

RESEARCH SUPPORT

COMPUTER LABORATORY

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This past year was a “work in progress.” I devoted most of my time to projects that would not be completed until the 2006/2007 timeframe, or beyond. Good progress was made on several fronts, however, and I look forward to seeing them through to completion:

- The restructuring and redesign of the Institute’s Web site.
- The Institute’s efforts to develop an integrated computer database of its museum collections, archives, publications, field records, and assorted documentation.
- The purchase of large amounts of off-site computer disk space for archival storage of critical Institute images, records, and documents.
- Enabling building-wide document printing and scanning using the Institute’s Xerox copy equipment.
- The migration of all the Institute’s remaining Macintosh System 9 computer users to new Macintosh computers running the System X operating system.

Projects

Web Site Restructuring and Redesign

By the time this *Annual Report* is in print, the process of converting all the Institute’s Web pages and images to our updated “look and feel” will have been completed, and parts or all of our new Web site design will be live on the Internet. This project has been in the works for over two years and has involved many faculty, staff, and former staff members within the Institute as well as various staff within the University’s Web Services division. It has also been the cause of many headaches and much delight as the final data structure and designs were arrived at and agreed upon. I collectively thank everyone involved in this project for their criticism, ideas, and contributions, but will wait until the migration is finished, and therefore until next year’s *Annual Report*, to name and thank all the individuals involved in this process.

Integrated Database

The idea of an integrated computer database of all the relevant records, photographs, publications, and other documents that are the legacy of the Institute’s eighty plus years of operation has been a dream as well as a goal of mine since I started running the Computer Laboratory back in 1990. The current administration of the Institute is actively facilitating its creation, and during the past year several steps have been taken that go beyond mere discussions around a table.

During this past year the Institute’s Integrated Database Committee (Gil Stein, Geoff Emberling, David Schloen, Raymond Johnson, Scott Branting, John Sanders, Thomas Urban, Steve Camp, and George Sundell) has been formulating a pilot project to be funded by an outside agency. Individual staff members who oversee Institute records, databases, documents, etc. have been compiling statistics and other pertinent information that will be used by the committee to specify the nature and scope of this pilot project. This process should be completed in fall 2006.

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Plans are also in the works for several faculty and staff to visit two or three institutions with similar museum collections and research objectives that have already undertaken computer integration of their holdings, and to consult with their administrators, researchers, and computer staff and attempt to glean from them the pros and cons of their experiences. These trips will occur before the end of 2006, and I'll report on our findings in next year's *Annual Report*.

Oriental Institute Terabyte Storage Initiative

Various units within the Institute have been collecting large amounts of electronic data and numerous computer files for some time now. The need for backing up these data on a daily basis, as well as the need for archival storage of critical Institute documents led Scott Branting, Director of the Oriental Institute's Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes (CAMEL), and myself to approach the University's Networking Services and Information Technologies (NSIT) division regarding the purchase of large amounts of computer storage space on its Terabyte (1,000,000,000,000 bytes) array. Called the Oriental Institute Archive (OIA), an initial two terabytes of disk storage were purchased in January 2006, increasing to three terabytes in spring 2006. Approximately fifty faculty and staff members, representing over a dozen units and/or projects within the Institute, are currently using this long-term computer storage space, and additional faculty and staff will have access to this facility as they receive new computer equipment in early 2006/2007 (see the Macintosh Computer Upgrades section).

Building-wide Document Printing and Scanning

Complaints over the past year or so regarding the frequent breakdowns of our well-used Xerox copiers throughout the Oriental Institute have brought about a resolution that solves two problems at once. After discussions with our Xerox representative, as well as recommendations from a competing company representative, it was decided late in the year to upgrade our existing Xerox equipment to faster, more capable machinery and bring into the building two additional Xerox copiers, to better distribute the amount of copying done by faculty, staff, and students on any single copier. It is hoped that the new copiers will help solve our recent breakdown problems. A second issue simultaneously addressed by these new, upgraded copiers is the ability to have faculty, staff, and students use this same copier equipment for computer printing from their desktops, and also to be able to scan documents, articles, even entire books directly into electronic computer files, which they can then view on their own computers. Once scanned at the Xerox copier, the computer files are either e-mailed to the person's e-mail account or sent to the Institute's file transfer protocol (FTP) server, to then be retrieved by the user from their own computer.

Needless to say, during a recent test period several staff and students were standing in line to take advantage of this new capability to capture printed material into electronic form without purchasing a scanner and software for their own computers. Admittedly, this capability to scan printed documents to computer files has been available in the Computer Laboratory for some time. However, the widespread familiarity with the use of our Xerox copiers, I believe, will encourage their future use for this scanning purpose as well as for printing and copying. Once all the Institute's new Xerox copiers are installed and set up for network printing and scanning this fall, I predict a wave of data capturing within the building and a reduction in the amount of paper (i.e., trees) that we are responsible for using in our daily activities. I'll report further on this issue in next year's *Annual Report*.

Macintosh Computer Upgrades

During the past year Apple Computer, Inc., discontinued tech support for its Macintosh System 9 operating system and the “Classic” mode under its newer System X. That development, coupled with the University of Chicago’s decision to no longer support password encryption for access to University e-mail accounts from System 9 based computers, meant that the Institute had to undertake a large-scale upgrade of computer hardware and software for all faculty and staff still using System 9 on their Macintosh desktop and/or portable computers. Access to the Institute’s new terabyte storage space, the OIA mentioned earlier, was another factor arguing for this upgrade at this time. The Networking Services and Information Technologies hardware maintaining the OIA is not able to communicate with the older Macintosh operating system. At the time of writing, about half of the Institute’s System 9 computers have been exchanged for their newer counterparts.

Electronic Publications

In a break from tradition, and in an effort to minimize redundancy and save space, the listing of those publications made available on the Institute’s Web site during this past year will only be described in the Electronic Resources section of this *Annual Report* and not in this Computer Laboratory section as well.

On this same topic, I encourage everyone to read that portion of the Publications Office section of this *Annual Report* regarding the status of the Institute’s Electronic Publications Initiative, which was formalized during this past year and is now underway. This project, to digitize and make available all past and future print publications produced by the Institute’s Publications Office, promises to be a great benefit to scholarly research in the various fields of ancient Near Eastern studies.

For further information concerning several of the above mentioned research projects, the Institute’s World-Wide Web (WWW) database, and other Electronic Resources in general, refer to the What’s New page on the Oriental Institute’s Web site, at (NOTE: this URL is case sensitive):

http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/INFO/OI_WWW_New.html

See the “Electronic Resources” section of this *Annual Report* for the complete URL to each of the Web-site resources mentioned in this article.
