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.

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 50,000 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 we equally favor 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.

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.

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 easily.

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

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.

Nicolle Hennig, Web Manager
617 253 9367 hennig@mit.edu
The fast-paced life of the undergraduate and the short tenure of each undergraduate generation presents a documentation challenge. Unlike MIT offices with organized record systems and staff to ensure that information makes its way to the Archives, materials created and maintained by students that document undergraduate life often are neglected. Faculty papers and departmental records offer a glimpse of the intellectual life of the undergraduate with collections of course syllabi and exams, but the Archives also seeks documentation on undergraduate social life as a means to reveal a richer picture of the MIT educational experience. Despite the fleeting nature of the records of student life, the Institute Archives has collected a range of materials from a growing group of records of student organizations to small collections of personal recollections.

Student publications are particularly important documents to collect. They range from regularly issued publications such as The Tech to single-issue publications of photography, poetry, short stories, or songs. Publications such as song lyrics, for example, are rich in detail and emotion. Songs related to the MIT experience provided undergraduates with a common bond and an outlet for frustrations. Early in the twentieth century MIT President Henry Pritchett (1900-07) asked alumnus Frederic Field Bullard, Class of 1887, to compile a book of Tech songs. Bullard collected many old songs from the pages of The Tech and Technique, but he also solicited and received contributions directly from alumni. Entitled Tech Songs, the book was subtitled "The M. I. T. Kommers Book," from the German, meaning a book containing a collection of students' songs to be sung at students' convivial gatherings. Bullard hoped that the first edition (1903) would be a seed from which later, expanded editions would grow. He noted upon its completion, "Thus endeth the beginning." In fact, a second edition of Tech Songs was published in 1907. New student songs were composed and additional verses and revised lyrics found their way into older songs. Such modifications reflected evolving student values, grievances, and sense of humor as one generation of undergraduates replaced another. A third and final edition, Technology Songs, was published in 1929. Tech Songs and other resources about student life communicate much about the MIT experience and are used by researchers both from within and outside of the MIT community. These materials are available for research in the Institute Archives and Special Collections. Building 4HN-118, Monday through Friday from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. If you know of student organization or other student records that could be placed in the Archives’ collections, please contact us at mithistory@mit.edu.

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SUPPORTING THE LIBRARIES:

Funding a Preservation Laboratory

The Libraries’ list of Giving Opportunities provides examples of the many projects and programs that can be enhanced—or initiated—with private support. This document will evolve over time as various items—such as the Preservation Services Laboratory—are funded and replaced on the list.

In December, the MIT Libraries were fortunate to receive a generous gift of $250,000 from an anonymous alumnus. This individual chose to support the creation of the Preservation Services Laboratory—the first phase of the Libraries’ new Preservation Center. The benefactor was interested in supporting something at MIT that was worthwhile but not an “obvious” choice for other donors. As an alumnus, with fond memories of his time at the Institute, his primary concern was to advance a meaningful project for the MIT community as a whole. Fortunately, he recognized the unique role that the MIT Libraries’ extraordinary information resources play in the intellectual life of virtually every student and faculty member of the Institute.

The Preservation Center will consist of both the Preservation Services Laboratory and a Digital Initiatives Laboratory. The work of these two Laboratories will be closely related, yet distinct in the way they carry out their distinct roles. Staff in the Preservation Services Laboratory will assess the condition and carry out the conservation of rare and historical books and other paper-based materials at the MIT Libraries. The conservators will also work with unique MIT material, such as archives or manuscripts, making these invaluable research resources available for students and scholars. Additionally, rare paper-based materials will be prepared in the Lab for digital scanning, to be carried out in the Digital Initiatives Laboratory. Staff in the Digital Initiatives Laboratory, the second half of the Preservation Center, will be responsible for a variety of reformatting and digital resources projects.

Where original works are fragile or extremely valuable, digital reformatting can protect the item while providing digital copies of great utility to students and researchers at MIT and beyond. The Digital Initiatives Laboratory is also expected to address the need to develop solutions for retaining and preserving digital documents over time—such as digital theses, data sets, and electronic MIT reports and working papers.

Currently, the MIT Libraries operate a small preservation and repair workshop, which is focused primarily on caring for the actively circulating collections of 20th-century materials. When completed, the new Preservation Center will greatly expand the conservation and preservation ability of the Libraries’ staff, as well as enable them to add digital reformatting work to their preservation options. Complete funding for the Preservation Center will allow portions of the Libraries’ outstanding collection of rare materials, now too fragile for use, to become physically and digitally available to students and scholars—in some cases for the first time.

The collections of the MIT Libraries are an extraordinary teaching and learning asset for MIT, and it is vital that these resources are preserved and available for use by current and future generations. The entire MIT community is truly fortunate that one generous alumnus was able to envision the considerable impact the Preservation Center will have on resources at the MIT Libraries. He decided that the Preservation Services Laboratory fit his criteria for giving. Now, the Libraries’ challenge remains: find someone who will feel the same way about the Digital Initiatives Laboratory and other opportunities on the Libraries List of Giving Opportunities. Please contact M. J. Miller if you would like a copy of the list or additional information on supporting the Libraries.

M. J. Miller, Director of Development
617 452 2123 mjmiller@mit.edu
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 person of each library seems to reflect the disciplines served.

What drew you to MIT?

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

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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.

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

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 riveting 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.

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

An example of this new species of scholarly publishing in 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 evolving.

Jim Mullins, Assistant Director for Administration
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Interview by Ruth Seidman
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 GECAdvance. 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.

For more information contact:
Sarah Shreeses, Project Manager for the Third Barton Transition
617 253 4979 sis@mit.edu

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