

INTER PARES research project underway

On June 10, the research project, INTER PARES (INTERNational Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems), began its preliminary phase with a meeting in Washington, DC of the international partners sponsoring the project. As explained by Luciana Duranti, the Project Director, the objective of the three year project is, "to develop the theoretical and methodological knowledge essential to the permanent preservation of records generated electronically, and, on the basis of this knowledge, to formulate model policies, strategies, and standards capable of ensuring their preservation". Without these, the documentary heritage and accountability of governments and other organizations are dramatically comprised due to the increasing problems associated with technological obsolescence and media fragility.

INTER PARES is a three year project which is to be formally launched on January 2, 1999. The project builds on the results of SSHRC funded research conducted at the University of British Columbia ("The Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records"). Given the global ubiquity of electronic systems and the associated issues of long-term preservation, the INTER PARES project draws on knowledge from a wide range of disciplines and on the expertise of private, public and academic organizations from countries around the world. Led by a Canadian group of researchers, the International Team is comprised of the chairs of six working groups from Canada, the United States, Australia, Northern Europe, Italy, the Collaborative Electronic Notebook Systems Association (CENSA), as well as the directors of research teams from eight national archival institutions involved in the testing of the research results.

Canadian participation and contribution will be subject to funding approval from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Numerous agencies have already committed financial support to the project including the University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, National Archives of Canada, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, University of California at Los Angeles, State University of New York at Albany, Italian National Archives, Italian Research Council, Italian Archival Association, Irish National Archives, English Public Records Office, Dutch National Archives, Swedish National Archives, Australian National Archives, Australian Research Council, Open Society Archives, and CENSA.

At the Washington, DC meeting, hosted by the US National Archives and Records Administration, the intellectual framework and the terms of reference for the course of the formal project were established. The research has been structured into four interrelated domains of inquiry; 1. Identification of the requirements for preserving authentic electronic records; 2. Development of appraisal criteria and methods for electronic records; 3. Development of methods and identification of responsibilities for preserving authentic electronic records, and 4. Establishment of a framework for the formulation of policies, strategies, and standards.

By July 1, a web site will be established at www.slais.ubc.ca/inter pares/ to communicate the terms of reference for the project, executive summaries of research workshops,

interim research results, other key documents, and links to resources considered to be relevant to the project.

Additional information on the INTER PARES project may be obtained from the Project Coordinator, Peter Van Garderen. TEL (604) 822-2694 FAX (604) 822-6006 EMAIL peterv@intergate.bc.ca.