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School of Information Studies / École des sciences de l'information University of Ottawa / Université d'Ottawa

By Ross Gordon

The Rebirth of a School

The School of Information Studies (ÉSIS, née School of Library and Information Science) at the University of Ottawa / Université d'Ottawa celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2019. It welcomed the first part-time students in January of 2009, and, in September of that year, it offered a full-time program leading to a Masters of Information Studies (MIS). ÉSIS currently offers the only English-French bilingual American Library Association (ALA)-accredited MIS program in North America¹ on the campus of the largest English-French bilingual university in the world.ⁱⁱ

The First School

A previous iteration of the School of Library and Information Science existed from 1938 to 1976, and was then Canada's only bilingual program for a Library and Information Science (LIS) education. Founded by University of Ottawa Librarian Father Auguste Morisset, a 38-year-old Franco-American,

who had moved from Massachusetts to join the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate at the age of 21, the school was the third degree-granting library school to open its doors in Canada after McGill and the University of Toronto. It offered full-time as well as part-time bilingual studies, the latter of which allowed students to continue working while upgrading their education. Courses were taught in English, but assignments and readings could be in French. The school granted a BA in Library Science (BLSc) starting from 1942 and a master's degree in Library Science (MLSc) from 1954. Until the late 1960s, most master's students were part-time. The school closed its doors in 1976 during a difficult time.

The decision to close had its roots in the ongoing failure to achieve an ALA accreditation in 1966. Despite an eight-year campaign by Morisset that included many overtures to the ALA Committee on Accreditation, to library leaders in Canada and



Staff of the first School of Library and Information Science: Among those pictured are professors Maurice Alarie, George Gerych, Gerhard Lomer, Father Auguste Morisset, and Enid Ringrose.

the U.S., and even to politicians in Ontario, who were asked to provide funding, it had been denied accreditation. The 1966 ALA accreditation report, referred to as the *Osborn Report* (Dr. Andrew Osborn chaired the committee), was a big disappointment to the school and the university. It was criticized internally for taking an 'American' view of the school and dismissing the French-language elements as being 'foreign' and thus not up to par.ⁱⁱⁱ The school believed that the committee did not fully understand the characteristics of the French-Canadian system of education. Further, the school faculty and supporters believed that the visiting review panel did not consider all the changes implemented to meet the ALA standards, that committee members had not talked to enough stakeholders to form a proper vision and a full picture of the program, and were swayed by the opinions of a few stakeholders.^{iv} There was also much unhappiness at the criticism of the advanced ages of faculty, especially given that Dr. Osborn was himself in his sixties.

The worst aspect for school faculty and supporters was that Dr. Osborn did not recuse himself given the announcement, just before the visit, that Dr. Osborn would be the director of a new library school at the University of Western Ontario (UWO). In the mid-1960s, the provincial government had publicly discussed opening a new library school in Ontario, and had looked at UWO and York University. Morisset had initiated a letter-writing campaign to provincial cabinet members, asking that funds be directed to his school instead of to the founding of another unilingual program. While much was made of Osborn's apparent conflict of interest, the school was not up to par on some very specific standards. The best-known member of the full-time faculty, Dr. Gerhard Lomer, was 84 years old in 1966 and was frequently ill.^v The school was seriously understaffed with full-time professors; there were five, including the director. No teaching faculty had doctorates in the field. The director of libraries at McGill University, John Archer, wrote to senior management at the University of Ottawa about the internal fallout from the *Osborn Report*, after faculty had drafted a response and circulated it to a few in the community. "I really must warn against letting any hint of this getout [sic] because the criticism of the members of the visiting team is highly unprofessional ... For example on page 9 of the critique there is the suggestion that Dr. Osborne [sic] was 'not unlikely influenced by his own plans for a Library School in Ontario.' This is a nice way of saying the guy was crooked ... some other points valid but the standards are what they are essentially. For Heaven's sake don't let it become public property."^{vi}

In 1971 after Morisset stepped down, the school hired a new director, Mr. Peter Havard-Williams, to remake the school into a fully professional master's degree program and get the ALA accreditation that was necessary for survival — without accreditation, the graduates were not as desirable to the professional community and the Government of Ontario paid them less than those from the accredited programs. Havard-Williams was an excellent hire who could have revolutionised the program. His appointment was to begin in July and a press release noted that he was a librarian and lecturer in library studies at Queen's University

Belfast, who had studied French literature and philosophy. In 1964 Havard-Williams had founded that university's School of Library Studies and served as its director.^{vii}

His tenure in Ottawa was notable for several disconcerting absences, then he told faculty, just after Christmas, that he would be leaving in the spring of 1972, but that *they should not announce it*. It was clear that he was returning to the U.K., where he became the founding head at Loughborough University's Department of Library and Information Studies.

When Havard-Williams left, two faculty also departed. The Advisory Committee on Academic Planning (ACAP) from the Council of Ontario Universities, which had undertaken a study on library education in Ontario, produced a final report in the summer of 1972 that recommended that the school be closed and that other Ontario schools offer courses to francophones.^{viii} The possibility of another ALA external review-panel visit in 1972 fell through, as the new director had left.^{ix} The last student intake was in 1972, and the school's last graduation was held in 1976.^x After it closed its doors, the school that Morisset built was sorely missed by the Information Management (IM) community in the National Capital Region (NCR).

The Renaissance

During its 33-year hiatus, there were plans to relaunch the school, but none came to fruition and, in reality, the timing would have been poor. Fourteen LIS schools closed in the U.S. between 1978 and 1991,^{xi} at a time when library science was starting to be seen as outmoded, given budget retrenchments, lack of space for large collections of physical resources (primarily books), and the rise of technology-driven information sharing and storage. It was believed that the need for librarians could be filled by graduates from other programs in Ontario or by library technicians. There was also much talk of using electronic-only to replace physical resources, and creating virtual libraries by having library patrons do their own information management through a computer. Hope for savings proved elusive, and the momentum slowed when studies found that professionals save both time and money when tasked with managing information on behalf of the wider community.



Leslie Weir

The emergence of a revitalised program was largely due to the effort and the single-minded drive of one person: Leslie Weir (who in 2019 became Librarian and Archivist of Canada). Weir began the campaign to build a school in 2003, the year that she became Chief Librarian at the University of Ottawa / Université d'Ottawa.

Her campaign met with some opposition from the beginning, not least from other Canadian LIS schools that saw another school as potential competition. It is not always easy to get new funding to expand into a field, such as a stand-alone graduate program that is not already established within an institution, but Weir was persistent and shepherded the idea along, knowing that the NCR market was underserved. The need for bilingual librarians and IM professionals was increasing with the impending large-scale retirement wave

of baby-boom librarians and specialists. Coupled with that demographic was the unanticipated consequence of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that offered an exemption to certain professionals, including librarians, to cross the border for employment with less paperwork. An increasing number of recent graduates began to look for opportunities in the U.S. One of the odd 'benefits' of so many school closures south of the border meant Canadian professionals could enter a larger market with their services.^{xii}

When Weir was fighting to open ÉSIS, seven Canadian universities offered unilingual LIS programs: six in English at Dalhousie University, McGill University, University of Toronto, Western University, University of Alberta and the University of British Columbia, and one in French at the Université de Montréal. The desire for a bilingual program — especially one based in the capital city of a bilingual country — was palpable. The entire NCR has a strong need for librarians and IM professionals who are bilingual, and no other program was offering this advantage. The region is home to three universities that are split into English, French, and bilingual institutions, several colleges in both languages, multiple federal departmental headquarters with their own libraries, strong public library systems, as well as the Library of Parliament, Library and Archives Canada, and the National Science Library. Recruiting library staff to the NCR has not always been easy. Many graduates of accredited schools in Canada and the U.S. tend to stay close to their home province or state, and the lure of Ottawa is not always as strong as its inhabitants may believe. Many of the best library positions in the region are bilingual, which makes them challenging for someone from a unilingual environment, but there have always been those ready to take on the task. The NCR had a great pool of potential IM and library professionals who did not wish to leave the area, or their current positions, to take the degree elsewhere. The option of a part-time program was a winning formula.

The school would be reopening in a favourable environment. Potential students knew they would graduate into a market with numerous job openings, and those who were already employed locally could earn a degree on a part-time basis without losing any ground at work. Weir recognised that there was then a push to increase graduate studies in Ontario and that there was new funding to support this growth.^{xiii} It was the moment to set the project in motion, and there was no stopping her once the wheels began turning. A question was circulated among library leaders in the NCR: "Has it become difficult to recruit bilingual library staff, especially since Western University closed its extension program?"^{xiv} This was followed up with the obvious question: "Do you think that the University of Ottawa should start a bilingual school to train Library and Information professionals?"

In 2004 Weir spoke of the project at an NCR Library Consortium (SmartLibrary) meeting to spread the word and gauge the feedback. In attendance were senior library representatives, including Librarian and Archivist of Canada Ian Wilson, City of Ottawa Librarian Barbara Clubb, Martin Foss of Carleton University Library, and others; all were well-positioned to offer advice and support or, perhaps, plead for caution. The meeting minutes note "Leslie Weir provided a brief

overview of her vision of a Library, Archives and Information Management graduate program Ms. Weir is developing at the University of Ottawa. Ian Wilson encouraged Ms. Weir to consult with the Canadian archives community regarding accreditation requirements."^{xv} There were no negative reviews.

Visits to library schools to discuss the idea in person found support for the program, though it was thought that perhaps a joint program would be the path forward with Université de Montréal considered as a possible partner. Consultations were held across Canada with the deans of SIS programs and university librarians. Over time the focus became a stand-alone school in Ottawa. A key political stakeholder to offer support to Weir was Ottawa-Vanier MPP Madeleine Meilleur, provincial Minister of Culture responsible for francophone affairs.^{xvi} The case for a bilingual school had weight in the NCR francophone community, since most graduates of the French-language program in Montreal stayed in Quebec.

In November of 2004, Weir presented her request for a Library, Information and Archives Management Master's Program (LIMA)^{xvii} to the University of Ottawa's Administrative Committee, armed with feedback from stakeholder groups. The project dovetailed nicely with the university's "Vision 2010 Academic Strategic Plan"^{xviii} that called for the creation of more bilingual programs for Canadian and international students. The justification for this school was simple: there were 160 library, archives, and information centres in the NCR located within departments and associations across the culture, heritage, government, education, health, and private sectors^{xix} and many needed bilingual professionals. The bilingual and bicultural NCR marketplace, combined with looming gaps indicated by the human resource-management literature for the library, archives, and information-management sector, indicated that an opportunity existed to develop a relevant, unique, specialized graduate program at the University of Ottawa.^{xx} The report noted that 31 percent of librarians working in 2004 would retire or be eligible to retire by 2011. According to the 2001 Statistics Canada census, 3,486 current librarians were predicted to retire or to be eligible to retire by 2011. This raised a key question: How to fill the positions in the NCR, with competition for graduates coming from across the continent?

In 2005 Weir engaged a doctoral student, Mary Cavanagh (who later became a faculty member, acting director and finally director of ÉSIS), to research a business case for a new school, assisted by the professional consulting firm Kelly-Sears, and to set about laying the foundations.^{xxi} The resulting *Business Plan for a Library, Information Management and Archives Graduate Program in a School of Information Studies University of Ottawa* outlined the master's program and the need to hire a professional, experienced academic director to run it. The program would offer full-time and part-time opportunities to complete the MIS — with fall, winter, and spring/summer course offerings — and hoped to attract a sizeable enrolment. However, as Lynne Bowker (the first cross-appointed faculty member and eventually a director of ÉSIS) later noted, the reality was that, because of its unique linguistic nature, the MIS was "likely to remain a boutique program — small, elite, and highly specialized."^{xxii}

In 2007 the school's first director, Dr. Kenneth Roy Bonin — who had wide-ranging experience in senior university administration, as a director of public and academic libraries, and as a consultant in government, academic, and architectural projects through KPMG — was brought on board. Bonin had been a faculty member in post-graduate programs in five universities, including Carleton and Laval. He was the only full-time staff and his job was to have faculty in place for the 2009 opening. By then, there were five full-time faculty and several part-time adjunct professors, most drawn from the information community in the region, as well as cross-appointed faculty who could hit the ground running and help set up committees such as a hiring committee to grow the faculty.

In April of 2009, a formal request was made to the university senate to create the School of Information Studies within the Faculty of Arts.^{xxiii} The request outlined the governance and direction of the school, updated the business plan, and described benefits for stakeholders that included the university, researchers, students, and community.^{xxiv} It noted the "University of Ottawa received pre-candidacy status in the ALA accreditation process. Approval for the graduate programs in Information Studies was obtained from the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies in 2008 ... Permission to offer three information-studies courses in January 2009 attracted 20 part-time special students. An initial full-time cohort of 30 students is anticipated."^{xxv}

The school offers courses in English and French, with a minimum of 25 percent of the coursework done in the second language. Students can take a master's of Information Studies through coursework only, coursework and a co-op, or a coursework-and-thesis option.

The school also offers a graduate diploma in Information Management that allows IM workers to advance their qualifications with a graduate diploma and an interdisciplinary PhD in Digital Transformation and Innovation with the Telfer School of Management, the Faculty of Engineering, and the Faculty of Arts.

In 2014 the ALA gave it a full seven-year accreditation — achieved by the work of all faculty, most especially Dr. Tom Delsey, who oversaw the preparation of the report to the accreditation committee. ÉSIS has averaged about 40 students during any given year, with more than 60 some years. In 2018 twenty master's degrees were awarded.^{xxvi}

Ross Gordon has an MA in history and an MLIS from McGill University. He is the Director of Information Management at Environment and Climate Change Canada and Visiting Professor at the University of Ottawa.

Founders and Directors

Founder and director (1938–1970) Father Auguste Morisset
 Director (July 1971–March 1972) Peter Havard-Williams
 Acting co-ordinator (1972–1974) Father Francis B. Wallis
 Administrator (1974–1976) George Gerych
 ÉSIS founder (2004–2009) Leslie Weir
 Director (2007–2010) Kenneth Roy Bonin
 Director (July 1, 2010–March 31, 2014) Lynne Bowker
 Acting director (2014–2015) Dan Paré
 Acting director (2015–2016) Sylvie Grosjean
 Acting director (2016–June 2017) Mary Cavanagh
 Acting director (June 2017–June 2020) Hélène Carrier
 Director (July 2020–) Mary Cavanagh

Endnotes

- i Bowker, L. (2011) L'École des sciences de l'information: Informez vous! (The School of Information Studies: Find out more!) *OLA Access: Magazine of the Ontario Library Association*, 17(1), 14.
- ii uottawa.ca/about/
- iii Father Desrochers, a part-time instructor, wrote a lengthy response to the *Osborn Report*, based on cultural and linguistic differences that set French-language education apart.
- iv Librarian of Parliament Erik Spicer was quoted as stating that the program needed work. He later said that was not his intention.
- v He was also assistant director until his death in 1970.
- vi Personal and confidential letter dated, September 9, 1966, from Director of Libraries, McGill University, John Archer to Vice-Principal Allan Gillmore, University of Ottawa
- vii In his 1995 obituary in *The Independent* newspaper, he was called "one of the foremost librarians and library educators of his generation."
- viii October 16, 1972, notes on a meeting of Dr. J-M Joly (Assistant Vice-Rector, *Institutional Research & Planning*) with the staff of the library school
- ix The claim of conflict of interest was voiced only internally; no appeal was formally made. The fact that Osborn accepted the position at Western, which was in competition for funding with the University of Ottawa, and then remained the accreditation-committee chair, was controversial.
- x Morisset died in 1989.
- xi McNally, Peter F. "McGill University Graduate School of Library and Information Studies," *ELAN* Special Issue Summer 2004, page 4.
- xii Under NAFTA, librarians could take positions in the U.S. under an exemption for certain professionals. uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/tn-nafta-professionals
- xiii Interview with Leslie Weir by H el ene Carrier, July 17, 2019
- xiv *Ibid.*
- xv Minutes of meeting, National Capital Region Library Consortium and SmartLibrary Partnership, September 9, 2004, revised (Ross Gordon was present.)
- xvi *Ibid.*
- xvii The acronym LIMA did not remain. The archives portion of the plan was later dropped.
- xviii http://web5.uottawa.ca/vision2010/pdf/strategic_plan.pdf
- xix "Request for Proposed Library, Archives & Information Management Master's Program (LAIM) at the University of Ottawa." Presented to the Administrative Committee November 22, 2004 (List comes from Collections Canada website.)
- xx Weir, Leslie. "Request for Proposed Library, Information Management and Archives Master's Program (LIMA) at the University of Ottawa" presented to the Administrative Committee November 22, 2004
- xxi *Ibid.*
- xxii Bowker, L. & Bultrago-Ciro, Jairo (2017) "Reflecting on Bilingual Library and Information Science Education in an MIS program in Canada." *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, Vol. 58, No. 2 – (Spring) April 2017, pp 106–111
- xxiii IM schools in Canada are not always located in the same Faculties. At Dalhousie University, the LIS program is housed in the School of Management, for example, while at the University of Alberta, it is in the Faculty of Education.
- xxiv Demande Pr esent ee au Senat de l'Universit e d'Ottawa/Request to the Senate of the University of Ottawa, "Cr eation de l' cole des sciences de l'information   la Facult  des arts/Creation of the School of Information Studies in the Faculty of Arts" April 2009, pp 1–4
- xxv *Ibid.*, page 14
- xxvi For a comparison, Dalhousie University's School of Information Management had 68 master's students in 2018, of which 19 received master's degrees (18 received other degrees).