Bibliotech

News from the MIT Libraries

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Cover Image
Jacqueline S. Casey, poster for the American Women in Science and Engineering Symposium (detail), 1964. Courtesy of the MIT Museum.

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Share Your Story

Did the MIT Libraries have an impact on your student experience, your career, or your life? Why is supporting the Libraries important to you? Please take a moment to tell us about your experience.

From the Vice Provost

This fall we mark 10 years in three important ways — it's the anniversary of the Women@MIT Archival Initiative, MIT Reads, and the Task Force on the Future of Libraries report. A decade of work is an important milestone and a chance to celebrate our progress, but we are not closing these chapters. We are just getting started.

We collect, preserve, and share the collections of women at MIT because we see the possibilities for future use — to complete our understanding, to fuel further research, or to inspire the next generation. We're taking MIT Reads in a new direction, because we recognize the unique power of storytelling to connect people and celebrate our humanity, at a time when AI and social isolation threaten the fabric of our community. We continue to use the task force report as a North Star, with its emphasis on digital access to content, open dissemination of research, and computational access to knowledge, because the prescience of its vision is remarkable 10 years later.

Our ability to realize that vision has been given a tremendous boost with a historic gift to the Libraries from Barbara Ostrom '78. Her generosity endows the MIT Libraries director role and will support our highest priorities, while my new vice provost title acknowledges the Libraries' critical place within the Institute and its leadership.

By supporting what we do — whether it's digitizing content, improving our online experience, or conducting research on open scholarship — you are investing in the future of knowledge. Thank you for your generosity over the past 10 years. I hope you are as excited as we are for what's to come.

All my best,

Chris Bourg
Vice Provost and Barbara K. Ostrom (1978) Director of the Libraries

Photo
Shawn Henry



Barbara Ostrom Makes Landmark Gift to the Libraries

Generous support creates an endowment to sustain the Libraries' leadership and innovation



A generous gift from Barbara Ostrom '78 SM '78 has created an endowment to support the MIT Libraries' director and the highest priorities of the organization. This landmark gift comes as Provost Anantha Chandrakasan recently announced that Chris Bourg has been named a vice provost, an acknowledgment of the enduring importance of the Libraries to the Institute's mission. Bourg, who has led the MIT Libraries since 2015, is the inaugural Vice Provost and Barbara K. Ostrom (1978) Director of the Libraries.

"Information management has never been more crucial," says Ostrom. "The Libraries directors I have met have been forward looking, innovative, and not afraid of change. I wholly support that mindset and think the individual overseeing the MIT Libraries system should receive the same level of support as any faculty member."

Ostrom's gift, the largest individual gift in the Libraries' history, will enable the organization to continue to innovate, responding to the new and evolving ways the community accesses library resources. She is particularly inspired by the Libraries' continually expanding efforts to go beyond print — collecting and providing access to digital content, code, data, and even oral histories. "Curating the digital world is important to make information widely available to anyone who needs it," she says.

Ostrom's previous support of MIT includes a gift to establish the Barbara K. Ostrom (1978) Bioinformatics and Computing Facility at the Koch Institute and a gift to help launch the Women@MIT Archival Initiative in 2016. A champion of education, she is particularly interested in ways to support students beyond the classroom.

"Barbara's gift is a testament to the importance and impact of the extraordinary work that the Libraries' staff does to advance knowledge and serve our community," says Bourg.

Ostrom is no stranger to the work it takes to run a library. She started working in her school library in the third grade, when "they needed some place to put me to keep me occupied rather than fidgeting in class," she says, then continued throughout elementary school, junior high, and high school. At MIT, she spent time in the military science library in the old Building 20. As part of ROTC, she had a part-time job organizing what she calls "a miscellaneous collection of uncataloged materials," getting help from staff at Hayden Library to put together a card catalog and inventory.

Today, Ostrom wants to shine a light on the Libraries' ability to fulfill a diverse range of needs within the MIT community. "Some people are curious to expand their personal knowledge, and others have a problem set due tomorrow," she says. The Libraries are here for them both, and thanks to Ostrom's philanthropy, will evolve to keep meeting those needs well into the future.

Women@MIT at 10 Years

Archival initiative marks a decade of elevating women's stories

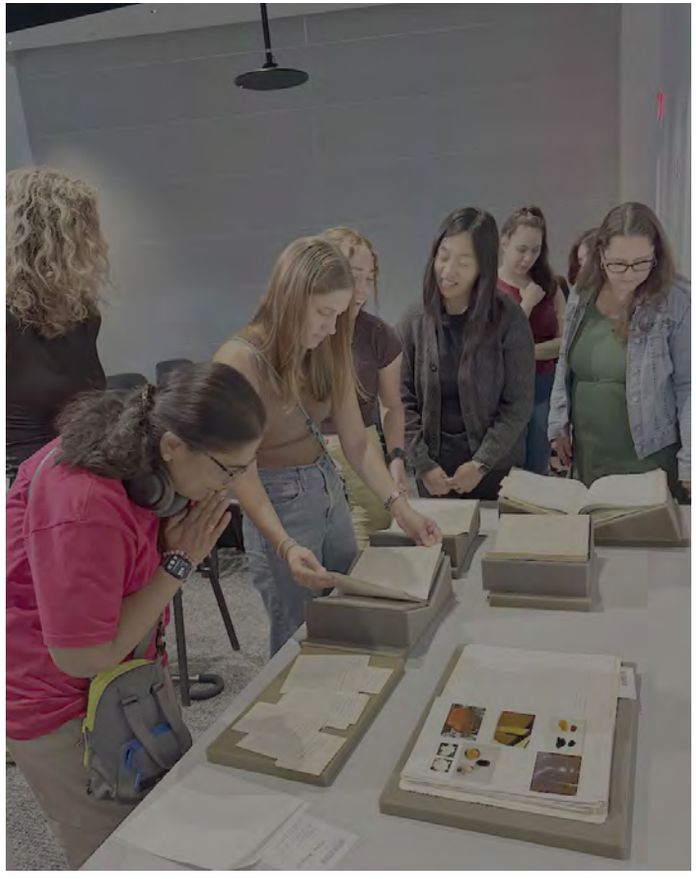


Image
"Dive into the Archives: Trailblazing MIT Women in Science" event with Grad Womxn in Biology.

Photo
Julia Van Goor

In 2016, MIT Libraries' Distinctive Collections launched a new effort aimed at acquiring, preserving, and making accessible the personal archives of women at MIT, generously supported by Barbara Ostrom '78 and Shirley Sontheimer. As the initiative approaches its 10th anniversary, *Bibliotech* takes a look back at efforts to grow and invite active engagement with the collections.



Image
Ruth Lehmann, director of the Whitehead Institute, speaks at the opening reception for "Under the Lens: Women Biologists and Chemists at MIT 1865-2024."

Photo
Bryce Vickmark

Filling the Gaps

The Libraries launched the initiative to address the absence of MIT women from the historical record. The impact of these omissions is twofold: "These gaps not only limit our understanding of past scientific achievements but also impact the visibility of women scientists who could serve as role models to inspire future generations of women in STEM," says Women@MIT Archivist Thera Webb.

The first phase of the Women@MIT initiative was focused on building the collections and forging relationships with faculty ending the active phase of their careers. Faculty members who added their personal collections in the first year include Nancy Hopkins, Amgen Inc. Professor of Biology Emerita, known for bringing about an investigation that resulted in the landmark 1999 report on the status of women at MIT; Mary Rowe, adjunct professor at MIT Sloan, special assistant to the president, and ombudsperson whose work contributed to MIT having one of the world's first anti-harassment policies; and Sheila Widnall '60, SM '61, ScD '64, Institute Professor and professor of aeronautics and astronautics, the first woman to serve as secretary of the Air Force, and the first woman to lead a branch of the U.S. military.

Since 2016, there have been more than 100 accessions of new material into the collections, comprising more than one million pages and more than one terabyte of born-digital material. They include the papers of the first Asian woman to receive tenure at MIT, ChoKyun Rha, a professor of biomaterials science and engineering who helped found biotechnology firm Genzyme, and economist Phyllis Wallace, the first tenured Black woman at MIT and the first tenured woman at MIT Sloan. The scope of the initiative has also widened to include staff, students, and alumnae. Distinctive Collections houses the physical and digital archives of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project, which chronicles the lives of MIT alumnae through interviews conducted by undergraduates.

Image
Top: Opening reception for "Under the Lens: Women Biologists and Chemists at MIT 1865-2024." Photo: Bryce Vickmark.

Bottom: A scene from "A Lab of One's Own," an immersive video game created by Women@MIT fellows Mariana Roa Oliva and Maya Bjornson.

Engaging with History

As the collections have grown, so too have the Libraries' efforts to make women's collections accessible to more people and to create opportunities to engage with them. In addition to digitizing materials — 17 collections have been made available on MIT Digital Collections — Distinctive Collections staff have expanded their outreach with MIT classes, student groups, and alumnae, as well as broader audiences. The Women@MIT Fellowship, launched in 2021, provides funding for artists, writers, filmmakers, historians, and others to create projects that invite the community to engage with different aspects of the collections.

"Now that MIT's Distinctive Collections is more established as a hub for preserving the contributions of MIT women, we can expand our focus to increasing the collection's use," says Webb.

In the last five years:

- 32 MIT classes, representing 11 different departments and programs, have used Women@MIT materials in class visits;
- 6 exhibits, both physical and digital, have showcased the collections;
- 13 MIT community and public events have given audiences insights into and hands-on experiences with the collections;
- 3 podcasts have featured Women@MIT archivists discussing the work of preserving the history of women in science;
- 7 Women@MIT Fellows have created projects that increase engagement with the collections, including a video game, a hypertext novel, and a short documentary;
- 399 requests for Women@MIT materials have been made by Distinctive Collections Reading Room researchers.

It's opportunities like these where audiences — from the MIT Graduate Womxn in Biology group to kids at the Cambridge Science Carnival — can be inspired by these pioneering women. That's part of the mission, according to Distinctive Collections Head Emilie Songolo: "Archives have the potential to bring together communities. Seeing oneself represented creates a powerful sense of belonging," she says. "Preserving and making accessible the contributions that MIT women have made to science tell a deeper and more accurate story of the Institute. If these contributions are recognized and taken forward, we all benefit."





Student Profile: Peyton Bryant

The brain and cognitive sciences major and student worker at Lewis Music Library advises the Libraries on meeting students' needs.

By Palak Patel

Image
Peyton Bryant

Peyton Bryant '27 always knew she would work in her university library, even before she knew she wanted to attend MIT.

"The library was the first view of the wider world for me," she says. Growing up, Bryant would visit her public library at least three times a week, something her family established as a priority. Her mother worked at her own university library, inspiring Bryant to follow in her footsteps.

"Libraries are the cornerstone of intellectual democracy, and I think that working in libraries is something that has always appealed to my interests," she says. "Advocating for people learning is so important."

That advocacy led Bryant to join the Committee on the Library System (CLS), a standing committee of the faculty that also includes students and staff. As a student representative, Bryant is tasked with liaising between the committee and the undergraduate student body. Bryant says she is fearless in asking questions and providing feedback in CLS meetings. Her contributions include suggesting CLS speak with societies around MIT to better understand the specific academic needs of each course. "They are all really involved and know exactly what people need from the Libraries," she says.

In addition to her work in Lewis and on CLS, Bryant is involved in a number of extracurricular activities. She sings for the MIT Logarhythms and served as the president of Alpha Kappa Alpha. On the academic side, she's a "super UROP" working in the Yaffe Lab at the Koch Institute, where she helps research cell progression and DNA damage. After graduation, Bryant plans on attending medical school and becoming a physician. But the Libraries will have a lasting impact on her.

"I am a course nine," she explains. "I had room in my courses my senior year, so I'm going to be pursuing a literature minor. I don't think that's something that would have happened without the MIT Libraries."



"If you believe in upholding the process of discovery, the process of learning, and the collaborative spirit of MIT, then you need to engage with the Libraries, because those are spaces designed exactly for that."
—Peyton Bryant

A New Era for MIT Reads

The fall 2026 book, chosen by President Sally Kornbluth, celebrates the power of storytelling

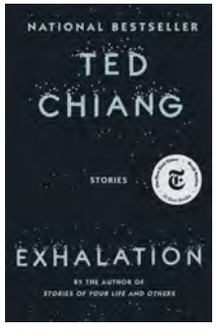
Designed to foster empathy, curiosity, and belonging, MIT Reads brings together the campus community — and readers everywhere — through common reading experiences, author talks, and group discussions. To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the program, President Sally Kornbluth has chosen the Fall 2026 selection, *Exhalation* by Ted Chiang.

One of *The New York Times*' best books of 2019, *Exhalation* is a collection of nine science fiction stories that grapple with humanity's oldest questions while exploring such issues as bioethics, time travel, and the uses of AI. The choice of *Exhalation* reflects MIT Reads' evolution, now focusing on fiction and memoir as forms that are uniquely suited to building social connections and a sense of our shared humanity.

"With the stories in his 2019 *Exhalation* collection, Ted Chiang offered an uncanny preview of many issues we're grappling with now concerning technology, particularly the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence," says President Kornbluth. "He raises deep questions about the future that humans and machines will share and offers provocative ideas and possibilities. I'm delighted that MIT Reads will give us the opportunity to explore his work together."

Since launching in 2016, MIT Reads has embraced the power of reading and storytelling to cultivate social connection within the MIT community. Virtual and hybrid programming have now extended the reach of the program, inviting audiences everywhere to engage in the conversation. We hope you'll consider joining us in person or online for the fall 2026 signature event.

10 YEARS
MITReads



Save the Date: Author Event
Ted Chiang in conversation with President Sally Kornbluth
Thursday, December 3
Visit *libraries.mit.edu/mit-reads* for more information and to register.

What's New



Image
Stata Center locker

Libraries Launch New Locker Service

Starting this fall, MIT students, faculty, and staff have a new way to pick up library items, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. New self-service lockers are located in the lobby of Building 10, the Stata Center, the 24/7 study space in E53, and the Met Warehouse. Users can request materials online, select their preferred pickup location, and collect items from a locker with their physical or digital MIT ID. Users can also return library materials to the lockers.

Web Projects Improve Discovery and Access

The MIT Libraries launched several technology projects during summer 2026, all aimed at making it easier to discover and access collections and services:

- A new website homepage was built around the ways users actually navigate the site, highlighting most-needed resources and services.
- Articles, Books, and More modernizes the library catalog experience to provide clearer tools for refining, filtering, and exploring results.
- Digital Collections (dome.mit.edu) is an upgraded digital repository platform providing a modern, sustainable foundation for sharing MIT's unique special collections materials.
- MIT Open Scholarship (dspace.mit.edu) is a significant upgrade of MIT's institutional repository, home to Institute research, theses, working papers, published articles, and more, with a mobile-friendly user interface and improved search functionalities.

Honor Roll

Thank you

We are grateful for the generosity of our library friends and supporters. Our donors enable the Libraries to support the MIT community and to advance the Institute's mission by producing, collecting, and sharing knowledge to solve the world's biggest problems. Thank you for your support.

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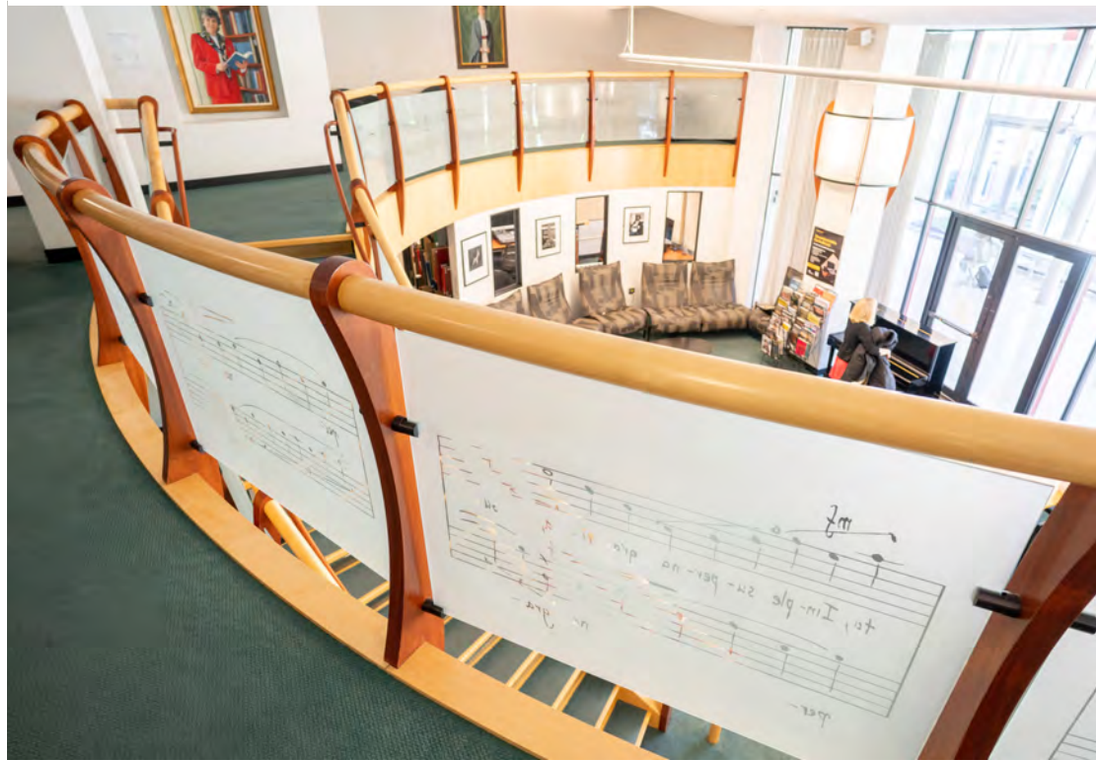
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Making a Gift

You may notice some changes to the website when you give online. Our funds have been updated to reflect the Libraries' current approach to collections, spaces, and services and our highest priorities. With fewer funds and clearer descriptions, you can more easily make a gift that matches your interests and our needs.



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