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Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

The Harvard library collections are among this University's greatest treasures. Over the last decade, the confluence of many factors ranging from rapid technological change to Harvard's broadening interests in global scholarly materials and the stunning increases in the costs of journal subscriptions have created challenges for our highly decentralized library system. Not surprisingly, these challenges have been significantly exacerbated by the current financial downturn.

In March 2009 I appointed a University-wide Task Force to examine our library system and make recommendations that would put it on a footing that could sustain and ideally enhance its excellence long into the future. Today, I am pleased to share with you the Task Force's findings and recommendations. A link to the report's text can be found below.

The report of the Task Force on University Libraries is a very thoughtful document about an extraordinary system. But it is also a stark rendering of a structure in need of reform. Our collections are superlative, and our knowledgeable library staff are central to the success of the University's mission. The way the system operates, however, is placing terrible strain on the libraries and the people who work within them.

Over time, a lack of coordination has led to a fragmented collection of collections that is not optimally positioned to respond to the 21st century information needs of faculty and students. The libraries' organizational chart is truly labyrinthine in its complexity, and in practice this complexity impedes effective collective decision-making.

Widely varying information technology systems present barriers to communication among libraries and stymie collaboration with institutions beyond our campus gates. Our funding mechanisms have created incentives to collect or subscribe in ways that diminish the vitality of the overall collection.

Libraries the world over are undergoing a challenging transition into the digital age, and Harvard's libraries are no exception. The Task Force report points us toward a future in which our libraries must be able to work together far more effectively than is the case today as well as to collaborate with other great libraries to maximize access to the materials needed by our scholars.

The Task Force report marks an important first step in our efforts to align Harvard's library structure with the University's evolving academic priorities. The next step will be taken by the work group that I am naming today to carry forward the Task Force's recommendations. The members of the Implementation Work Group will closely consult with existing library committees, faculty, students, and administrators. They are:

Chair, David Lamberth, Professor of Philosophy and Theology, HDS

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

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

John Haigh, Executive Dean, HKS

Mary Lee Kennedy, Executive Director, Knowledge and Library Services, HBS

Leslie Kirwan, Dean of Administration and Finance, FAS

Richard Mills, Dean for Operations and Business Affairs, HMS

John Palfrey, Vice Dean of Library and Information Resources and Henry N. Ess III Professor of Law, HLS

I am grateful to the members of the Task Force and the many people who advised them during the course of their work on this project. The Task Force has begun an important conversation that will be continued by the Implementation Work Group through many different venues such as town hall meetings and focused conversations with faculty, students, and library staff. Please share your written feedback with the Task Force at library_implementation@harvard.edu.

I look forward to continuing our conversation about strengthening our libraries for the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Hyman

Link to the Report of the Task Force on University Libraries:

http://www.provost.harvard.edu/reports/Library_Task_Force_Report.pdf