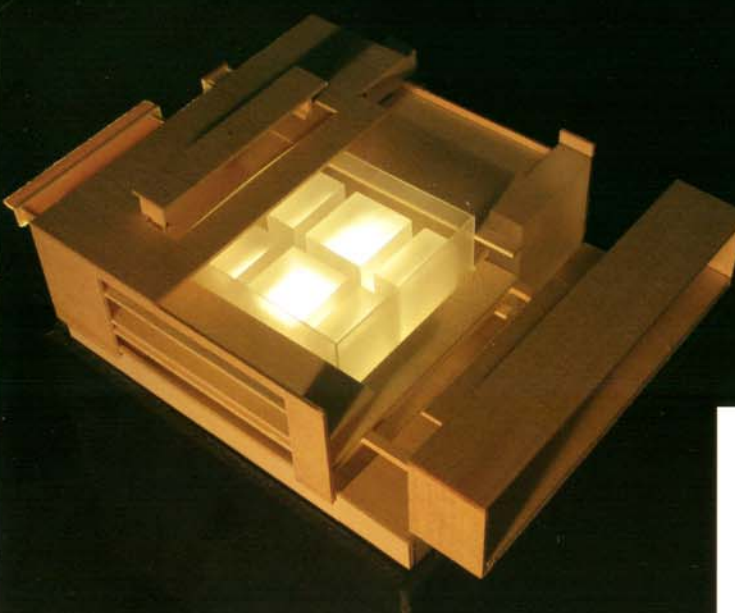


Higher learning evolving to new heights

By David S. Hunter



Architects solve puzzles at UTM with a new library building design

Measuring 9,100 square metres, the new facility will be more than double the size of the current one, making it the third-largest circulating library at U of T behind Robarts and Gerstein.

UTM students and staff alike can look forward to a variety of more than a thousand "smart," safe, and secure study spaces, a 70 per cent increase over the current library, and two "smart" classrooms accommodating 45 people. In addition, there will be a wealth of wireless and wired computer resources, including 160-plus desktop PCs, all with Internet access, application software, and linkage to library resources. There will also be an academic skills centre and a library café for meeting and socializing.

Among the features for faculty members will be a pleasant place for interacting with colleagues and students, as well as specialized services such as instructional technology and Geographical Information Services (GIS), both backed up by expert assistance.

One of the highlights of the Academic Learning Centre/Library will be a so-called puzzle box, the brilliant brainchild of the architectural firm Shore, Tilbe, Irwin & Partners. The opening of the puzzle box is an architectural metaphor for accessing knowledge.

"At the outset, your library is an intricately crafted box of weathered stone that conceals a second box – a finely crafted cabinet of wood and softly radiating coloured glass," states architect Andrew Frontini. "The inner cabinet contains a great treasure – knowledge."

Stack after stack and aisle after aisle of books and periodicals have always been the dominant focus of academic libraries throughout the world. Countless thousands of printed works, organized in an efficient, orderly fashion with the aid of the time-honoured Dewey Decimal system, have had an almost overwhelming impact on many a student who has walked into a university library for the first time. Architecturally, conventional libraries have, out of natural necessity, focused more on being a "collections space" than a "people space." That tradition, however, is no longer viable in the 21st century of higher learning and is changing, as evidenced by UTM's new Academic Learning Centre/Library, scheduled to open in September 2006.

"The modern library's mandate is to provide value-added, personalized services in a high-tech environment; a location for intellectual interaction and study; and scholarly print and electronic resources in support of research and teaching," asserts Mary Ann Mavrinac, UTM's chief librarian. Mavrinac is highly cognizant of the library's need to keep pace in an ever-changing technological world. "Our point of existence is to support the research and teaching functions of the university," she goes on to say. "Most of our users are students, and, with the advent of the Internet and remote access to electronic resources, students perceive that they have other choices to obtain the information and assistance they require."

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