

February 10, 2012

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

Earlier this week, [President Faust wrote](#) to you about the singular importance of Harvard's libraries and why changes are essential to ensure that they continue to set the standard for academic libraries worldwide. Today, I write to share how a new organizational design and strategic direction, *recently recommended by the Library Board*, will position the Harvard Library to respond to the evolving expectations of the 21st century scholar.

The new Library [organizational design](#) enables Harvard to respond nimbly to the constantly shifting demands of the Information Age. It replaces a fragmented system of 73 libraries spread across the Schools with one that promotes University-wide collaboration. The new Library will harness both the power of a unified Harvard and the distinctive contributions of the Schools, which will retain responsibility for work that requires deep knowledge of research, teaching and learning needs within their respective domains. These changes will [benefit](#) everyone who uses the Harvard Library. A single access policy will make borrowing easier at every library location.

Library experts in all subject areas will be available to answer questions and deliver information quickly. Working together, we can leverage Harvard's buying power, set a high and consistent standard for service delivery and pursue a University-wide collection development strategy that strengthens our holdings.

In pursuing this new strategic direction, we will make better use of the resources we commit to acquisitions and collection management. There also will be changes that affect staff at every level of the library system. The details of many of these changes are being developed, and they will be announced in the coming weeks. It is clear at this point, however, that they will include but not be limited to adjustments in how and where many staff members perform the work that has made the library one of the University's greatest treasures.

Our goal is straightforward—to enable investment in innovation, in digital infrastructure, in the services we provide, and in our collections. The Board's recommendations address [opportunities](#) for improvement that repeatedly surfaced during two years of [study](#). The strengths of our Library are extraordinary, and begin with the excellence of the Library staff. The support for research, teaching and learning that they provide is unequalled. Their understanding of user needs is unmatched. And among academic institutions, our collection is unrivaled. Yet we are not organized to make the best use of these remarkable assets. Finding many of these resources in the current system of “coordinated decentralization” can be challenging. Scholars struggle to navigate more than a dozen access policies. And much of the collection is inaccessible simply because resources haven't been properly allocated to process it.

In recent decades, the libraries have struggled to collect the books, journals and other research materials desired by faculty and students. They have had to cope with steadily rising prices, the cost of providing both electronic and paper versions, the expansion of the University's intellectual horizons and the duplication of efforts throughout a disjointed library system. Our analysis showed that these challenges have persisted despite the fact that Harvard spends on average more than twice as much as its peer universities on its libraries, devoting 3.3% of its overall budget to libraries while its peers spend on average 1.9% of their budgets.

The new organizational design unifies functions that occur within all libraries—Access Services, Technical Services and Preservation and Digital Imaging Services. The shared services will enable greater focus on the needs of the user community as the Library improves workflows, policies, infrastructures and reporting structures system-wide. The new organization will enhance physical and digital access to the entire collection and related resources—regardless of School affiliation—through a robust Library portal (expected to launch this year), mobile devices, self-checkout and mobile checkout. The majority of people who work in the libraries will learn in the next two weeks whether their role will remain associated with their local library or be designated as part of the new shared services structure. Working groups are already being formed to develop processes and standards that will be applied within each service area and across the broader system.

These changes will be supported by a new approach to Library technology, which will allow us to use information resources in exciting new ways. The library-focused resources of the Office of Information Systems (OIS), as well as IT staff working in the Harvard College Library, will join with the expertise of Harvard University Information Systems (HUIT). This combination of assets will more strongly align Library and University technology strategy and goals, and it will increase interoperability between library systems.

The new strategic direction will encourage the Library to partner with Schools to create a single point of procurement for e-resources. It will also support collaboration between the Library and the Schools to implement a system-wide collection development strategy and a system-wide access policy. The strategic direction also commits the Harvard Library to providing greater and faster access to materials housed outside Harvard, as recent partnerships with [Borrow Direct](#) and the [HathiTrust](#) demonstrate. Since the launch of Borrow Direct in June, for example, Harvard patrons borrowed several thousand items not available in the Harvard Library collection and received them twice as quickly as they would have with Interlibrary Loan.

Work has already started on an infrastructure to build digital collections and to support new approaches to library services. The changes will position the Library to lead in scholarly communication and open access, to design next generation search and discovery services, and to accelerate digitization and digital preservation.

The Harvard community uses the Library for diverse purposes. The new Harvard Library will meet the varying needs of our community members. It will offer increased access to information resources within Harvard and beyond its gates. Faculty and students will enjoy faster checkout and delivery of information to their computers and mobile devices, and improved access to reserves during peak periods. Library staff will be able to make decisions and collaborate in ways that continuously improve services.

Change of this magnitude is challenging and understandably prompts many questions and concerns. We recognize that members of the talented Library staff are anxious to see how the transition will affect them as individuals, and we are confident that our new strategic direction will ultimately produce gratifying new responsibilities and career development opportunities. As President Faust noted, it is inevitable that we will need to adjust our plans as we work through the details of this process together. But I want to reassure you that this new direction for the Harvard Library is the product of a lengthy and deliberate process, and that it has been shaped by deep organizational analysis and widespread consultation with many individuals and groups in the libraries and across the Schools.

Moving forward, the choices we need to make as we implement this new vision for the Harvard Library will rely heavily on the knowledge and experience of the staff and library users, and we will be looking to faculty members and other members of our community for guidance in their areas of expertise as we develop a broad collection development strategy and establish metrics by which we can measure the progress of the new organization. This will ensure that we meet the rising expectations of the Harvard community in the 21st century and—ultimately—that we will continue to set the standard for academic libraries worldwide.

Alan M. Garber
Provost