Re-imagining the McGill Library

The hub of teaching, learning, and research

Walk into any of McGill’s libraries – morning, noon, or night – and you will experience a hive of activity. From undergraduates gathering to research group assignments, to graduate students accessing digital journals, to professors availing themselves of some of the finest rare books collections in the country, the Library is McGill’s beating heart: a home away from home for students, a physical and virtual repository for generations of accumulated knowledge; and the centre of the teaching and learning enterprise that is at the core of McGill’s mission and social compact. McGill’s Library truly exemplifies the age-old mission of all great libraries: to acquire, preserve and make accessible the recorded knowledge of humankind.

As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, the University’s Library is in a period of rapid and fundamental evolution. Technological innovations are radically changing the ways that students learn, as well as their expectations for how and where they interact with information, their professors and with each other. Digitization offers exciting new opportunities for sharing knowledge, and for preserving and housing documents to ensure their conservation, and their wide availability to students and scholars within McGill and around the world. Research aimed at exploring the most effective uses of technologies, new and old, to improve teaching and learning is opening up exciting new avenues for professors and students.

Such changes offer extraordinary possibilities; possibilities on which McGill—Canada’s top-ranked medical-doctoral university and an established pedagogical innovator—is well-positioned to capitalize. McGill’s Library embraces this opportunity to lead the way in taking full advantage of new tools and technologies to further deliver on its core mission.

We are re-imagining McGill’s Library—the core of the student experience and the lynchpin of our innovative teaching and learning enterprise—for the digital age, creating a cutting-edge and truly world-leading facility which integrates the latest technological advances while remaining focused on the needs of students.
McGill’s Library has a fundamental responsibility to embrace revolutionary changes in information management and pedagogical technologies and to lead, as McGill has led for almost two centuries, the quest for academic excellence. We have an exciting vision of information management, knowledge transfer, teaching and learning at McGill; one that would position McGill at the forefront of the information revolution, while ensuring that our students are welcomed into a physical, intellectual and technological environment that represents the very best of what modern university libraries can be and do.

Placing the libraries at the centre of a new pedagogical model
The transformation of McGill’s Library is just one element of McGill’s ambitious plans to transform its approach to teaching and learning. With the McGill Innovative Learning Environments (MILE) initiative, McGill is systematically moving toward implementation of an overarching action plan for leveraging technological advances for course and program delivery, and for managing the information resource that is the foundation of all higher education, the library.

McGill’s vision for the lower quadrangle, where the McLennan-Redpath Library is located, sees its transformation into a true learning commons. In order to realize this ambitious objective, the existing Library must be reconfigured in such a way that components of our existing physical collections are relocated to a dedicated, perhaps offsite, repository. The relocation of some collections will allow for the transformation of the space into one that promotes technology-assisted collaboration and cooperation, and which meets the expectations of today’s students of the Library as a “home away from home” and a source of access to digital and physical resources. McGill’s vision will make it a pioneer in library innovation, propelling it beyond today’s collections and facilities not by increments but by an order of magnitude.

From vision to reality: Building the library of the future
The following sections outline how our ambitious vision can be realized across a number of key axes; where we currently stand; and why it is imperative that we execute this transformative change.
LIBRARY SPACES

Our vision:

- To transform our two largest branches so we can welcome students into a physical, intellectual and technological environment that supports all modes of learning.
- To create a universal design of space that allows for flexible learning and teaching spaces, and accommodates users’ different needs.
- To offer individual and group spaces that support quiet study collaborative, small group teaching; active learning; contemplation and leisure.
- To offer secure, around-the-clock Library access for McGill students, instructors, and researchers in the downtown Montreal core.
- To repatriate the iconic Redpath Hall as a dedicated reading room befitting a major academic library; a space which will serve as the Library’s centerpiece while also functioning as an event and exhibit room.
- To house our academic and support staff in appropriate office space that is tailored to their functional needs.
- To create a space outfitted with state-of-the-art technology designed to aid in transforming the learning and research experience.
- To ensure that rare and special collections are highlighted through an extensive exhibition program.

Where we are today:

Opportunities:

- The Library occupies historic and iconic spaces in the heart of the university which are representative of the life of the mind.

Challenges:

- McGill Library comprises a complex network of 12 branch libraries of various sizes, 11 of which are located on the downtown campus.
- Throughout, our facilities are limited by poor spaces and inadequate seating for quiet study and collaborative work; facts demonstrated by an internal survey and observational research. (Appendix D: Library Seating)
- The Library is severely overcrowded, particularly during examination periods.
- Service points for library users are poorly located.
- The Library has critically insufficient space for the current print collection.

Why we must evolve:

- Internal research demonstrates that students express a strong connection to the McGill Library as a “home away from home,” and that they need and want improved spaces.
- Published research shows that students do most of their learning on campus, regardless of their residence.\(^1\)

• There is enormous value in developing a research commons as a space within the library for students, instructors, and researchers to promote productivity and community.²

MCGILL’S COLLECTIONS

Our vision:
• To provide a collection that reflects the status and history of McGill University, for use by all students, instructors and researchers, and available to the global community of students and scholars.
• To organize physical collections to provide quick access to frequently used materials while preserving the remainder of the collection. (Appendix C: Usage-Driven Open Stacks Collection)
• To enable students, instructors and research to influence the acquisition of certain library materials (e.g., patron-driven e-book acquisition).
• To build a collection to support online learning, including massive open online courses (MOOCs), including e-textbook rentals.³

Where we are today:

Opportunities:
• McGill has the largest and most unique research collection in Quebec and one of the most unique collections in North America. (Appendix A: Unique Items in McGill Library).
• The Library has initiated a digitization program for these rare and unique materials.
• McGill preferentially acquires digital content over print, where feasible.

Challenges:
• The Library is facing a space crisis. The Library has inadequate space to store and expand its print collection, and several branches already exceed 100% working capacity. (Appendix B: Shelf Occupancy)
• McGill University Library is the only major academic library in Canada (and probably North America) without a permanent, off-site storage facility for physical materials.

Why we must evolve:
• To teach and learn effectively, students, instructors, and researchers increasingly expect that most if not all information resources should be electronic.
• By virtue of McGill University’s status and history in Quebec and Canada, the Library is the steward of valuable information resources which must be preserved, digitized, catalogued, exhibited and made accessible to McGill students and researchers, and to scholars around the world.

The cost of storing a print book in open stacks is $4.26/year, compared to $0.86 in high density storage. Scholarly publishing is rapidly evolving to open access and in-house publishing models, to which McGill must adapt.

**LIBRARY SERVICES**

**Our vision:**
- To develop a team of specialized, professional staff who will lead the Library’s evolution into the digital age.
- To facilitate document delivery of all materials directly to the desktop, including an integrated digitization program located in storage facilities.
- To expand in-house expertise in matters of copyright and intellectual property, in order to offer guidance to researchers, professors and students on best practices.
- To enhance user services by providing on-site staffed service desks for immediate, simple needs of users, as well as roaming assistance in library buildings, and remote assistance using virtual communication software.
- To develop an integrated and interdisciplinary pedagogical model, where professional librarians participate as members of instructional and research teams. Librarians with subject expertise will partner with instructors to facilitate teaching and learning, and will be present in students’ virtual learning environments as an information resource. Librarians will also collaborate with researchers and practitioners/clinicians in departmental and clinical settings to provide sophisticated, just-in-time research services. We will embody the maxim, “The librarian: a search engine with the most user-friendly interface.”
- To offer a range of complementary services on site including workshops, one-on-one research consultations, 3D printing, and other technologies (printing, productivity software and tools).

**Where we are today:**

**Opportunities**
- The McGill Library has a cohort of highly skilled professional and support staff who partner with instructors and researchers to support teaching, learning and research.
- The Library also has skilled front-line staff who handle on site transactions such as book loans and IT troubleshooting.

**Challenges:**
- The Library lacks dedicated and specialized expertise and leadership in the areas of digital collections, technology-assisted learning and pedagogy, as well as adequate subject-specific expertise.
- The Library lacks internal expertise in data curation and copyright.

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5 See, for example, the University of Nevada Library’s 3D printing service: [http://www.engadget.com/2012/10/19/reshaping-universities-through-3d-printing/](http://www.engadget.com/2012/10/19/reshaping-universities-through-3d-printing/)
Current deployments of staff and service resources do not optimally meet user needs. Librarians have limited integration into pedagogy and research.

Why we must evolve:
- As information becomes ubiquitous, assessing and satisfying users’ information needs in a timely fashion is essential.
- In world-class research libraries around the world, there is a trend toward embedded librarianship, in which professional librarians with subject expertise are integrated into research teams, instructional design, and students’ courses.\(^6\)
- As McGill’s research output increases and becomes more data-centric, there is an increased need for expertise in data curation (storage and retrieval of raw data from research).\(^7\)
- There are great cost saving and efficiencies to be realized by automating services whenever possible, decreasing the need for front-line service staff to handle traditional tasks such as book loans.

Evolution or Revolution?
At the core of McGill’s institutional mission is our commitment to advancing knowledge in all areas of human endeavour, and to doing so in a manner that reflects the evolving needs of our students and faculty; the most innovative and exceptional possibilities opened up through technological advancement; and the research university’s unique capacity to positively impact people and communities across the globe through the sharing and expansion of human knowledge.

McGill has developed a bold vision to bring its teaching and learning spaces, technologies and methodologies into the future, and at the heart of that vision is our Library. Building upon our long tradition of innovation, we will position ourselves as one of the finest research libraries in the world; one where the most effective technological advancements support our unique physical collections to advance the age-old mission of all great libraries: to acquire, preserve and make accessible the recorded knowledge of humankind.

We envision the library at the vanguard of an even larger evolution: one that will lead to fully redeveloped facilities and a leading-edge vision of teaching and learning that will allow us to serve our students even more fully, preparing them to be leaders in tomorrow’s digital world.


Appendix A: *Unique Items in McGill Library*

**Chart 1:** Uniqueness of books in McGill Library compared to other Quebec Universities
Chart 2: Uniqueness of books in McGill Library compared to Canadian research libraries

[Bar chart showing distribution of titles held by institutions in a peer group for Edition Specific and All Editions (FRBR) viewpoints.]

Chart 3: Uniqueness of McGill Library books in comparison to Association of American Universities

[Bar chart showing distribution of titles held by institutions in a group holding for Edition Specific and All Editions (FRBR) viewpoints.]
Appendix B: *Shelf Occupancy*

Other sources recommend a lower shelf occupancy rate of 75%.
## Appendix C: Usage-Driven Open Stacks Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Branch (Proposed)</th>
<th>Library Branch (Current)</th>
<th>Volumes published in last 5 years OR loaned in last 3 years</th>
<th>Estimate in Linear Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; Social Sciences Library (McLennan-Redpath)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birks Reading Room (Religion)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,839</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackader-Lauterman (Art)</td>
<td></td>
<td>28,658</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>33,757</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
<td>11,015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td>392,335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish Institute Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>514</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian College</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,410</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSSL Self-serve Reserve Room</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,326</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New HSSL TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>479,854</strong></td>
<td><strong>39,588</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td>28,289</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Rosenthal Math Stats</td>
<td></td>
<td>590</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osler (History of Medicine)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,464</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schulich Science &amp; Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td>46,481</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Science Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>83,824</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,684</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>23,170</td>
<td>1,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahum Gelber Law</td>
<td></td>
<td>34,785</td>
<td>5,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macdonald Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>15,588</td>
<td>1,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Duchow Music</td>
<td></td>
<td>14,823</td>
<td>1,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for All Locations</strong></td>
<td><strong>652,044</strong></td>
<td><strong>57,053</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix D: Library Seating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Branch</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Populations Served</th>
<th>Student Enrollment 2012-2013</th>
<th>Seats per Capita*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; Social Sciences, Islamic</td>
<td>2,340</td>
<td>Faculties of Arts, Arts &amp; Science, Management, Religious Studies, Continuing Education</td>
<td>16,404</td>
<td>0.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schulich (Science &amp; Engineering)</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>Faculty of Science</td>
<td>5,641</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Sciences Library, Osler Library</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry</td>
<td>5,306</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
<td>2,744</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macdonald Campus</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>Faculty of Agricultural &amp; Environmental Sciences</td>
<td>1,880</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Duchow Music</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>Faculty of Music</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahum Gelber Law</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>Faculty of Law</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4404</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>37,835</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.12</strong></td>
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