



# **Voices from Fort Book:**

Exploring the History of Austerity and  
Technological Change in Robarts Library

CAPAL 25  
Jesse Carliner  
Tys Klumpenhower

# Hello!

**I am Jesse Carliner.**

User Services Librarian

University of Toronto

[jesse.carliner@utoronto.ca](mailto:jesse.carliner@utoronto.ca)

Image from University of Toronto Archives



# Hello!

**I am Tys Klumpenhower.**

University Archivist

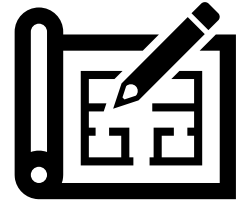
University of Toronto

[t.klumpenhower@utoronto.ca](mailto:t.klumpenhower@utoronto.ca)



A black and white photograph of a large, modern library building. The building features a prominent central tower with a complex, geometric facade of concrete panels and windows. To the right, there is a lower, more rectangular wing with large glass windows. The foreground shows a snowy street with utility poles and a few cars. The entire image is framed by a thick black border.

**John P. Robarts  
Research Library**



# Project overview

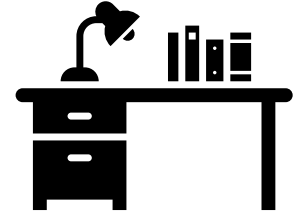
- Purpose of the research
- Research methodology

# Robarts Library Oral History Project



- Project for the 50th anniversary of Robarts Library in 2023
- Conducted interviews in 2021 with 30 participants, including retired librarians, library staff, library administrators and other stakeholders
- Balance and add to the historical record of Robarts Library
- Shed light on how changes in technology impacted Robarts Library
- Realized that austerity may have been a bigger driver of change than technology

# Research Methodology



- Historical scholarship (limited!)
- Archival materials
- Oral history interviews



# Presentation outline

1. Historical context
2. Robarts Library: Austerity and Technological Change in an Academic Library
3. Current context and implications

1.

# Historical context

Ontario and the University of Toronto

# Ontario



## Pre-1970--Social Democracy & Fordism

- Economic model, characterized by large-scale mass production and consumption
- Government involvement in regulating and maintaining the economy
- Huge expansion in public infrastructure
- Welfare state
- Policies supported growth of large middle class
- Education policies focused on “social inclusion” (Sears & Cairns)

# Ontario

Mid 1970's-Post-Fordism—neoliberal turn

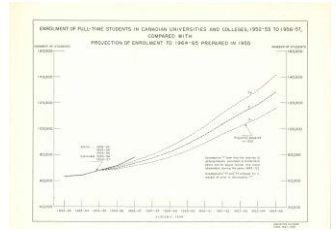
- Neoliberalism
  - Free markets, limited government intervention, and deregulation
- Impact of Ontario's neoliberal government policies
  - Labour disruptions and challenges– Decline of Canadian labour movement
  - Focus on the market
  - “Self-reliance”

# Ontario

Impact of neoliberal policies on higher education

- End of education for education's sake
- “Lean Education” (Sears & Cairns)– introduced by the Conservative government of Mike Harris
- Budgetary austerity- changes in funding models
- Increased enrolment but not funding
- Standardization, corporatization, marketization, and metrics
- Privatization– public/private partnerships

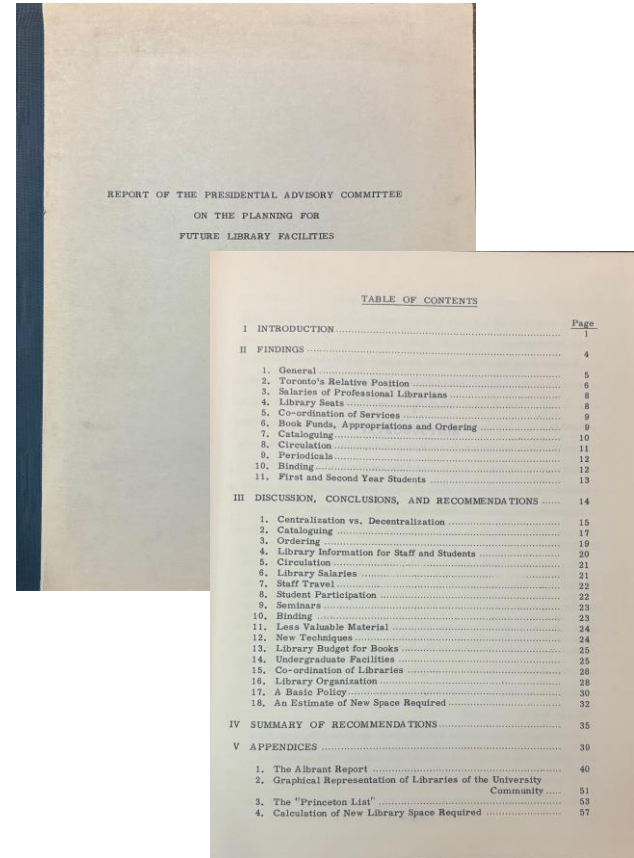
# University of Toronto Enrolment and Expansion



- National Conference of Canadian Universities, 1955
  - Doubling present enrolment of 67,000 in 10 years
- University of Toronto' 'Plateau Committee', 1956
  - Predicts higher increase at UofT than provincial or Canadian average
  - Calls for prioritization of physical builds to accommodate students (residence, study space)
- President Claude Bissell, President 1958 - 1971

# University of Toronto: The Library System

- Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on the Planning for Future Library Facilities, 'The McLaughlin Report', 1959
  - Library centralization
  - New library space
  - Automation and planning



The image shows the cover and table of contents of the report. The cover is a plain, light-colored paper with the title centered. The table of contents is a separate page with a header and a list of sections and page numbers.

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON THE PLANNING FOR  
FUTURE LIBRARY FACILITIES

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*The Committee therefore recommends that steps be taken to add to our library staff a person versed in the new techniques of storing and retrieving information...*

- *Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on the Planning for Future Library Facilities, 'The McLaughlin Report', 1959*



*It is a fact not unknown in the University that the building of a proper research library has been my obsessive concern since I returned to this University.*

- *Claude Bissell's 'Presidents Report for the year ended June 1966'*





University of Toronto Archives. 2011-22-6MS





**2.**

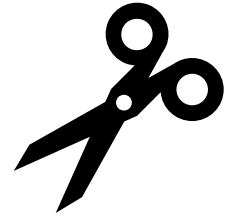
# **Robarts Library**

Austerity and Technological Change in an Academic Library



**Ian Lancashire (1942-2025):** I think the library systems throughout the world have been shaken into doing things that were new, more than any other academic profession. **And it's amazing that the librarians have survived...** Librarians have been at the forefront in the University of this [technological] change; in their lives, in their buildings, we see the impact of this revolution, which is an equal to any revolution, that we have had as people, as human beings. The library has just done wonderfully, I think, in responding to this.

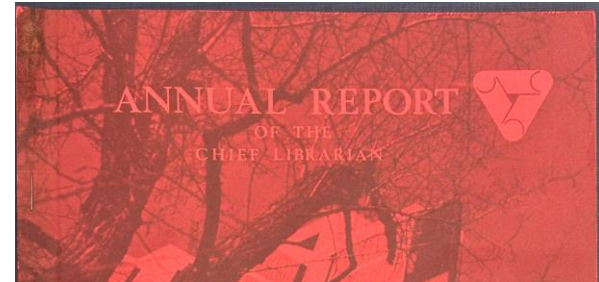
# Surviving the cuts



- Budget cuts
- Staff reductions through attrition & buy-outs
- Technological efficiency
- Expanded roles and increasing workload
- Reallocation of resources

# Surviving the cuts

- Between 1975 and 1981, the library lost 21% of staff positions, despite increased library usage
- 1981-82 Budget Submission:
  - Library Operations Budget reduced
  - Impact on Services
  - Automation considerations



SUMMARY

In 1980-81 the base budget for the Central Book Fund was increased by \$339,200 to help offset inflation in the price of publications. This reallocation, though helpful, has not met the full impact of the dollar depreciation and rising prices.

At the same time the base budget for Library operations was reduced by \$161,000, and then \$7,500 was added to meet the new file maintenance fees levied by UTLAS on all the libraries participating in the Campus Union Catalogue. In addition the Library received a one-year reallocation of \$135,000 to facilitate the brief-listing of half the processing backlog which had accumulated from previous budget cutbacks.

The cut in operating budget, which had to be applied to staff positions, created a further deterioration in library services, a mounting toll on the physical condition of collections, and a further drop in our cataloguing capacity. In order to avoid lay-offs the effect took hold earlier than 1980-81, as vacancies were frozen in the latter part of 1979-80. The \$135,000 "add-on" for the brief-listing project helped to provide users with at least a modicum of accessibility to about half the existing backlog, but this is a temporary relief. The cut has ensured a continuous growth in the size of the backlog and/or the number of items to be brief-listed in the future.

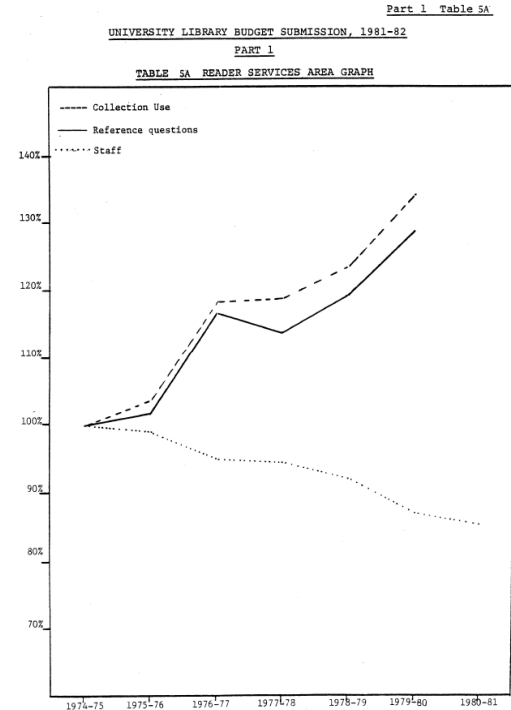
The Library has continued to consider and plan for the implementation of automated techniques which can be adapted for library operations. However, at this time, any relief to be gained from adopting such techniques as are available is limited by technology and costs. Under these circumstances, if the budget cuts continue, there will be a further and more drastic decrease in quality of library service.

Top: Annual Report of the Chief Librarian, 1981

Bottom: University Library Budget Submission, 1981-82  
UTA A1985-0034/013(04)

# Surviving the cuts

- 1981: University Advisory Committee on the Library System, Subcommittee on Budget Priorities
  - 'Budget Planning for the Eighties':
    - Survival at present level
    - Survival with curtailment of services
- Requests for reallocation to save automation goals



University Library Budget Submission, 1981-82  
[UTA A1985-0034/013(04)]



**Carole Moore:** The cause of the austerity was public funding was the majority of the university budget. So, [funding] either came from the province for education or from federal research grants. **After huge increases in [funding in the] 60s, continuing cuts started right as Robarts was built by the provincial government. Then it became really drastic in the 90s, because it was more of a political view. And, so we had huge reductions. Tuitions, of course, are controlled as well. We had to be quite creative about seeking outside funding.** And that was true at University of Toronto, but it was true pretty much all over the world. Seeking private donations, seeking grants.



**Alfred Cheng:** And the budgetary constraint at the time was real, it was so real, we're talking about 5%, if not more budget reduction every year. **And we used the limited resources and started to migrate to digital.**

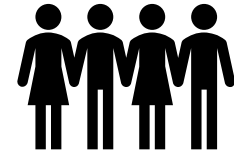


**Carole Moore:** The university was very anxious, as were we, to avoid layoffs, because we'd avoided them all these years for the most part, and especially large-scale layoffs. **So [the university] always set aside funds for retraining and for retirement packages and for exit packages for people who wanted to change...** So the university, each time we had a major cut, which was almost every year, would have packages available and many people took them... **During this period, we didn't technically lay people off. They voluntarily took exits.**



**Alfred Cheng:** We never laid anybody off. And I think that is a huge accomplishment. **We only did it through attrition...** And within that, **there was reallocation of resources to the area where resources are needed.**

# Labour, austerity & technology



- Buy-outs and attrition
- Making up for loss of staffing with technology
- Labour's clout weakening due to reductions in the number of members and technology
- Retraining
- Hiring new people with needed/desirable skills
- Increased workload
- Parallel workflows (analogue and digital)

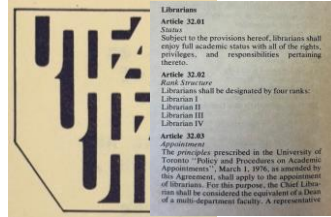
**1964: Ontario University Presidents' Research Committee**



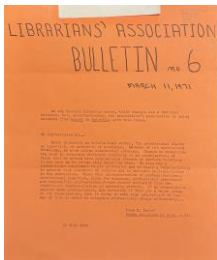
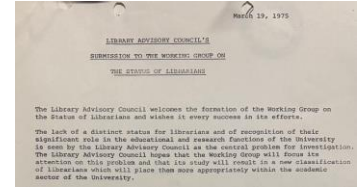
**1971: Exclusion from Governance structure**



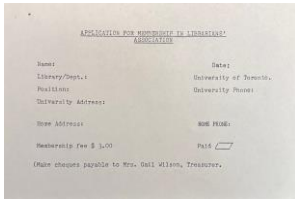
**1974-1975: UTFA Membership**



**1978: Approval of Policies for Librarians**



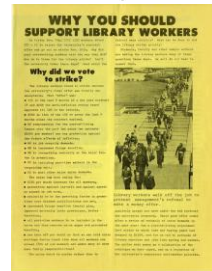
**1969: Formation of LAUT and Certification of CUPE Local 1230**



**1974: 'Reference Revolution'**



**1975: CUPE 1230 Strike 1**



**1991: CUPE 1230 Strike 2**





**Gabriela Bravo:** The staff were very affected by the technical change. **The library went from having over 800 staff members, there was there a point when there were maybe 250.** So, the staff in the Union showed clearly that this was going to be very difficult for them. And they staged a strike.



**Carole Moore:** There were people who said we had too many staff and some people who said the staff didn't have enough to do. But I think that was more a question of **not having the right skills for the changing times and not being able to quickly train everyone.**



**Gabriela Bravo:** One of the reasons, **staff were unhappy, because they, they didn't feel that the introduction of all these automated services had been done with enough training for the staff.** In general, there was resistance. So, they were very threatened by this.



**Terry Corriea:** There was **some discontent that technological improvements and efficiencies would take jobs away – or fear that it wouldn't create any new jobs.** But it certainly did. You know, it created more technology related jobs, people with different expertise, and I can't even name some of the new things that are going on in the library now.



**Gabriela Bravo: [The strike] was really a setback for the union, because we (the managers and librarians) ran the library.** We did different jobs like circulation. We had to run the library with short hours, but we did it. So, when the staff came back, there was no chaos in the library. **And we had all learned easily how to run this computerized services like holds and renewals, that before had all been done by different desks.** [Before the strike] holds, renewals, and paying fines were all done by different staff at different desks.

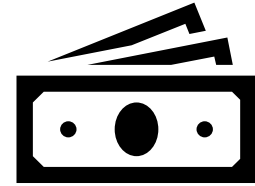


**Carole Moore:** But some of our managers.. tried to keep the services going, including the cleaning services. My department had said, “Well, that was the time when we started working all the time.” **Before [the strike] people would work certain number of hours, then they’d go home and that was that.** You’d [take your] vacation. After that strike people really learned how to manage in different ways, and the **managers started working a lot harder or more hours.**



**Patricia Bellamy: We had to keep our knowledge of all the traditional reference sources, the bibliographic instruction, collection development, and committee work [in addition to the new digital methods].** And it was difficult, and for some of us, it was impossible to let go of the traditional work.

# Private & public partnerships



- Cross-unit university partnerships
- Corporate partnerships
- Private donors and fundraising
- Grants from province or other governmental organizations (outside of regular funding)

University of Toronto Library

Yes, I want to support the University of Toronto Library!

Enclosed is my cheque for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your cheque payable to:  
The University of Toronto  
and send to:  
Gayle Garlock, Director  
Development and Public Affairs  
University of Toronto Library  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5S 1A5

I would like to designate my contribution for:

- General Library Support
- The Digital Library
- The Gerstein Science Information Centre / Sigmund Samuel Library Building
- Acquisitions Fund
- Preservation Project
- Director of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
- Chair for the Curator of Jewish Studies
- Librarian's Chair in Central and Eastern Europe
- The Centre for Academic and Adaptive Technology

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

University of Toronto Library

ACHIEVING DISTINCTION: THE ROLE OF PRIVATE GIVING

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS  
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT VICE-PRESIDENT (PLANNING)  
AND UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

October 31, 1985  
(Revised November 4, 1985)

UTA Office of the Chief Librarian A1999-0007

*OK  
please return*

*Advisory Committee*

*- Central pos. 3 up tower  
Dr. Mac - downwards*

*Development and Public Affairs Coordinator:  
Possible areas of concern*

- Fund-raising*
- University private funding*
- Corporate: private*
- SNECC*
- Specialized Research Collection*
- Hosting Opportunities*
- Bibliographical Tools*
- Travel Grants*
- Research Grants*
- Foundations*
- eg. Hannah Foundation*
- Alumnus Foundation*
- Gifts-in-kind*
- Private Funding Office*
- Cultural Property Export Review Board*
- Public Relations*
- Vice-Pres. Institutional Relations*
- University Bulletin*
- Alumni Chronicle*
- Inter-Institutional Co-operation?*
- Publications*

DRAFT 03.12.86

[Ref.]

[Date]

Dear .....

**"The best research library collection in Canada."**

The University of Toronto Library is often described in these terms, and we are eager to maintain and improve what has become a major national—an international—resource. Among its great strengths are its exceptionally rich and diverse collections of materials published overseas, and it has always been our policy to build these collections to support teaching and research at this University.

The Library's aim is excellence and this has sometimes been difficult to achieve. During many years of budget reductions throughout the University, we have struggled to protect the purchasing power of acquisition funds to ensure that present and future generations of students and researchers would have access to the world's knowledge. Unfortunately, the recent decline in the Canadian dollar in the international market has made it necessary to make severe cutbacks in our purchasing including 1500 journal cancellations last year.

If we are to continue to develop an excellent collection of German language material, we need assistance from organizations such as yours. You may not be aware that our Library is open to members of the public. Both university and independent scholars are welcome to conduct research using our collections.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss our services and to provide further information about how you might assist us in collection building. Mr. Alan Horne, our Development and Public Affairs Co-ordinator (978-2292) and I would like to come and talk to you about this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Carole Moore  
Chief Librarian

1985: **IBM** and UofT partner to create the Centre for Computing in the Humanities, housed in Robarts Library



1990: Private donation from **Dr. Cheng Yu-tung** for the completion of the East Asian Library in Robarts



1997: **Scotiabank** gifts \$2 million to expand Information Commons, the electronic services and resource centre



1989-90: **Mellon Foundation Grant (x2)** for microfilming a preservation



1993-94: **Cadillac Fairview Corporation** provides financial assistance to create the new Teaching & Learning Resource Centre



2008: **Russell and Katherine Morrison** donate \$10,000,000 to the Renewal Plan



2 June 1993

Professor J. E. Foley  
Vice-President and Provost  
University of Toronto  
Simcoe Hall

Dear Joan,

*Re: Library Fundraising Appeal*

The Library did not receive funding to support one of the new Development Officer positions. We do expect, however, to continue to devote considerable internal effort to raising additional external funds for Library Acquisitions and Preservation.

We have been assisted in this effort by the University Development staff. It has been made increasingly clear to me by both U of T and other development officers that whatever fundraising success we have had in the past, has been extremely fortunate, since we have no part in any annual campaign.

We need to remedy this situation as soon as possible, preferably by having a Library option for donors in the annual campaign. I am told that all the evidence here and in other universities indicates that this would result in increased contributions overall and would not detract from other giving.

If this is not possible this year, we would begin by launching our own appeal, and include our Friends group, donors, Library staff, Associate Members and carrel holders in a mail appeal this year. It would serve as an extremely helpful catalyst for staff in University Development and the Library to have your support to launch this first appeal. Alan Horne and John Hochstadt estimate they need \$10,000 to support the printing of a brochure, reply cards and return envelopes. If you could provide this start-up funding, we would expect to use a portion of the funds raised to support further annual appeals.

Yours sincerely,

Carole Moore  
Chief Librarian

Toronto Ontario Canada  
M5S 1A5

Adequate funding is an essential factor in accomplishing these objectives. While the value of University funds continues to be reduced, finding outside support is crucial.

The Library has been the beneficiary of many gifts, with the Friends of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (under the leadership of Ron Peters) being very active in raising funds and encouraging the donation of books and other material to the Library. Significant gifts received during the year include—

- A major grant from the federal Cultural Properties Export Review Board. Together with generous contributions from the Friends of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, this Library to obtain General James Thomas Gray's *Elephant* Yard as its 7—

## PRIVATE FUNDING

Soaring costs and diminishing financial resources continually challenge the ability of the library to sustain the levels of service and performance its patrons expect and deserve. At such times, the University of Toronto Library must rely heavily on the support of its community of "Friends". During the past year, the following have been the beneficiary of many gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations, some of which have already been referred to in the report:

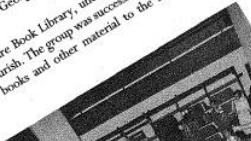
- Funding from the...

is, some  
which  
special  
thing

## Private Funding

Funding from outside the University helps the Library maintain and improve its collections and services, and to take on development projects which otherwise could not be contemplated. During the 1989-90 year, the Library was the grateful beneficiary of many grants and gifts. Some of these have already been mentioned in this report — grants from the Andrew Mellon Foundation in New York for preservation microfilming, and from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to improve our libretto collections and our collections on Italian literature and on the history of bibliography. There were many other donors, both individual and institutional, who generously supported the Library. These include the Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine; Brascan Limited; the St. George's Society of Toronto; Shirley Drummond; Suzanne Gayn; John Harbison; George Kiddell; and Hilary and David

Friends of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, under the leadership of its President, continued to flourish. The group was successful in raising funds for the donation of books and other material to the Library. The





**Ian Lancashire (1942-2025):** I founded the Center for Computing in the Humanities in 1985. And it was chosen to be sited on the 14th floor of Robarts library. This was an important development. **It actually involved IBM Canada Limited, and the Center for Mechanical Engineering.** In that faculty, all three of us were involved with the university in setting this up the center for computing and the humanities then was interested in introducing academics and the humanities to computing.



**Carole Moore:** Then we needed to raise more money for a more expanded service, that was the second stage [of the Information Commons on the first floor of Robarts Library]...**We were successful in raising [funding] mainly from the Scotiabank...who at that point were interested in supporting technology.**



**Carole Moore:** From Scotiabank's point of view, they weren't seen as being leaders in new technology for users, and they wanted to be seen that way. They thought featuring student access would advance this goal. From their point of view, it was not an outrageous amount of money, because **all the banks supported the universities in some ways.**



**Carole Moore:** When I was talking to Russell Morrison about the needs of the library, and what the future was--he's a very future oriented person. He said, "Well, I think you should really get rid of all the books"....He said, "Everything will be electronic. But the **students need space, and every government will shovel in as many students as they possibly can.**"

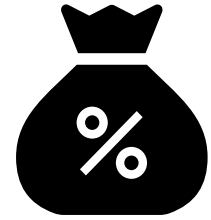


**Carole Moore:** The plan for revitalization [of Robarts Library] was approved finally by the university and allowed for a phased development. Each phase was approved as funding was found. And the provincial funding was kind of a kickstart for us. This was a big issue; I think one that was at the centre, because there were a lot of other facilities and competition of all sorts of facilities on campus. **But we did receive a 15 million dollar boost from the province for revitalization after making the point of how many external people from the whole province used Robarts,** so we managed to scrape through that as well.



**Carole Moore:** [Russell Morrison] was investing in students, and this wasn't his generosity, but he thought this was just a good investment. I'll just mention what he said briefly at [an] event.... **"If you think the productivity of student is improved by 10%, the return on investment is unbelievable."** So that I think was always his thinking, and as an investor he always said this in investment terms. I found that quite good because **in making a case for libraries, we were often asked, "Well, what's the return on investment in a library?"**

# Corporatization of the library



- Seeking efficiencies
- Using technology to create efficiencies
- Cost cutting
- Framing library worth as a "value proposition" or investment
- Looking at community members as consumers

# Other themes



- Changing services, including consolidation of services and libraries, and service reductions
- Changing role of librarians and how that contributed to the advancement of neoliberal goals within the university
- External pressure on libraries, including university-wide objectives

**1973:** UTLAS suite of automation tools launched.

**1976, Fall:** Introduction of Computer Output Microform (COM) catalogue.

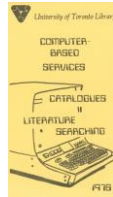


**1985:** Centre for Computing the Humanities (CCH) opened in partnership with IBM.

**1988:** FELIX available at all libraries via dial-up connection.



**1975:** Printed card catalogues converted to machine-readable form.



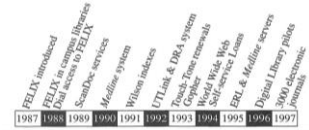
**1976:** Instruction offered for online searching; users paid per minute fee.



**1987:** First online catalogue FELIX introduced.

**1990-1991:** Expansion of electronic services; seven online periodical databases added

**1991:** Medline introduced; largest installation in the world.



**1994:** Online library services available on the World Wide Web.



**1997:** Information Commons renamed Scotiabank Information Commons.

**2003:** SIRSI library services platform launched.



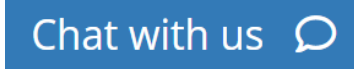
**2008:** Library begins WiFi rollout



**1992:** DRA Catalogue/UTLink introduced, replacing Felix.

**1995:** Information Commons opens at Robarts Library.

**1999:** New Media Suites opened in Information Commons.



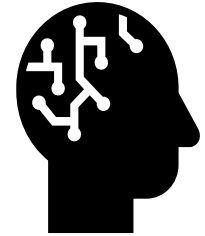
**2004:** Online reference service LiveHelp developed, later known as Ask a Librarian.

**3.**

## **Current context & implications**

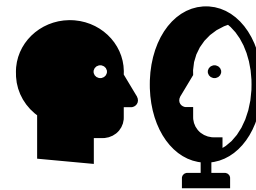
The AI disruption and intensification of neoliberal policies

# Current context



- Budget and funding challenges
  - Tuition freezes = hiring freezes
  - 'Unprecedented times'
  - Permanent austerity
- Impact of AI on the Library
  - University-wide and Library Admin expectations
- Impact of AI on the Individual
  - Job security
  - Efficiency and workload/parallel workflows
  - Type of work/skills required

# Things we might expect to see based on the past



- Jobs eliminated or positions not replaced due to AI
- Potential labour action/unrest
- More library closures or mergers
- Service reductions
- Creation of new kinds of jobs (probably not enough to offset the losses)
- Merging of roles, expanding portfolios and workloads

# Thanks!

**Any questions?**

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