

News from the
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Bibliotech

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News from the MIT Libraries, an official publication of the MIT Libraries, is published twice a year, in the fall and spring.

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Design

Pentagram

From the Director

At a time when public health demands we be physically distant, our MIT community is still able to come together in the ways that truly matter.

When many students and faculty were scattered across the globe, the MIT Libraries scanned hundreds of book chapters, provided thousands of remote consultations, and added more than a million digital items to the catalog. We shipped books to students all across the country, digitized Distinctive Collections, and pivoted to online thesis submission. Even the MIT Reads program went virtual, as author Tommy Orange talked with members of MIT's indigenous student community in an intimate conversation that spanned two coasts.

We've seen over the past year that the community we serve and the community we create as a library can be defined in entirely new ways. With the Building 14 courtyard, we will provide a beautiful and restful new outdoor space for those on campus. We can share MIT research with a global community that has downloaded more than 17 million open access articles. We can offer up our collections data to anyone who wants to use it, and we can bring people together through the pleasures of reading and discussion.

In this issue of *Bibliotech*, you can read more about what our recent efforts have meant to the MIT community (p. 12), go behind the scenes of the Hayden renovation (p. 4), and meet some of the newer faces on our staff.

I am grateful for the role you play in this community. Thank you for your ongoing support.



All my best,
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Photo
Shawn Henry





Transforming Hayden Library

Renovation construction reaches the finish line

The vision for Hayden Library has finally taken shape. Construction on the library renovation, along with the revitalization of the Building 14 courtyard, concluded in early spring, and the transformation is remarkable. While access to library buildings has been significantly limited due to the pandemic, we anticipate opening Hayden to the community in the fall and are planning a celebration later in 2021 or when public health guidelines allow.

In a few months, the final piece will be in place—the community members who will bring these spaces to life as they learn, recharge, and create new knowledge. Until then, *Bibliotech* takes a closer look at what went into the library and courtyard renovations.

Image
The first floor reading room under construction. Photo courtesy of Elaine Construction.

Hayden by the Numbers

Data as of March 2021

5

Women in lead roles for the project: Sheila Kennedy, architect; Sonia Richards, director of capital projects, MIT; Caroline Petrovick, project manager, interior; Erin Wasserman, project manager, courtyard; and Stephanie Ramirez, laborer, Elaine Construction

56

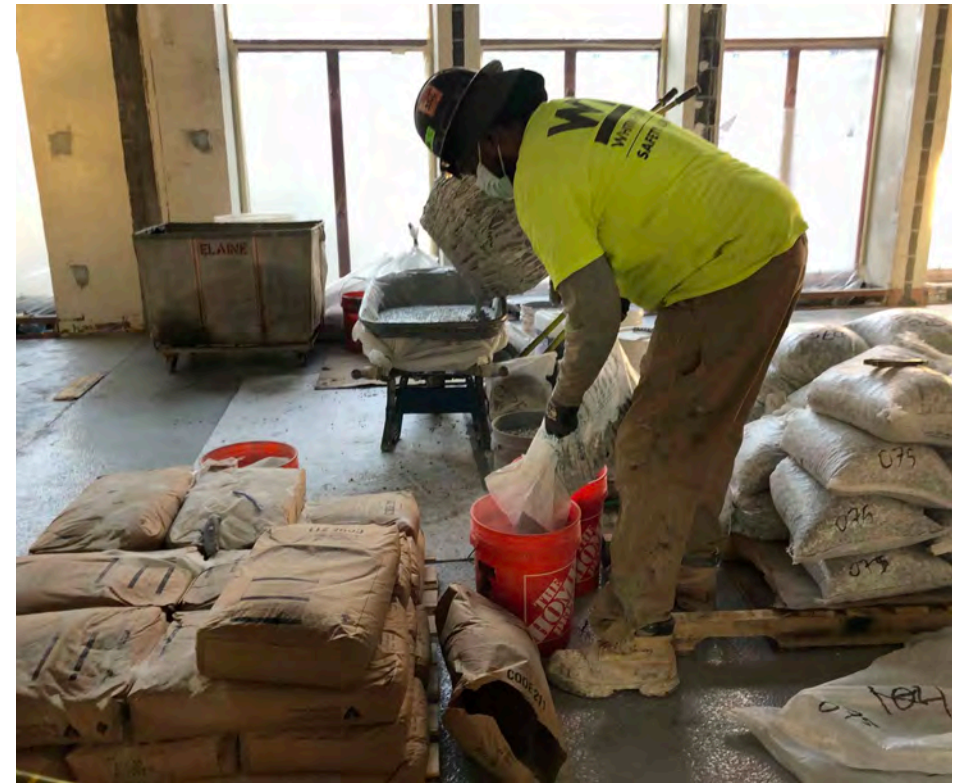
Weeks of construction

80

Approximate number of construction workers on site on any given day

4,267

COVID Access wristbands issued



Courtyard Construction by the Numbers

Photos
Courtyard photo courtesy
of Elaine Construction.
Following pages:
Hayden Library first floor
reading room. Photo:
Copyright Merrill Shea 2021

1

Custom bench designed in real time on site

10

Crane picks

1,527

Bags of concrete, totaling 76,350 lbs

764

Bags of gravel, totaling 38,200 lbs

400+

Linear feet of steel





Why We Do What We Do

Messages of thanks to staff who went
the extra mile

“I am humbled by and in awe of MIT’s library staff for their remarkable job in transitioning a gigantic library system in short order to being entirely virtual.”
-Faculty member

“As the pandemic brought many changes to all of our lives, there was one constant that we could all rely on—access to information—and the support from the MIT Libraries to that effect.”
-Faculty member

“Thank you @mitlibraries for keeping us going! You are an integral part of our continued progress in teaching and research.”

-Faculty member

“The [interlibrary borrowing] staff have been so amazing in working through these times, I feel very grateful to them, it is only because they are doing what they do that I can continue my research this summer.”

-Faculty member

“A huge shout-out to @mitlibraries for being the absolute best. I am writing my dissertation and get books shipped to my house in 1-2 days. Figuring out the logistics for this in such a short amount of time seems like a massive effort. Thank you, thank you!”

-Graduate student

Meet Alexia Hudson-Ward

A Q&A with the Libraries' new associate director for Research and Learning

In October, the Libraries welcomed Alexia Hudson-Ward as the new associate director for Research and Learning. Previously the Azariah Smith Root Director of Libraries at Oberlin College, Hudson-Ward provides strategic leadership for the community-facing service portfolio of the Libraries. She recently talked to *Bibliotech* about the MIT Libraries' vision, working through a pandemic, what “mind and hand” can mean for libraries.

Can you talk about some of the aspects of the Libraries vision that you find most compelling?

So much of what we are doing to operationalize the vision is super compelling, specifically, looking at our vision and mission in the era of COVID-19. I think we will emerge from the COVID crisis as fundamentally different people and as a fundamentally different library. One of the many reasons why I was thrilled to join the MIT Libraries at this time in history is that there is no better place in the world, in my mind, to deal with the big issues that we are confronting in relation to this global health crisis.

COVID has brought with it different dimensions to how we think about locations, our ever-evolving service model, the exciting elements around the Hayden Library renovation, and defining community more broadly than we did prior to the crisis. All of this connects perfectly to things that I'm deeply committed to, along with a real focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice (EDISJ).

It's been wonderful to hear and learn that there is such a deep commitment to EDISJ throughout the entire Libraries. It's been refreshing to know that everyone's thinking about it outside the traditional corridors that these conversations take us through. Folks are having conversations around neurodiversity, we are thinking about the ways in which the future of work and AI will align within our organizational structure, and we have a commitment to dealing with disinformation as a diversity topic. There are so many pieces to this important pie, and it's delightful to hear people thinking about it in a multidimensional way.



It's hard enough starting a new job; you've had to do it in the midst of a pandemic. What do you think we can take forward from this experience post-COVID?

Without a doubt, we have all these convergent crises happening in the U.S., and those crises led to my coming to the MIT Libraries. It's been fraught with challenges, but it's also been really delightful. Individuals in and outside the Libraries have gone above and beyond to make me feel welcome. That has been heartwarming, and that's some of what I see continuing post-COVID.

I also see our ability to be agile as an organization continuing; activities, processes, procedures, and dialogues that would usually take an exceptional amount of time are getting done more quickly. When I look at the great work that has happened with the on-campus services restart, the Hayden renovation, and its service design—staff pulled all those activities together and integrated me as if I had been here all along. We understand now that we can quickly organize, deploy, and get done the things that are central to the mission and the vision of the Libraries in a far more rapid pace than prior to the pandemic.

“One of the things I’ve learned in my career is that you can balance a computational present and future with a connection to the haptic.”
–Alexia Hudson-Ward

You’ve talked about your interest in “balancing a computational future and haptic traditions” in libraries. What does that mean to you?

I was very attracted to the motto of the Institute, “mind and hand,” and I think about the ways in which libraries have always represented that. After all, at one time in history, the book was considered new technology. One of the things I’ve learned in my career is that you can balance a computational present and future with a connection to the haptic. There is a lot of interesting dialogue, from a neurodiversity standpoint, around the differences between reading material electronically versus in print. We can have different types of learning labs that allow for creativity by mind and by hand. For me, that’s a way to wed our “digital first” vision with the ways in which we know people learn by touch, and the MIT Libraries is the best place to explore those dimensions.

You shared that you’re a Formula 1 racing fan. Have you found any fellow fans on the Libraries staff, and what are some of your other passions?

Yes! When I said that, people started popping up on Slack, like “did you see that race this weekend?” I had no idea we had so many race enthusiasts within the Libraries! I also have a passion for eating and cooking; having Slack channels dedicated to these topics has been fun and has helped to foster community for me as I come on board remotely.

News from the MIT Press

Dædalus, journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, becomes open access



The MIT Press and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences recently announced that *Dædalus*, the Journal of the American Academy, will now be an open-access publication. Years of volumes and hundreds of essays previously behind a paywall have been ungated and made freely available.

First published in 1955 and established as a quarterly journal in 1958, *Dædalus* has addressed a wide and multidisciplinary range of subjects over the years. Topics explored in recent issues include climate change, access to justice, and ethics, technology, and war; the current issue looks at the versatile literary form of the novel. Essays are written by leading scholars and practitioners sharing their expertise and insights across a range of disciplines.

A recognized leader in open-access book and journal publishing, the MIT Press has partnered with a wide range of societies, libraries, and foundations to make access to scholarship more open and equitable. To learn more about open access publishing at the MIT Press, visit mitpress.mit.edu/mit-press-open.

Staff News

Photos
Top: Nur Sobers-Khan.
Bottom: Avery Boddie;
photo by Jenny Mann.

New Appointments

Avery Boddie
*Music and Media
Program Head*

Nur Sobers-Khan
*Program Head, Aga Khan
Documentation Center*

Jess Myers
Thesis Project Associate

Steven Stowe
Director of Human Resources

Retirements

Robert Hall
*MIT Publications Cataloging
Associate*

Carol Schweigert
Access Services Assistant

Libraries Welcome New Program Heads

In February, the Libraries welcomed Avery Boddie as the program head for Music and Media. In this new role, Boddie will manage the daily operations of the Lewis Music Library while envisioning and implementing digital initiatives related to music, audio, and multimedia. Previously the Music and Dance Librarian at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Boddie says working at MIT is a dream job: “I greatly look forward to working with and engaging the music students, faculty, and patrons here on collaborations and supporting their research and educational needs.”

Nur Sobers-Khan also joined the Libraries in February as program head for the Aga Khan Documentation Center (AKDC). Sobers-Khan is responsible for stewarding and developing collections, services, and programs to support the information needs of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture in MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning, as well as oversight of Archnet, an open access online library of the built environment with a focus on Muslim cultures. Sobers-Khan was most recently the lead curator for South Asian collections at the British Library, where she innovated new approaches in digital humanities research methods for South Asian-language material.



What's New

Images

Top: A visualization of the researcher's house in the video game "A Lab of One's Own."

Bottom: Holly Jackson '22 helped develop an algorithm to virtually unfold and read historic letters.

Mariana Roa Oliva and Maya Bjornson Named Women@MIT Fellows for Spring 2021

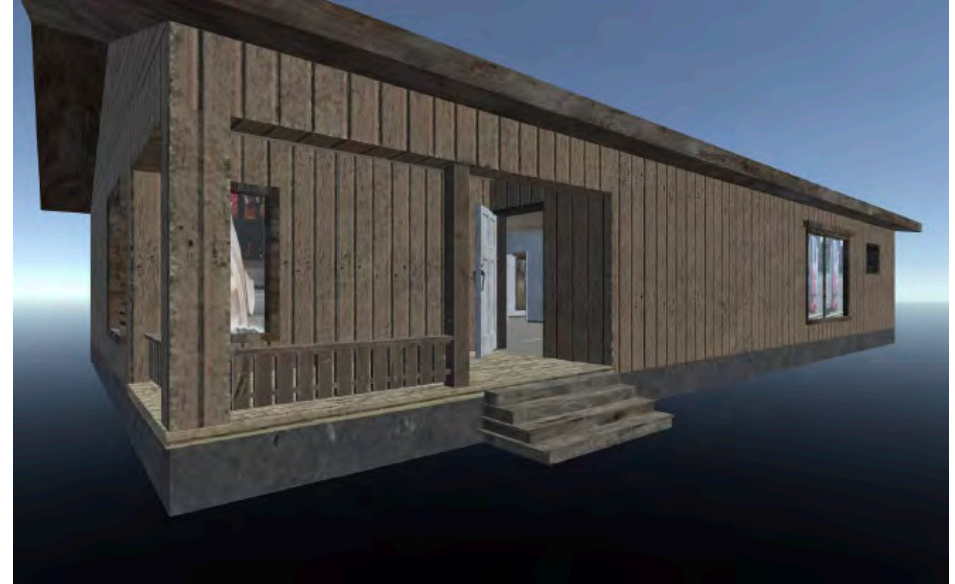
As fellows, the artists will engage in archival research using Distinctive Collections to create an experimental video game featuring the narratives and discoveries of women, gender non-binary, and gender non-conforming trailblazers from MIT's rich history. In their project, "A Lab of One's Own," participants will play an unnamed researcher living on a small island scattered with several observation stations. As players interact with the environment, including laboratory equipment, paper ephemera, and other objects, different characters will pop up to tell stories about their life and discoveries.

The Women@MIT Spring Fellowship invited scholars, activists, artists, musicians, writers, and others engaged in the expansion and expression of knowledge to propose a project that would contribute to greater understanding of the history of women at the Institute and in the history of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The Women@MIT archival initiative, made possible thanks to the generous support of Barbara Ostrom '78 and Shirley Sontheimer, seeks to add the records of women faculty, staff, students, and alumnae to the historic record by collecting, preserving, and sharing their life and work with MIT and global audiences.

Nature Communications Features Letterlocking Research

An international team of researchers led by Jana Dambrogio, Thomas F. Peterson (1957) Conservator, has developed a computational method for virtually unfolding centuries-old "locked" letters written on elaborately cut, folded, and sealed paper. Their findings appeared in a recent *Nature Communications* article titled, "Unlocking History: Virtual Unfolding Reveals Secrets of Sealed Documents."

The flattening algorithm was developed by Holly Jackson, an MIT undergraduate student in computer science, and Amanda Ghassaei, a graduate of MIT's Center for Bits and Atoms. Examining letters' contents without irrevocably damaging the systems that secured them represents a breakthrough for the study of historic documents, as the papers' folds, tucks, and slits are themselves valuable evidence for historians and conservators.





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