

Harvard Announces Library Task Force

Provost Steven Hyman today announced the formation of a task force charged with developing recommendations to make the Harvard Library system stronger and more responsive to the needs of students and faculty at a time of both technological change and financial challenge.

Harvard's libraries are one of its greatest assets, with more than 16 million volumes, vast archival collections and a robust menu of online offerings. Since the establishment of the first Harvard library in 1638, however, the system has grown organically. The resulting highly decentralized system has made it difficult to coordinate services or to be as nimble as we might be during a period of rapid technological change.

"We will come out of this process with an organization that is more responsive to the needs of the research and teaching communities across Harvard," Hyman said. "The panel will set priorities to tailor the system for the rapidly changing digital information landscape and propose reforms aimed at supporting collecting, preservation, and other core activities."

The task force, which Hyman will chair, will be comprised of 19 members chosen from the faculty and from libraries across the University. The committee will consider how acquisition, preservation and conservation policies, can be improved. In addition to assessing the system's changing technological needs, the task force will also prepare for changes in the way scholars are pursuing research.

"This is an opportunity to craft a different approach to the management of our libraries, one that takes into account the increasing interest in interdisciplinary research," said Nancy Cline, the Roy E. Larsen Librarian of Harvard College and a member of the task force. "We need to better understand our colleagues' needs, and we need to better understand how our users' changing needs can be met."

Robert Darnton, the Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and Director of the University Library, said that while the current economic climate added urgency to the task, the task force's mission was focused on improving the library system. "We can make a great library system even greater by rethinking structure and services on a pan-University scale," said Darnton, who also will serve on the task force. "It is being done in the spirit of trying to improve service."

Task Force Charge:

Harvard's libraries are among its greatest resources and contribute to the University's global leadership. At this time in its history, the library system faces significant challenges as it seeks to maintain its collecting and to fund other aspects of its core mission. This system, comprised of more than 70 separate libraries, has evolved organically over 371 years, often with too little consideration given to its overall structure.

Many of the components of this system are great treasures, yet the duplication of acquisitions, licenses, and long-term storage space may detract from our ability to fund critical priorities. Several libraries have their own preservation laboratories, digital

facilities, archives, and methods of handling special collections. They undertake common activities in incompatible ways, often without reference to the resources and expertise available at the center of the system in places like the Weissman Preservation Center, the Harvard University Archives, and the Office for Information Systems. The creation of HOLLIS showed how all of the libraries could benefit from a centralized service.

This task force is charged with making clear recommendations to the President and the Council of Deans to adapt the Harvard Library system to the 21st century to make a stronger and more efficient library system. This effort is not meant to slow efforts going on within schools, but to facilitate University-wide efforts to rationalize our system. In particular the committee should (1) set clear priorities to tailor the system to the information landscape being created by technological innovation and, (2) propose reforms that will help maintain collections and support other core activities at the highest attainable level.

Task Force Members:

Chair, Steven Hyman, Provost, Professor of Neurobiology

Jeremy Bloxham, Mallinckrodt Professor of Geophysics and Professor of Computational Science; Dean of Science, FAS

Nancy Cline, Roy E. Larsen Librarian of Harvard College, FAS

Robert Darnton, Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor; Director of the Harvard University Library, HUL

Mary Maples Dunn, Former Director, Schlesinger Library, RIAS

Andrew Gordon, Lee and Juliet Folger Fund Professor of History, FAS

Jennifer Hochschild, Henry LaBarre Jayne Professor of Government and Professor of African and African American Studies, FAS

Mary Lee Kennedy, Executive Director, Baker Library, HBS

Isaac Kohane, Lawrence J. Henderson Professor of Pediatrics; Director, Countway Library of Medicine, HMS

David Lamberth, Professor Philosophy and Theology, HDS

James McCarthy, Professor of Biological Oceanography; Alexander Agassiz Professor of Biological Oceanography in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, FAS

Kathleen McCartney, Gerald S. Lesser Professorship in Early Childhood Development; Dean, GSE

Louis Menand, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of English, FAS

Donald Oppenheimer, Associate Dean of Information Service, HKS

John Palfrey, Henry N. Ess III Librarian and Professor of Law, HLS

Antoine Picon, Professor of the History of Architecture and Technology, GSD

Stuart Shieber, Gordon McKay Professor of Computer Science; Faculty Director of the Office for Scholarly Communication, SEAS

Laurel Ulrich, 300th Anniversary University Professor, FAS

Clayton Spencer, Vice President for Policy, ex officio