AI Task Force

University of Toronto Libraries

Report
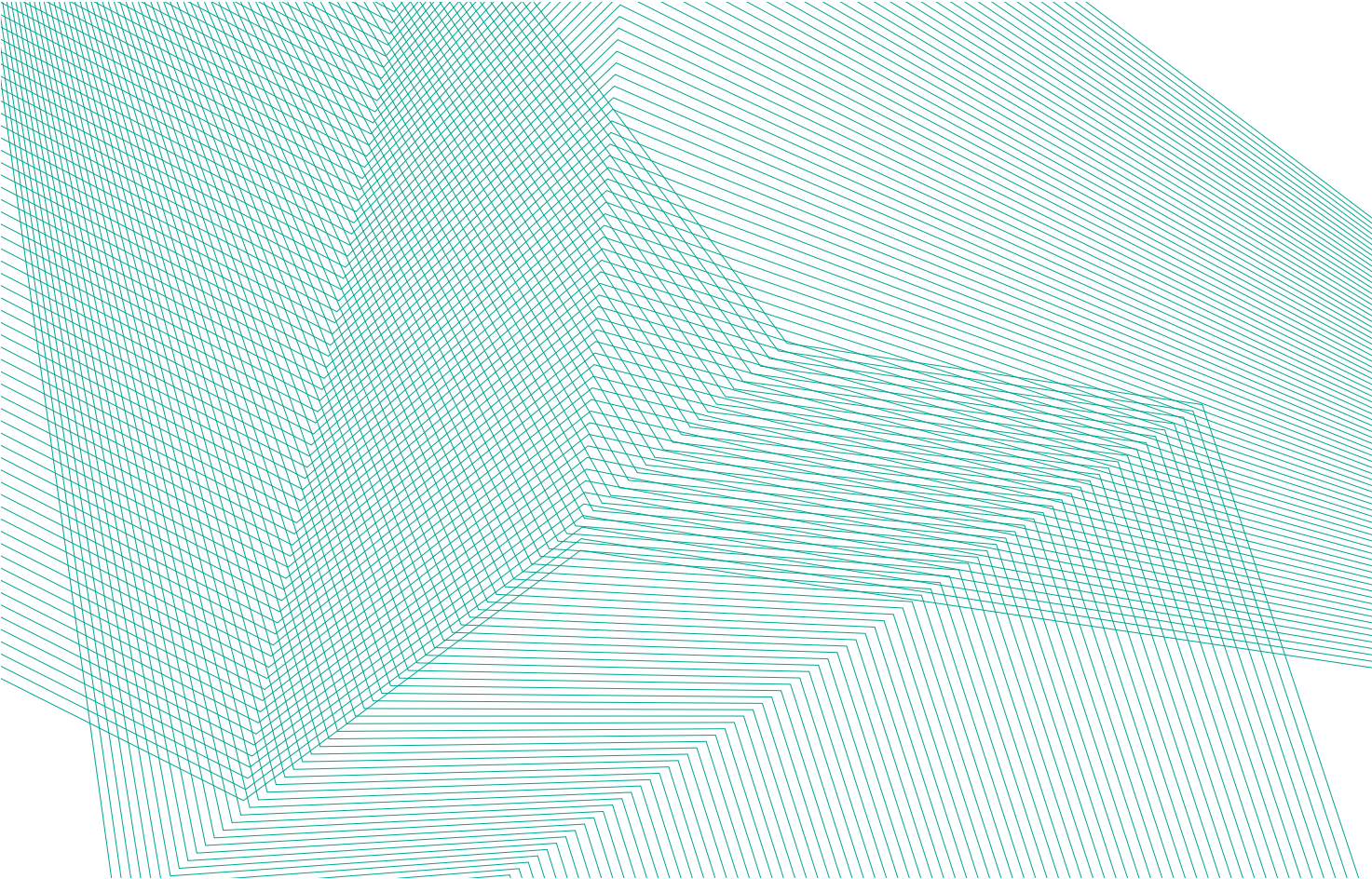
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As U of T advances toward becoming an AI-ready institution, the University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) is playing a key role in helping students and faculty navigate this transformation. Guided by our commitment to equitable access, intellectual integrity, and collaborative scholarship, we are integrating AI into library services to enhance research, teaching, and learning in support of the academic mission. While AI introduces new ethical considerations and transparency challenges, it also creates opportunities to broaden access to information and streamline scholarly workflows. UTL is working to ensure that the University community can engage with AI thoughtfully and effectively. By embedding AI into our operations and services, we aim to meet the evolving needs of students and faculty to help them thrive in a rapidly changing academic landscape.

Bringing UTL expertise to AI decision-making and planning

AI research tools evaluation checklist

UTL has developed a checklist to assess AI research tools. The checklist allows those making decisions about licensing to consider potential benefits, as well as copyright, intellectual property, and information security considerations. The tool is continually evolving, and also supports UTL in communicating with faculty and students.

Copyright and research efficiency

To mitigate copyright risks and enhance research efficiency, UTL engages in proactive outreach on the use of library-licensed content with AI tools. This includes providing guidance for publishing research in response to evolving policies and mandates, and negotiating strategic content licenses to align with current use cases. These efforts ensure that U of T researchers retain a competitive and collaborative advantage.

Privacy and data protection

In response to the growing interest in acquiring AI tools that meet the University's privacy and data protection requirements, UTL is partnering with central ITS to provide access to secure AI tools such as OpenAI's ChatGPT EDU through the License Software Office (LSO). This initiative will enable secure and managed access to an important AI tool.

Expertise and AI literacy

By increasing AI literacy through embedded classroom instruction, workshops that complement curriculums, and consultation services, UTL is shaping the University's response to the evolving role of AI in research and teaching.

Contributing to the success of AI projects across and beyond U of T

Data utilization and AI technologies

UTL's owned and licensed data is well-suited for training AI models, offering a rich source for new kinds of research. Investing in AI technologies can enhance the organization, retrieval, and usability of this data, fostering new and innovative research and discovery opportunities.

Investment in hardware

UTL has invested in advanced hardware to support AI processing for learning, training, and application hosting, which is an essential capability for delivering services to students and faculty in a secure environment.

Unlocking data

UTL is using AI to unlock the content of historic images and maps, creating new data sets by extracting previously inaccessible metadata. This work will enable new kinds of research questions at a level of detail that was previously unattainable, while also helping librarians and staff develop competencies with AI tools that will further support public services.

Collaborative AI and Machine Learning program

The AI and Machine Learning program is a collaboration between the 21 Ontario Council of University Libraries libraries. This two-year exploratory program encompasses five pilot projects, aiming to investigate, evaluate, and assess tools and workflows that can be adapted for future use, driving innovation and collaboration across institutions.

Supporting AI literacy and education

Workshops and in-class instruction

UTL delivers workshops in partnership with CTSI, CRIS, and JHI on using library-licensed resources with Generative AI (GenAI). Collaborating with faculty, UTL provides in-class instruction sessions to support student learning, focusing on the most relevant disciplinary tools. AI literacy, as an extension of information literacy, helps students effectively leverage technology, critically examine outputs, and weigh ethical considerations. These efforts are contributing to our collective understanding of how information is used, produced, and distributed within AI systems.

Student engagement and feedback

UTL has hosted "AI Pop-Up Playdates" to expose students to available AI tools. These events also serve as a platform for gathering feedback on student learning needs, which are then incorporated into purchasing, licensing, and instructional design decisions. More than 100 students have attended these events to date, providing valuable insights that inform library teaching and student support.

Microteaching and social media campaigns

To further support student learning, UTL has developed YouTube shorts on topics such as GenAI as a learning tool and using Copilot to summarize PDFs. These microteaching videos are featured on the UTL YouTube Channel and are part of a social media campaign titled "Overdue Advice."

Skill development

UTL offers hands-on workshops for staff and librarians, including those from U of T affiliated hospitals, to increase competencies and build skills capacity in working with AI tools.

Embedding AI in UTL activities

Enhanced collaboration and resource deployment

AI tools are being used to analyze annual departmental workplans, identifying opportunities for collaboration and areas of duplicate work. This has helped reduce silos, improve communication, and more effectively deploy resources across UTL's administratively complex and geographically dispersed system. UTL is also leveraging AI to transform library operations and services through improved collaborations, new kinds of content creation and discovery, and skills development, while navigating some of the challenges presented by the proliferation of AI into library work.

Improved content discovery

AI is unlocking new opportunities to enhance content discovery by enabling large-scale improvements to library metadata. This includes elevating quality, increasing standardization, and representing materials in languages beyond the scope of internal expertise.

AI tools for library tasks

UTL has identified and deployed various AI tools to assist with library tasks. For example, AI is being used for appraising emails for digital archiving purposes, and facilitating records transfers and processing practices to meet legal records management retention requirements. Other AI technologies are enhancing the accessibility of scanned documents through optimized algorithms, and AI tools for translation and captioning films are increasing access to collection materials. Additionally, AI has the potential to personalize recommendations, automate routine inquiries, and offer advanced search capabilities—changing the possibilities of how UTL can enable users to interact with library resources.

Considerations and concerns

Budget challenges

U of T students and faculty have consistently demonstrated early and intensive adoption of emerging technologies. Historical trends suggest that their demand for advanced tools will continue to exceed that of other institutions in Canada. While this high level of engagement delivers significant academic value, it also introduces growing financial pressures. As AI becomes more embedded in research and learning, user expectations are increasing. This rising demand is placing added strain on library collections budgets as access to new products comes with new costs.

Implications for searching and literacy

AI is likely to impact comprehensive searching, search question formulation, translation of search strings for use in multiple databases, and the teaching of critical literacy skills for assessing outputs. Libraries are adopting a multifaceted approach to ensure intelligent systems meet expectations for authority, credibility, and accuracy.

Looking ahead

UTL continues to explore emerging areas where AI intersects with the academic mission. As AI reshapes scholarly communication, pedagogy, and research practices, UTL will need to continue to invest in staff development, cross-campus partnerships, and scalable infrastructure to respond effectively and proactively. Strengthening our capacity to evaluate, implement, and teach AI tools will be essential to supporting students and faculty across disciplines. By staying attuned to evolving needs and maintaining a strong foundation in our values, UTL will help ensure that AI is integrated in ways that enrich academic inquiry and uphold the University's commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation.

For more information, please contact:

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