this Fall is a way of supporting first year students across the curriculum who can't afford the astronomical costs of required textbooks. We've struck working groups on indigeneity and Canadiana to try to better support these areas. These are just a few examples, but I would, as Director, be firmly committed to continuing this work of incorporating multiple levels of analysis.

I don't think my second priority is going to come as a surprise to anyone. Articulating the ways that our collections directly support teaching, learning and research has always been a part of what we do, but as we transition to the SHARP budget model, it is now absolutely vital. I think the new part here is really the degree of granularity we must bring to this effort. We need to shift our narrative from simply "collections are vital to research and teaching" to something more akin to "**here is precisely how our collections and content support the teaching, learning and research needs in**

**your faculty.**” I see this as not really a fundamental change to the story we tell about collections, but rather, a sharpening and refining of each chapter of that story.

I think we can do this in a variety of ways, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

And, as with priority one, we’ve already laid important groundwork in this area. CCG members have been actively engaged in this work in a number of ways. Over this past year, we have:

- Revamped GOBI fund codes to better track monograph purchases by subject
- Done an exercise to map all of our electronic resources over \$7000 to the faculties that use them the most as a way of seeing whether SHARP contributions from faculties match the real costs of these eResources. Spoiler alert: in many cases, they don’t in many cases. Bill can fill you in, if you are interested.
- Done a retrospect analysis of one time only purchases over that last five years so we can better see how we’ve supported individual faculties with those funds.
- We are developing models for shared cost arrangements with individual faculties and templates for how we deal with requests for very specialized and or expensive products so that we can be more transparent and accountable in how we spend our collections budget
- We’ve improved communications about collections and have gradually shifted our from internal communications to more outwardly-focused messaging through channels such as our newsletter *the Abstract*

Perhaps most importantly, we’ve been very intentional about moving towards transparency in all aspects of our collection management in order to educate and engage our community in the very real challenges we face in the current scholarly communication landscape. While we weren’t able to do a full release of our eResource

expenditures as planned this year, this is a priority that I would continue to strongly support as a Director. I would also continue to push our vendors to remove non-disclosure clauses from their contracts and advocate for fairer pricing and terms of use. Indeed, I think that all of this points to the most critical area of intersection between the Content Development and Analysis and the Open Scholarship Department and I look forward to working closely with colleagues in this department to advance these priorities.

#### **SLIDE 14: Animate**

Finally, I think I'm most excited about the third priority: **Animate**. As a Director, I would insist that we turn more of our attention to finding creative and dare I say it, even fun, ways to reanimate our collections, and bring them to life for our community in concrete and highly visible ways. While it is true that our collections exist to support the academic needs of our users, I think we shouldn't forget that they are also vehicles for unlocking our collective and individual imaginations, and that they can also be sources of delight, of pleasure, and for some, even sustenance and empowerment. I admit that I sometimes worry that in all our very important and necessary discussions about impact, and alignment and leveraging our expertise, we can easily lose sight of the vital role that our curated collections play in supporting the intellectual and personal wellbeing of ourselves and our community, as citizens of the world, and as whole people. I think this is even more important in a political and economic moment that often feels, well, I'll just say it: pretty bleak.

As a Director, I would invite us to remember that, in the words of one of my favourite librarians Barbara Fister, "the library is conceptually the commons of the University" and to recognize that "the world is not separated into the scholarly and the ordinary and "if knowledge matters, it must matter beyond the boundaries of our campuses." For me, it follows then, that the collections we build and curate using public monies should not

only serve our immediate institutional needs, but should also, serve the higher ideals of education itself: to inform, to empower and to liberate.

So how do we do this? How can we work across all YUL units to build, promote and make accessible content that captures users' imaginations and is responsive to both institutional needs and higher order ideals? I don't have all the answers, but I do have a few ideas. I've been thinking about something Anica said to me in our recent discussions about the leisure reading collection. She reminded me that so most of our content remain hidden behind obscure classification systems that are largely impenetrable to students and faculty and that this problem is even more acute users for whom English is a second language. I think we must working hard to ensure that our rich content is put right in front of users, in places--both physical and virtual, where they can be easily seen, read, heard, digested, and experienced. We will no doubt be helped in this regard by a full-scale Discovery interface made possible through Collaborative Futures and hopefully, sooner rather than later, a refreshed YUL website. But as we watch, wait and prepare for those developments, we can start by focusing on what we can do now.

I've been inspired by the efforts of library staff across units in creating thematic displays, and by the energy and enthusiasm these efforts have generated. As Director, I'd build on this momentum and develop a framework for a more coordinated approach to book and content displays across all our units. I'd be a forceful advocate for library spaces that directly support user engagement with our content. A good example a proposal, still in its infancy, to create a permanent and attractive Browsing Hub area on the first floor of Scott Library, and how this might serve a model for creating other collection spaces that are welcoming, relaxing and support the totality of the student experience.

## **SLIDE 17: TELLING STORIES**

We might also work with our future communications officer to develop better messaging

about collections, and to emphasize the intrinsic links between our content and the ways in which it helps make the world a better place. I think we need to follow the lead of places like Simon Fraser University, MIT, New York Public Library and even our very own archivists in telling the stories behind the content. I think all of these efforts would not just bring to life our collections but would reanimate the role of the library in the minds of our users.

So there you have it: Analyze. Articulate. Animate.

Let me wrap up with a few thoughts about what I might personally bring to the Director role to help make these priorities a reality. I think my work as Chair of CCG since 2016 can partially speak for itself. In that capacity, I've worked hard to harness both subject and functional expertise across the Libraries, and I've tried to help cultivate a space where people from across units and employee groups can work collegially together. I think the breadth of projects that we have been engaged on CCG with reflects my commitment to collaboration and collegiality. But at the same time, I've taken my role as Chair seriously, and I work hard to be organized and prepared for our monthly meetings, and I am attentive to be accountable and on track with the projects that we have committed to.

On a personal level, I bring seventeen years of experience as an academic librarian at York. I know both libraries and the University well, and I take great pride in the strong relationships I have formed with colleagues across the campus. My years as a YUFA Steward have strengthened my facilitation and problem solving skills, and I'd like to think I'm adept at managing conflict, competing interests and providing support and mentorship to my colleagues. I am not afraid of hard work, or hard conversations, but I always try to remember that we are all really working towards the same goal: to play our critical part in advancing York's mission of creating, preserving and dissemination



knowledge, and helping to cultivate the critical thinkers that this world so desperately needs, especially now.

Finally, I'm going to leave you with my version of a handout, because despite being an idea person, I also have a very practical and pragmatic streak. Blame by Irish heritage. So this is a bookmark and on the front is an image of a bookshelf in my basement. The unusual classification scheme is the brainchild of two eight and ten year olds who were extremely bored one long winter afternoon last year. At first I was horrified by the arrangement -- if you look close you will see the Handbook of Rocket Modelling next to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. But it still looks like this a year later because of a comment my daughter made in defense of their system. She said, "but Mommy, it looks so beautiful that way, and it makes her happy." I think if we can make our users just a little bit happier -- either because they easily found what they needed for their research or they had a serendipitous moment of finding something beautiful -- then we've done our job. And I just want to have a bit of a bigger role in helping us do that over the next 3-5 years.

Thanks once again for your attention today. I'm happy to take any questions.