

Bib·li·o·Tēch

NEWS FROM THE MIT LIBRARIES

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What's New?

“No stereotype of libraries as quiet, uneventful places could survive the 1990s. Whatever stability and predictability libraries once had as ordered storehouses of the treasures of the printed word were shattered by the digital revolution.”

“[This] transformation in principle awaits realization in fact.”

LC21: A Digital Strategy for the Library of Congress, June 2000

To which I say: Right on both counts!

Research libraries face a daunting assortment of technical and policy challenges in their efforts to accommodate and integrate the digital revolution. The issue is not just one of scale, although that alone suffices to intimidate. The more fundamental challenge is that of reinterpreting the part of a research library’s mission that mandates the capture and preservation of important intellectual work. Because for hundreds of years research libraries—on behalf of their institutions and to the benefit of society—have accepted the difficult responsibility of preserving knowledge beyond one generation.

Research libraries have been notably successful at fulfilling this mission in the print environment. Print-on-paper is fixed and stable, the channels for production and distribution are mature, purchase brings clear rights of use. Consider, in contrast, the digital environment.

~ What does it mean to accept curatorial responsibility for millions of items of scholarly digital content over hundreds of years?

~ How will libraries verify, accept, and manage content that is “born digital,” with no print equivalent, in dozens of formats, through generations of software and hardware upgrades?

~ What metadata schemes will work best for different intellectual disciplines and a variety of different media?

~ How does a library “collect” a web site? A computer game? An interactive educational tool? Online scholarly or research “letters?”

The MIT Libraries are in a unique position to participate in the quest for answers to at least some of these vexing questions. The strength of MIT’s exceptional faculty and students, the extraordinary opportunities to collaborate with the MIT Press, the World Wide Web Consortium, the Laboratory for Computer Science, and other world-class research enterprises combine with a wealth of practical experience within the MIT Libraries themselves to create a special synergy here at the Institute.

In typical MIT fashion, the MIT Libraries have chosen to tackle important but difficult research problems, and to work with industry on real problems whenever possible. In keeping with the Libraries’ service mission, our research projects are also intended to inform and support the activities of other digital initiatives here at MIT, such as the work of the Council on Educational Technology, and the research projects of Academic Computing.

Three recent research initiatives are especially worthy of note. We are pleased to be partnering with the Hewlett Packard Company on the DSpace project (<http://web.mit.edu/dspace>). DSpace is an institutionally based digital repository, designed to accept, preserve, and serve digital materials in many formats throughout a networked environment. When it goes into production, DSpace will provide the stable long-term storage needed to house the approximately 10,000 digitally formatted documents produced annually by MIT faculty, researchers, centers and labs, and which they expect to share within the Institute and with their colleagues around the world.

The *Andrew W. Mellon Foundation* has generously agreed to support two additional research initiatives within the MIT Libraries. One project will examine the economics of building and maintaining a digital repository such as DSpace, and then explore business models for sustaining such a repository over time. The second Mellon Foundation initiative is a grant to plan the development of an archive of dynamic electronic journals, those newly emerging scholarly web sites that provide a broad range of dynamic content.

While books will always be an important—indeed, essential—medium for the faculty and students of MIT, the MIT Libraries have no intention of becoming a book museum. Nor do the equally forward-looking libraries of our peer institutions. The magnitude and complexity of the digital revolution demands a multi-institutional, multifaceted research approach, to which we are pleased to contribute. The MIT Libraries are gratified to have such strong and knowledgeable corporate and foundation support, and privileged to be seeking insights into these complex but important problems within MIT’s unique experimental culture.

Ann Wolpert, *Director of Libraries*
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USER-CENTERED WEB DESIGN: MIT Libraries’ Improved Web Site

In 1999 we began the process of redesigning our web site. Our vision for the site is to make it extremely user-friendly and easy to navigate. It’s more than just an electronic publication about the Libraries; it’s the gateway to all of our interactive services and collections and our presence outside the physical walls of the Libraries.

In order to make this vision a reality, we have been following a “user-centered” design process, involving the MIT community in several different ways to help develop the site. We have conducted observed usability tests, card-sorting usability tests, surveys, and more, in order to see the site from our users’ point of view, rather than our own.

The usability tests involved watching volunteers find the answers to specific questions on the web site while thinking out loud. The card-sorting tests consisted of asking volunteers to create and name categories of information for our site. Volunteers included students, faculty, staff, alumni, and users with disabilities. The results of these tests have allowed us to design a web site where users can find information quickly and efficiently.

One of the main drawbacks to the Libraries’ current web site is that it is modeled after the physical world, so it doesn’t fully take advantage of the Web as a medium. For example, the main links on the home page are the names of the individual libraries at MIT. Improving the user’s ability to locate specific information is another area needing attention. The current design sometimes assumes the user’s awareness of the department or unit where information can be located. As it now exists, much of the information about what can be found on the site is hidden in lower-level pages.

The new site will clearly show all that the Libraries have to offer in the way of services and interactive resources. The new categories on the home page will be:

Research Help

Search Our Collections

Subjects + Courses

Borrowing + Ordering

About Us



(Photos by L. Barry Hetherington)



Darcy Duke, Mechanical Engineering Librarian, conducts usability test by interviewing fourth year student David Pinson as he attempts to find answers to specific questions on the new Libraries’ web site. Results of these tests will lead to further refinement of the site design.

These categories grew out of the concepts that arose from the card-sorting usability tests, and reflect the points of view of our users. The categories will be the main starting points on our home page, rather than the links to individual library home pages (which will now be listed on a second-level page). Our site in cyberspace is independent of physical location.

Many staff members were involved in creating and fine-tuning this new architecture during the course of the summer and fall of 2000. We created what’s known as a “wire frame,” a text-only version of the site that allowed us to focus on content, structure, and wording without looking at the visual design elements, such as colors, fonts, or graphics. Subsequently, during the academic year 2000-2001, we have been working with a design firm to create a new look and feel for the site.

We are now in the process of moving our pages from the “wire frame” to the newly designed templates. Once a certain number of pages are completed, we will conduct further usability tests for the purpose of fine-tuning the site. During this spring semester the public will be invited to preview the new site and we hope to make it live during the summer of 2001. The new site will have the same URL, <http://libraries.mit.edu>. For further information or questions, contact the Libraries’ Web Advisory Group: webgroup-lib@mit.edu.

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Homepage of the
new web site.





Photo by L. Barry Hetherington)

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MEET JIM MULLINS

In January 2001 James L. Mullins joined the MIT Libraries as Assistant Director for Administration. He holds a Master of Arts in Library Science from the University of Iowa and a Ph.D. from Indiana University-Bloomington in Library Administration and Higher Education/Law. Jim comes to MIT from Villanova University, where he was University Librarian. At the MIT Libraries Jim is responsible for financial, human resources, and facilities management across the library system.

Now that you are here, what do you find most intriguing about MIT?

I am impressed with the intense dedication to instruction as well as research. When you think of MIT you think of research, but since I’ve been here, I see great concern with the education of students. I am also impressed by the commitment of the students to learn all they can from an MIT education.

And what is most intriguing about the MIT Libraries?

The decentralization. I have just finished visiting all the libraries and meeting most of the Libraries’ staff. Each library has its own personality and its own way of being organized. The persona of each library seems to reflect the disciplines served.

What drew you to MIT?

The opportunity to work in a great research library and an institution that is embarking upon projects such as DSpace that are in the vanguard in exploring options for information storage and retrieval. At the same time, the organization is committed to enhancing space that houses the services and collections of the MIT Libraries.



(All Photos by L. Barry Hetherington)

What do you think that you can bring, as a former library director, to this assistant director position?

Having served as director of smaller academic libraries, I have had the opportunity to understand and appreciate the role and the needs of an academic library in the broader context. This helps me at MIT, while working behind the scenes, to always understand and appreciate the mission of the Libraries.

You began here with the New Year. What would you most like to accomplish by New Year’s Day 2002?

I would hope to have in place budget models that will reflect the priorities of the strategic plan for the next five years. With those models, we will be able to adjust resources as changes occur so that we can accomplish our vision for the future. In my work with facilities, I would hope to have two Hayden Library space improvement projects underway—compact shelving for the basement and a newly designed entrance for better service.

In the area of personnel, I hope to contribute to strengthening a sense of community for the library staff, finding new ways to make people feel that their contributions are appreciated, in part through the *Rewards and Recognition Program* that the MIT Human Resources Department is in the process of introducing. I also would like to work to make certain that each library staff person has an appropriate, ergonomically correct, workspace.

What do you anticipate will be your biggest challenges?

We need to modify facilities to provide space for the growing legacy library collections and at the same time integrate new technologies and the new uses students are making of libraries. For example, today’s educational techniques require group study space

I am impressed with the intense dedication to instruction as well as research.

for team learning. I have also become aware of research indicating that today’s students relate more to their families than did students of ten years ago—and so they are looking for a home away from home, space with a comfortable ambiance. The MIT Libraries can become that kind of friendly place.

I also think that we must continue to find outstanding staff to fill positions. The candidate pool is becoming increasingly tight because fewer people are receiving professional library degrees and at the same time there are more options for librarians to enter the private sector. Their skills in organizing information, and utilizing controlled language for information storage and retrieval are very much in demand, often at very attractive pay scales.

As a member of the senior library administration, what major issues do you see facing the MIT Libraries and how will you go about addressing these issues?

The most critical issue is the need to integrate print materials with electronic information products—and how to preserve both for future generations. If we are not careful and resourceful about preserving electronic information, we could enter a new dark age. This is why I find the MIT Libraries’ DSpace research project to create a repository for digital information so exciting. The administrative support that my staff and I will provide for this and other forward-looking projects will, I hope, contribute towards their success.

What are your thoughts on the role of the academic library in the educational process?

An important library role is to work with faculty to help students understand the breadth of recorded knowledge. The ease of doing an electronic database search often helps a student find specific information quickly. However, sometimes the student misses how this specific piece of information fits into the context of the “larger picture.” Students also need to learn more about evaluating the quality of an information source. Library instruction programs can help students in this respect also.

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

These are exciting times for libraries. I have been a librarian for many years (more than I care to realize). I have been privileged to experience tremendous change during those years, and although it would be naïve of me to say that it came without some challenges and stress, I would not give any of those changes up. These continue to be challenging and exciting times for librarians and other information professionals. The opportunities afforded us by new technology are rivaling those created nearly five hundred years ago by Gutenberg. I look forward to the future and the part I can play in helping the MIT Libraries meet these challenges.

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Interview by Ruth Seidman

MIT LIBRARIES RECEIVE MELLON FOUNDATION GRANT TO DEVELOP ARCHIVE FOR DYNAMIC E-JOURNALS

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded \$145,000 to the MIT Libraries to plan the development of an archive of dynamic electronic journals, those newly emerging scholarly web sites that provide a broad range of frequently-changing content.

Ann J. Wolpert, Director of Libraries, said: “Digital sustainability is the next great challenge for research libraries. It is especially important to begin resolving the archiving issues that are inherent in these multifaceted, dynamic tools while they are still evolving.”

An example of this new species of scholarly publishing is the MIT Press’ CogNet, launched in September 2000 to create a community for researchers and scholars in cognitive and brain sciences. Other scholarly publishers such as Columbia University Press and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) have created similar dynamic tools while they are still in development.

Working with publisher partners, the MIT Libraries will explore and assess possible strategies and technologies and will plan a model for a safe repository for this new form of scholarly communication.

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WHAT'S NEW IN THE LIBRARIES?

NEW ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2nd Edition contains over 29,000 articles written by the world's leading music authorities. The electronic version includes links to images and digital sound. It is updated quarterly and offers a variety of searching and browsing features. Four MIT music faculty members are contributors: Ellen T. Harris, Lowell Lindgren, Martin Marks, and George Ruckert.

Index to Current Urban Documents covers full text of municipal publications from the New England states and New York State.

Kluwer Online Journals provides full text access to over 700 periodical titles in science, engineering, and the social sciences.

JSTOR General Science Cluster contains the complete historical runs of highly significant science journals such as *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* and *Science Magazine*. List of titles is at: http://www.jstor.org/about/gs_content.html

HOW MUCH SHELF SPACE DOES IT TAKE TO HOLD...

...the complete solo piano works of *Beethoven*, *Brahms*, *Chopin*, *Mozart*, *Schubert*, and *Schumann*; the complete piano works of *Grieg* and *Mendelssohn*; the keyboard works and four-part chorales by *J.S. Bach*; the complete keyboard sonatas of *Haydn* and *Scarlatti*; the complete songs of *Schubert*; plus several hundred pages of standard repertoire?

The Lewis Music Library recently acquired this music and it takes less than one foot of shelf space. Thanks to a generous donation from *Leonard Bezark Jr.*, an MIT alumnus and a member of the *MIT Council for the Arts*, the library recently obtained 17 CD-ROMs containing all this music. They are part of a continuing series of printable scanned images of public-domain music published by CD Sheet Music. Users may check out the CD-ROMs for a week and print the music at their convenience.

ONLINE CATALOG SYSTEM

The Libraries have selected *Ex Libris Aleph 500* as the new library management system, to replace *GEAC Advance*. The change is scheduled for July 2001. Included in the system are the catalog, known as *Barton*, as well as the database, circulation transactions, and the ordering, receipt, and payment of new library materials. The new catalog will be web-based and the Libraries will be able to enhance the catalog to meet MIT's needs, with community participation in the development of a user-friendly interface.

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