

RESEARCH SUPPORT





Above and overleaf: Worker standing beside a doorway relief of the King with attendants from the Central Building at Persepolis. Schmidt Expedition, 1935 (D. 13314)

RESEARCH SUPPORT COMPUTER LABORATORY

Knut Boehmer

I started as IT Support Specialist of the Oriental Institute in October 2015, replacing Paul Ruffin after a one-month hiatus. Initially a bit nervous, since I had never worked in a non-German environment before, the welcome I received from all staff and faculty alike was overwhelmingly positive and a great incentive to hit the ground running, helping to improve everyone's work environment as much as possible. While I have collaborated with almost everyone in the Oriental Institute by now, the biggest changes so far took place in the OI-IT/Computer Laboratory-related workflow.

Workflow Changes

Oriental Institute IT Inventory

One of the biggest challenges I faced during the first few months was getting a good overview of the resources in place — what computers, printers, etc., were being used around the building — as well as a good understanding of what the server structure looked like. Since that was also a great opportunity to get to know almost everybody in the building, I decided to start from scratch, going from room to room and creating a detailed list of everything I came across. This list has kept growing and already proven to be a valuable tool. As of mid-July 2016, this list contains information about over 175 computers.

Improving Working Conditions for Everyone

One of my primary goals for the IT department is to be able to provide the best support possible for everyone, using all resources at our disposal and making sure nothing goes to waste by sitting on a shelf or in a drawer while there is someone in the building that could benefit from it. As such, any machines that were replaced by newer or refurbished ones were checked against the inventory list; if they would be a step up for someone else, the computer was wiped, provided with a new clean installation, and repurposed. If that is not the case, all working parts were set aside before decommissioning the rest. These spare parts have helped many people across the building, often providing same-day improvements to their workplaces.

Change from Ticketing System to Direct Support

The old ticketing system that was in place before was retired. The Oriental Institute's size is something that should allow (and even encourage) personal contact, and IT Support should be present and approachable around the building, not hidden behind an e-mail. While it can be a challenge to keep an eye on multiple requests on a busy day or week, constant contact throughout any support process has proven highly effective and appreciated by everyone.

Purchase Processes

Extending the existing services, the purchase of computers and software has been streamlined, so that now a large majority of all new IT-related purchases are processed through the Computer Laboratory. This includes preliminary meetings to discuss the required needs, research to find the best solutions, ordering, checking everything upon arrival, and setting up all required parts, as well as giving a brief introduction to any changes, if necessary. The reception of this new service-oriented approach was very positive.

Recycling Pickups

Starting in spring 2016, semi-annual recycling pickups will be organized to prevent old electronic waste from piling up in the Oriental Institute. The first pickup removed a complete van-full of old electronics from the building, the second one is to take place in late July and will likely have a similar volume.

Projects

Project Support

As mentioned in the introduction, there are few projects or parts of the Oriental Institute that have not been in contact for help in one form or another over the last couple of months. For projects, the Integrated Database Project should be mentioned as one of the most constant interactions, but other projects like (but not limited to) CAMEL, the Persepolis Fortification Project, the Demotic and Hittite Dictionaries, OCHRE, the Epigraphic Survey, and others have been supported in a multitude of ways.

Oriental Institute Website

In spring 2016, a website committee consisting of staff from Membership, Development, Education, the Research Archives, and OI-IT was formed to discuss long-term strategies for the Oriental Institute's website. While the Content Management System "Drupal" makes it easy to change the website's content, it is important to keep everyone else in the loop about changes to prevent conflicting information. Throughout the year, the website also was expanded in several areas, including new projects like MANTIS, and improvement of underlying code.

Hybrid Classes

Starting with Foy Scalf's "Egyptian Hieroglyphs for Museum Goers," a mobile computer setup was created that allowed the recording of the complete on-site class. The day after each session was held at the Oriental Institute, the full video was uploaded and provided to the participants via CHALK, allowing them to experience a realistic idea of what it would have been like had they been there.

Initial feedback after the class concluded was encouraging, and with a complete overhaul of the classrooms happening in summer 2016, including the installation of hardwired webcams, the possibilities of this will further increase in scope in the near future. A long-term goal here is to allow live-streaming of classes and interaction with online participants in real-time.

FileMaker Upgrade Process / Haccinebi Project

The FileMaker databases that are used in-house have slowly been outdated, to the point that the system requirements to run the server software are so outdated that it is starting to become a security risk. To combat this threat, hardware that was bought but never set up has been repurposed with the newest 2016 FileMaker Server software. The databases of various OI projects will be moved over this summer. This setup will also serve as the backbone of a few new database projects, with Gil Stein's Haccinebi slide database spearheading the development of a process to ease future "photo slide-to-internet" transformations.

"The Suq" POS System

Starting in spring 2016, the OI-IT and the Suq Team began to work with the University's Web Security and Procurement offices to find a reliable new partner for a modern point-of-sale and inventory system that is able to integrate with the University's systems. This process should hopefully be finished by late summer 2016.

Identity Finder

Working in cooperation with the Bursar's Office, a tool called "Identity Finder" has been rolled out to all Oriental Institute staff machines. The purpose of "Identity Finder" is to point out confidential information that was accidentally stored locally, thus in an unsecured environment.

The above points highlight only a few of the tasks that I have worked on since October 2016; for additional details please contact me directly.
