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Entering a New Era: The High-tech, High-touch Library
Dear Alumni, Parents, Friends, Students and Colleagues:

Today’s “netgener”s are tech-savvy, demanding and sophisticated, but still require care and guidance in finding, evaluating and using information. The weather, bus timetables, Google Maps, financial markets, and social networking sites such as Facebook jostle for space on their computer screens. The thirst for knowledge is met by many sources, and students quickly search and grab for the information they need.

Changing information needs and preferences require an active and committed response from academic libraries.

The Library is refurbishing its physical spaces in order to support and sustain positive learning outcomes. Our vibrant, student-centred Cyberthèque has replaced the poorly lit spaces and dated furnishings of the Redpath Library Building at street level. The Education Library and Curriculum Resources Centre and the Schulich Library of Science and Engineering have also undergone recent facelifts. Student response to the refurbishments has been extremely positive, but there is still so much more to do. Work will continue over the summer, with renovation of the Humanities and Social Sciences Library foyers already underway, and work slated for the Life Sciences Library and Howard Ross Library of Management.

The changes in the Library’s physical environment are complemented by the growth of the virtual library. Our e-resource holdings have expanded to upward of a million e-books and almost 40 000 e-journals, and resources that guide the use of and access to Library materials are increasingly moving online. The Library is embracing new technologies and catering to tech-savvy users by extending services into emerging online environments such as Second Life. At the same time, we are ensuring that records for items in our treasured Rare Books and Special Collections are made available in our online catalogue.

This edition of the Library’s In Focus highlights these efforts to enhance the resources, services and facilities the Library offers all its users – from fresh exhibitions showcasing diverse collections, to McGill Campaign priorities that realize and build upon the Library’s significant potential.

Please share any thoughts you may have regarding the developments outlined in this newsletter. And finally, I would like to stress how grateful we are for the amazing support we receive from our friends and benefactors. Without your generosity, advancing our mission would be a much more challenging task.

Janine Schmidt
Trenholme Director of Libraries
Building for the Future

Arts student Jimmy Craig is there almost every day. Management student Nadia Sayed has been there a few times and plans to go back. And Romain Bontemps, a second-year Communications student, looked so at home at his computer by the window that it was hard to believe he had never been there before.

Jimmy, Nadia, and Romain are just three of the many students studying, reading, researching or discussing assignments at the newly built Cyberthèque – a large-scale, multi-purpose Library facility that opened its doors to students in January.

The Cyberthèque does not look like a conventional library. Located at street level in the Redpath Library Building in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library, it boasts laptop workstations and 125 desktop computers in a comfortable, light-filled environment. Students sprawl across brightly coloured pouffes or seat themselves at stylish banquettes that would not look out of place at a hip urban café. And in the centre of the room are four glassed-in study pods, each housing a 52-inch screen that can be hooked up to a laptop for group study and presentations.

The facility’s look and feel owe much to local architect François Émond, BScArch’86, BArch’88, and his team at ékm architecture, who created the design with Toronto’s Bregman + Hamann Architects. The teams drew their inspiration from a concept brief that was carefully crafted by library staff. “We were responding to student feedback about our facilities,” explains Janine Schmidt, Trenholme Director of Libraries. “Today, libraries need to support a variety of experiences. Some students come to do research, others to work on assignments with colleagues. They are accessing e-resources as well as borrowing books. With the Cyberthèque, we set out to create an inspirational space that addresses students’ evolving needs.”

The facility also includes an e-classroom with computer screens, flexible seating and a sound system, as well as a production area with printers and photocopiers. Future plans include a vending machine selling supplies like pens and USB memory sticks – an idea that came directly from students.

The Cyberthèque is the latest step in the broad renewal of McGill Library facilities. Following the renovations started at the Macdonald Campus Library two years ago, major refurbishments have also taken place at the Schulich Library of Science and Engineering and the Education Library and Curriculum Resources Centre. The renovations have all included re-fashioning existing library space to maximize natural light and the addition of new computers and comfortable study areas, with the aim of providing more welcoming spaces and easier access to information.

Though it is just a few months old, it is clear that the Cyberthèque is meeting students’ needs. “It’s packed,” says librarian Kendall Wallis, BA’69, MLS’71, as he surveys the room from his post at the information desk – also dubbed the “genius bar.” “It was a guaranteed success.”

And what do the students think? “I find a place to read by the window and then hunker down for eight hours,” says Jimmy Craig, who’s working with five other students on a project explaining the commercialization of Valentine’s Day.

“I like the space a lot,” says Nadia Sayed. “It’s well-lit, and there are lots of laptop plugs.”

She pauses, looking for the right words. “It’s modern-looking, new. New things are always nice.”

Romain Bontemps agrees. “Oui, c’est cool,” he says as he turns back to his computer.
McGill Library Gains a Second Life

Sola Mertel was showing a visitor around the McGill Library. Once they reached the second floor, a slightly tricky process due to the absence of stairs, she pointed out a conference area where a recent staff meeting was held, and the new space that would soon house digital exhibitions.

“It’s best when everyone is sitting in his or her chair,” she said. “You can float, but it’s distracting.” The tour completed, Sola jumped off the roof and flew to the ground.

Sola Mertel is an avatar – a lifelike computer-generated personality and virtual tour guide. Her real-life counterpart is Louise O’Neill, BA’78, MLS’80, Associate Director of Library Technology Services, who controls Sola’s actions – right down to the acrobatic leap off the building. O’Neill is sitting – not floating – in her chair in an office on McGill’s main campus, while Sola is flying around McGill’s virtual library in “Cybrary City,” a neighbourhood in the 3D online virtual world of Second Life.

Creating a McGill library in Second Life is part of a concerted effort to meet the changing needs of students in the face of new technology. “Today’s students spend a lot of time on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. We need to take advantage of that and find new ways of bringing the library into their world,” says Trenholme Director of Libraries Janine Schmidt. She is quick to add that this is not about using technology for its own sake, but rather about extending the Library’s services in keeping with its core commitment to providing high-quality, client-centred products, services and programs.

The McGill Library was one of Canada’s first libraries to make the jump to Second Life, where at least 50 more libraries worldwide – mostly academic – have also taken up residence. “Second Life is still much like the Wild West,” says O’Neill, “except that it’s huge and getting bigger every day.” And the virtual world’s size is truly staggering – Sola is just one of its 13.6-million digital “residents.”

McGill’s virtual presence is further evidence of the shifting technological landscape that today’s libraries must contend with, and of the efforts required to remain relevant and valuable to their users. This particular one is still in the development stage. “On a basic level, we are just trying to replicate library services in Second Life,” explains O’Neill. Once the project is completed, visitors will be able to access the Library catalogue, digital exhibitions and other electronic resources, ask librarians for help or just hang out with fellow students. The Library plans to recreate the new Cyberthèque (see page 3) in Second Life, linking the physical library with the virtual one.

There are still a few kinks to work out and new opportunities to discover. “It will be very interesting to explore what we can do in Second Life that we can’t do in real life,” says O’Neill. “We can try things that don’t need an investment in bricks and mortar. Replicating services is important, but I think we need to take it further. It’s a whole other world, a whole other universe to explore.”


Renovation and renewal

Bright study spaces in the Schulich Library of Science and Engineering
**Tomorrow’s Library in the Making**

“T**his is not just about buying some more books and painting a few walls,” says Don Walcot, BA’63, Chair of the McGill Library Advancement Committee. “This is transformation. It’s about investing in new technologies. It’s about taking the Library into the future.”

Walcot’s enthusiasm for *Campaign McGill: History in the Making* is well-warranted; the University-wide fundraising drive has the highest starting goal in Canadian academic history – $750-million over five years – and the Library aims to raise $24 million toward that goal.

Walcot calls himself a “refocused retiree.” As well as chairing the aforementioned Committee, the former Chief Investment Officer for Bimcor (the investment management arm of Bell Canada Inc.) sits on a number of different boards, including the McGill Pension Investment Board, which he chairs. He has given McGill more than his counsel, with 45 years of private support under his belt and a particular focus on the McGill Library since 2001.

“People need to think of libraries in a new way, not just as places full of books for reading,” he says, referring to the pivotal role the library plays in information management.

“I like the Library – it’s where I got my education,” he says. “We need to make sure it continues to be a student-friendly experience.”

Today, the Library is the most heavily used facility on campus, and growing demand for library services has created an urgent need to renovate library spaces and upgrade technology. “Over the last several years, the McGill Library has profoundly transformed and reshaped its crucial role in the educational and research programs of the University,” says McGill Provost Anthony C. Masi. “Without private funding from philanthropic sources we would not have accomplished as much as we did.”

Key priorities for the Library include: renewing its flagship branch (the Humanities and Social Sciences Library); establishing learner-focused, student-centred branch libraries through renovation and redesign; building its unique collections; and broadening access through the digital library. Targeted support for these initiatives will enable the Library to continue to support innovative teaching, learning and research, and will help address the needs of current and future generations of scholars.

Walcot acknowledges that raising capital has some specific challenges. McGill graduates are spread out across the country and around the world, and fundraising efforts must therefore cover a good deal of ground. And not everyone understands the changing role of the library and the need for support, he says. “The challenge is to communicate that.”

Despite these challenges, Walcot is optimistic. He hopes to not only help the Library reach its current $24-million goal, but also establish a wider donor base that will support the Library well into the future.

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Along the River Nile

appy are the Nile travellers who start with a fair breeze on a brilliant afternoon,” wrote Amelia Edwards in *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, an account of the journey up the Egyptian river in 1870 that sparked her love of Egyptology. Dr. Richard Virr, PhD’80, agrees. As Head and Chief Curator of the McGill Library’s Rare Books and Special Collections, Virr freely admits that the Library’s winter 2008 exhibit, entitled “Nile Letters: From Montrealers and Others,” indulged a Nile dream of his own.

Virr did not have to go to Egypt to fulfill his dream. Instead, he and guest curator Mary Mason, MLS’79, took a trip through the Library’s collections. “We had a volume of letters from Peter Redpath, and we knew we had extensive holdings of 19th-century and early 20th-century photographs,” explains Virr.

Redpath was a major McGill benefactor, and his personal letters from Egypt, penned in 1873, were at the heart of the exhibit. “On Friday we drove to the mosque of the dancing dervishes, a large hall surrounded by a dome,” Redpath wrote in one. In another he describes viewing “the procession of the brides” upon his arrival in Cairo — the brides being the three daughters of the Viceroy and the three women married to his sons. The exhibit also featured excerpts of travel accounts from Redpath’s contemporaries such as Amelia Edwards and Florence Nightingale, and a selection of photographs and illustrations depicting many of the scenes described.

“These exhibits allow us to explore our holdings, to see what kinds of things are here,” says Virr. “They broadcast our collections to a wider community, and expose the treasures for all to see.” The Library’s collections support teaching, learning and research, and constitute a significant national cultural heritage. Exhibitions alert students, professors, and members of the community to what the Library has to offer. Even Egypt’s Consul-General for Montreal and Consul for Cultural and Educational Affairs dropped in to see the Nile exhibit. Rare Books and Special Collections also aim to make their holdings accessible online, a critical endeavour that Virr feels gains an added richness when students and researchers have a chance to see the originals.

“I wish I had more patience in writing,” wrote Redpath from Egypt. “To give a correct description of a street in Cairo would require more time and more space than I can accord in a single letter.” Likewise, to explore the Rare Books holdings would require more time and space than a single exhibit can afford. Happily there are more on the way. Until August, the Library is presenting an exhibit on Samuel de Champlain inspired by the 400th anniversary of Quebec City’s founding. It will be followed by “Tower of Babel or Universal Understanding? The Art of Translation in the Eighteenth Century,” which will coincide with the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference to be held at McGill in October.

"Nile Letters” occupied the Library’s main exhibition space in the McLennan Library Building foyer
As a former librarian, Miriam Tees could be accused of bias, but her respect for libraries is not just a result of the profession she practised for nearly 40 years. It also comes from a lifelong commitment to learning – Tees has four degrees from McGill.

Her history with the University goes back to her childhood. Her grandfather was Dean of Medicine, and until she was four years old she and her family lived within walking distance of the University grounds, often going for strolls around campus. It was only natural, then, that Tees became a student at McGill. She completed her first degree, a BA, in 1944.

The Library that Tees used then was very different from the one she knows and loves today. “When I was an undergrad, you couldn’t go into the stacks,” she recalls. “You had to fill out a form and the librarian would go and get your book for you.” Tees sees huge improvements in the way the McGill Library has evolved: students are allowed much more freedom, McGill’s collections have grown considerably, and librarians no longer need to type and file title, author and subject cards for each book.

After completing her undergraduate Library Science degree in 1951, Tees spent 26 years as a Royal Bank of Canada librarian before leaving to become a full-time faculty member in McGill’s Information Studies program, where she also completed her Master’s degree. She was a member of the University’s Senate Committee on Libraries for several years, (“way back,” according to Tees), and though long retired, she has continued her involvement both as a patron and a volunteer. She completed her fourth degree, a Master’s in Musicology, in 1996, and then spent six years as a volunteer at the Marvin Duchow Music Library, helping the Library catalogue new CDs.

At 85, Tees is still an active member of McGill’s community. She is both a student and a study group leader at the McGill Institute for Learning in Retirement, a network of mature learners who participate in self-directed education. And of course, she still frequents the Library.

“I love to learn,” she says. “I really do.”

Eric L’Italien, BA’07, first-year Law student

A typical study day for Eric L’Italien, BA’07, starts at 7:15 a.m. at the Nahum Gelber Law Library. The Library does not open its doors until 9:00 a.m., so he simply reads in the adjacent lounge, then heads to his usual spot on the third floor. Except for leaving to attend his classes and to grab a quick bite to eat, L’Italien is at the Library until 6:00 p.m., when he leaves for hockey practice.

“It's got a nice ambience and it's pretty quiet,” he says. But it's more than just a peaceful study spot for the 24-year-old Law student. For him, the Library is also a source of inspiration. “The building is new, but you can feel the history here,” he says. “With all the old books and legal texts, it exudes the law.”

For L’Italien, to be at the Library is to walk in the footsteps of the great legal scholars and practitioners who have strolled through the University’s halls.

L’Italien’s disciplined Library schedule helps him keep up with his Law studies while playing hockey with the McGill Redmen. He has played for the team since 2004, and earned a BA in Psychology before launching into a Law degree in 2007.

This latest academic year has been one of discovery for L’Italien, but with the help of McGill’s librarians he is becoming adept at navigating the Law Library’s databases and search engines. He does not yet know where his studies will take him. For now, the Library seems a good place to be.
A Bag About Town

As consumers increasingly shun disposable plastic shopping bags, the reusable cloth bag is becoming a must-have item. Enter the McGill Library bag, sporting the McGill logo and available in blue, red, and black.

Upon casual examination, one might think it is a pencil case. Fully compressed, it is a handy 3 x 6 inch package that can be slipped into a coat pocket or purse and pulled out when needed. Once unfolded, the bag is large enough to carry books, a laptop or even groceries. The bag has been spotted on the arms of McGill Library patrons on the Métro, around campus and at various Montreal hot spots.

Bags are distributed at Library events such as Orientation and Homecoming, and are available for free at branch library loans desks.

Charles Perrault: The Lessons of History

Teaching recently at the École des Hautes Études Commerciales, Charles Perrault, BEng’43, MEng’46, knew first-hand what his students were going through. Just a few years earlier, Perrault was sitting alongside McGill students, taking notes in class as he sought to improve his knowledge of history.

“I have great interest in public policy,” he explained. “History is essential to understanding complex social and economic problems. It helps us see how we got to where we are today.”

Perrault did not acquire his concern for public policy from the sidelines. He has worked on several government commissions, including the Conseil d’orientation économique du Québec.

In this recent stint as a student, Perrault noticed that the McGill Library needed a helping hand. While impressed by the dedicated staff, he believed that additional resources could greatly boost the vital services and resources the Library provides for faculty and students. Donors tend to favour their old faculties, explained Perrault, leaving the Library as the odd man out, despite the crucial role the Library plays for students.

That’s why Charles Perrault is leaving a bequest to the McGill Library, so that tomorrow’s students have access to the resources they will need to understand how history shapes the future.