At SLAIS, Change Is the New Constant

BY EDIE RASMUSSEN, DIRECTOR

WELCOME TO OUR first edition of SLAIS Matters. Here you'll find an update on SLAIS and the many changes that we've undergone in recent years. We hope that our alumni, friends and visitors are interested in hearing our news, and that in future editions we have news from you to share as well.

Probably our most visible change is in our space – we left SLAIS' home since 1961, in the old North Wing of the Main Library, in June of 2003, as it was torn down to make way for the new Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC). After almost five years in "temporary" space in the far reaches of campus (out by "B Lot" if that rings a bell for some of you), we returned last year to our magnificent new space in the IKBLC. In "Space Matters" on these pages you'll read about the physical space, the vision of the Learning Centre, and some of the innovative ways that SLAIS students are involved in the activities of the Learning Centre.

There are many new faces at SLAIS – some "old SLAIS hands" have retired and some faculty have been lured away by other programs, and in the past few years we have hired eight new faculty, as well as four new staff members. You'll find brief introductions to some of these new

photo: Janis Franklin

faces under "Faculty Matters". And, with new faculty come fresh energy and enthusiasm, and new teaching and research interests. You'll find a profile of SLAIS research interests in "Research Matters".

Under "Student Matters" you'll learn about the new courses SLAIS is developing for online instruction, and some comments from employers on our students, whom I believe are among the best in North America. Under "Alumni

Matters" you'll see a snapshot of our graduates, as well as our current student body. And a contribution from Adjunct Professor Debbie Millward – thanks, Debbie, and I hope your discussion of "Why I Teach at SLAIS" convinces others in the community to share their expertise with the next generation of SLAIS students.

One more change… this first issue of SLAIS Matters also marks my last month as Director. It has been a pleasure and privilege to serve in this role for the past six years. Terry Eastwood has generously agreed to emerge from a retirement filled with golf and curling, and the archival scholarship he never really left, in order to serve as Interim Director of SLAIS over the next year. We're all grateful to Terry for taking on this role for the second time – he was Acting Director in 2002-2003 as well.

And speaking of Terry, we invite you to support a new award for students in the Archival Studies program, created in recognition of Terry's pivotal role in founding and developing the program. See "Giving Matters" for details.

We hope you enjoy "SLAIS Matters"! And, thanks to our Student Services Coordinator, Michelle Mallette, for her design and editing work on our new newsletter. ■

Inside

Terry Eastwood is Back as SLAIS Interim Director

PROFESSOR EDIE RASMUSSEN is stepping down as Director of the School of Library, Archival & Information Studies effective July 1, at which time she begins a 14-month sabbatical after which she returns to SLAIS as part of the faculty where she will take up her research and teaching activities.

Professor Terence "Terry" Eastwood has agreed to serve as Interim Director of SLAIS from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010.

Professor Eastwood not only chaired the Master of Archival Studies Program from 1981 to 2000 but served as Acting Director of SLAIS on two occasions: from January-June 1998 and July 2002 to June 2003. Although Professor Eastwood took early retirement in June 2007, he has stayed active at SLAIS by teaching on a part-time basis over the last two years.

SLAIS will begin its search for a new Director in the Fall of 2009. ■

A NEW HOME FOR SLAIS

Research @ SLAIS – What We're Thinking

SLAIS IS HOME to a community of researchers actively engaged in the investigation of questions of vital importance to society in the age of information. At the broadest level, we are concerned with the recorded artifacts of human experience: their creation, collection, organization, preservation, and use. Increasingly, these artifacts—books, documents, images, data, etc.—are created and/or preserved in digital formats that can be widely disseminated and used. Our collective work aims to ensure that this legacy of human experience, housed in both traditional and newer digital forms, is preserved, shared and explored, so that individuals and communities can continue to draw upon it to deepen their understanding of themselves and their communities and make new discoveries about our world.

While our overarching research agenda is broad, research at SLAIS is clustered around three core areas of inquiry:

1. Management and Curation of Digital Records

Records—documents made or received and set aside in the course of a practical activity—have played a central role in human society for thousands of years. A major ongoing research area at SLAIS is the management and curation of permanent authentic records in electronic systems. Research carried out in the framework of the three phases of the InterPARES project has made fundamental contributions to theory and practice in this field. This work is complemented by emerging research at SLAIS on digital records forensics and records-related risks in financial institutions, fostering collaborations with international researchers in diverse fields such as business, law and computer science.

2. Creation and use of cultural materials

Library, archives and museum professionals are major players in the collective and interdisciplinary effort to promote and preserve cultural materials and make them available over time to diverse populations. The stewardship of archives and collections of works of literature, art images, recorded performances, etc. and the study of their creation and use is an important and dynamic research area. SLAIS plays a major part in this effort as a centre for the study of Canadian and international children's literature, book publishing and illustration. Faculty research in this area is strengthened by outstanding student work carried out in the context of the Master of Arts in Children's Literature program. Other cultural materials research at SLAIS includes work on multimedia digital libraries, the organization and retrieval of art images, and the documentation and preservation of art and theatre performances. As the museum, archives and library fields continue to expand and move towards greater convergence, we look forward to increased activity and new collaborations in this area.

3. Digital Information Systems and Interaction

Digital information flows from person to person through systems in a rich and complex process of representation, interpretation and interaction. Understanding how this process occurs, including the cognitive, affective, physical, technological and situational variables that play a role, is essential to finding means to better support information flow and use in society. A major research focus at SLAIS is on the closely intertwined areas of human information interaction and digital information systems. We aim to extend current models of information interaction to include a greater focus on engagement with, and use of digital information as it relates to real world tasks and activities. In parallel, we are actively seeking new paradigms, techniques and algorithms to improve the systems and tools that facilitate information interaction. As information science researchers in the area, we draw upon theories and methods from many disciplines: human-computer interaction, psychology, sociology, education, computer science, information retrieval and design and actively collaborate with colleagues from these fields. ▪

Research questions on
Digital Records:

- What constitutes a digital record?
- How can the authenticity of digital records be determined once they are removed from the original system?
- How can digital records be maintained and preserved such that their authenticity will not be questioned?
- How can records-related risks to financial institutions such as data-leakage, legal discovery challenges, compliance, etc. be reduced?
- What methods, standards and practices are effective for the management of digital record?

Research questions on
Cultural Materials:

- What role can information professionals and information institutions play in making cultural materials accessible?
- What is different about recording and making accessible information and materials produced in the context of the arts from other types of materials?
- How do we record and make accessible more fluent and dynamic forms of artistic expression, such as storytelling, dance and theatre?
- How do we maintain the richness and diversity of localized artistic expression in the face of the global economy?
- What contributions does children's literature make to individuals, communities and to society as a whole?

Research questions on
Information Interaction:

- What are the effects of different contexts, situations and tasks on digital information interaction?
- How can systems better expose the ideas and intents embedded within information objects so that people can engage with them more directly and more deeply?
- How can systems be designed to support the emotional and experiential aspects of information interaction?
- How do we support users in environments that are complex, nonlinear and multimodal?
- How can existing meta-data and indexing structures be better utilized to increase retrieval effectiveness?
- How do we document and evaluate information interaction and use?