

IS&T

MIT

News about Information Services and Technology throughout MIT

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Welcome to Information Services and Technology (IS&T)

• Robyn Fizz

You may have noticed something different about the publication you have in hand. It used to be called *i/s*, and the tag line was "News about information systems throughout MIT." It's now called *is&t*, and the tag line reads "News about information services and technology throughout MIT." What's in a name, or in this case, a name change?

This newsletter is published by the central information technology (IT) services department at MIT. As you may have observed in the online directory, read about in *TechTalk*, or heard in the hallway, that central IT department has a new name: Information Services and Technology (IS&T).

The Reasons Why

Last fall, Jerrold (Jerry) Grochow became MIT's new Vice President for Information Services and Technology. Grochow's role expands on that of his predecessor, James Bruce, since IS&T comprises two former organizations: Information Systems (IS) and Financial Systems Services (FSS).

According to Grochow, "One of my goals is to expand the service orientation of the combined IS and FSS departments. When I arrived at MIT in November, I asked that we make an

important, though perhaps symbolic, change in the organization name and my title. As I like to point out, the word 'Services' comes first." (For an in-depth interview with Jerry Grochow, see pages 3 and 4).

Grochow heads a restructured organization whose leadership team oversees five key technology areas (see the box on page 2). This reorganization has been done at a time of significant budget cuts. Due to MIT's financial situation, IS&T has needed to reduce its staff by about 20 percent. Although this represents a great loss to the community, IS&T has worked with MIT Human Resources to provide many support resources for staff who have been laid off, including job counseling and outplacement services.

IS&T is actively realigning teams under the new organizational structure. Once that structure has been finalized, an organization chart will be posted in the "About IS&T" section of the department web site at

<http://web.mit.edu/ist/about/>

The web site will also be undergoing changes to reflect the reorganization and the new name.

The main location for customer contacts will remain Building N42 at 211 Massachusetts Avenue. IS&T will vacate its leased space in Building W20 (the Student Center) by the end of June, with remaining services relocating to N42 at that time.

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WELCOME TO IS&T

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Potential Impacts of Budget Cuts

According to Grochow, "If we can change the way in which we provide certain services, over time we can provide even better services at lower cost." With support from community-based advisory committees, IS&T is making a conscientious effort to minimize impacts of the budget cuts on its clients. The community may experience some service impacts in the short term.

- Front-line help services are being consolidated.
- Ensuring the integrity of MIT's campus network remains a top priority, but response times to some network outages may be impacted.
- Presales advice, computer repairs, and Athena cluster maintenance will be outsourced. IS&T is working to make this transition as seamless as possible.
- SAP upgrades and implementation of SAP-related systems will continue, but development cycles may take more time.
- Equipment replacement programs for academic and administrative computing are being reappraised.

IS&T will reevaluate these changes in service as it adjusts to its budget constraints, and as it receives feedback from the community.



Collaboration Is Key

Another of Grochow's key goals is to foster collaboration with all the groups on campus that provide information technology services. To help set priorities going forward, IS&T will work actively with various groups on campus. These include the Council on Educational Technology, the SAPbiz group, the Administrative Systems and Policies Coordinating Council (ASPCC), and IT Partners, among others.

Grochow has also started a group, IT Leaders, made up of top IT managers from across campus. This group will come together on an informal basis. An important agenda item will be to discuss ways to present a common face to IT customers, so there is less

confusion about which groups provide which services.

IS&T and its technology partners will jointly determine which services are best provided for common use by IS&T, and which services are better provided locally by departments, labs, and centers. Collectively, these IT groups will identify new or enhanced services and technologies that need to be nurtured, and ensure that they are funded to the full extent of MIT's resources.

Finally, a new group – the Information Technology Coordinating Council (ITCC) – will be appointed by Provost Robert Brown and Executive Vice President John Curry, and chaired by Jerry Grochow. The ITCC will advise senior management on high-level IT issues and resource allocation decisions.

Getting in Touch with IS&T

IS&T has set up an e-mail address, <ist-transition@mit.edu>, for members of the community who have questions or concerns about IT services during this period of transition. This e-mail address will remain active through June 30, 2004.

If you want to weigh in about services or needs in a specific IT area, you can also write to Vice President Grochow or the appropriate Director (see box below). ☎

Leadership Team for Information Services and Technology (IS&T)

Jerry Grochow	Vice President for Information Services and Technology <jgrochow@mit.edu>
Vijay Kumar	Director, Academic Computing <vkumar@mit.edu>
Wayne Turner	Director, Administrative Computing <wturner@mit.edu>
Greg Anderson	Director, Client Support Services <ganderso@mit.edu>
Theresa Regan	Director, Operations and Infrastructure <tregan@mit.edu>
Allison Dolan	Director, Telephony and IS&T Shared Services <adolan@mit.edu>

- Academic Computing and Administrative Computing provide expertise and technology for two major client groups on campus: academics and administration.
- Client Support Services helps all members of the MIT community resolve day-to-day issues with information technology.
- Operations and Infrastructure runs MIT's common computing and network infrastructure – critical to academic, administrative, and research activities. They also operate central applications systems, such as Payroll, SAP, and Stellar.
- The Telephony group operates MIT's telephone system. Shared Services provides IS&T's internal finance, administration, services, and human resource functions.

MIT information services & technology

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On Information Services and Technology at MIT: A Talk with Jerry Grochow



On November 1, Jerrold Grochow became Vice President for Information Services and Technology at MIT. He has been leading the reorganization of the central department,

Information Services and Technology (IS&T), and making rounds throughout the community to hear what IS&T clients have to say. Here are his observations after three months at the helm.

is&t: You graduated from MIT and everyone in your immediate family has close ties to MIT. You know the Institute well, but have there been any surprises in your new role?

Grochow: I know the Institute well as of thirty years ago as a student, and I know the Institute as an alumnus and a parent, but I hadn't previously known MIT as a member of the administration. The past several months have been a learning experience for me, and I expect that to go on for quite some time.

I've met a lot of people not only within IS&T, but also around the Institute. I'm very interested in learning the business of MIT, which means meeting with faculty who are on the cutting edge of new ways of teaching, and meeting researchers in their environments. As in any organization that I've worked with over the years – and there have been many, because I was a consultant for a large part of my career – the first thing I try to do is understand what the people in those organizations do, since that helps me in providing computing services to them. I'm trying to do the same thing here.

Thirty years ago MIT didn't have a network and there were only a few computers on campus. Course 6 was Electrical Engineering only – no Computer Science. So MIT is clearly a different place. I view the Institute as a new place for me to learn about, but also a place that I know and love in a way I can't say about any other organization.

How will your background as a chief technology officer influence your leadership here?

I've had the title of Chief Technology Officer (CTO) a couple of times in my career. As the interface between the information technology (IT) group and

the organization, my role was to understand deeply both the technology and the business of the organization. It was my job to look for ways in which the technology could enhance the business, to allow it to change and grow.

I've had the role of Chief Information Officer (CIO) as well, and been directly responsible for day-to-day operations of large numbers of computer systems. But having been a CTO, focusing on the future, puts me in a terrific position here at MIT. Where's a better place than MIT to think about the next Athena, if you will? What's the next big thing? At MIT, I can talk to the designers of the next generation of network technology, I can talk to people at the Sloan School about how best to organize information services at a large institution. What better place to be to think about where we're headed – and then help us get there?

What's in the cards for information technology in the next five years? And what challenges does IS&T face, in the short and long term?

Changes in technology tend to go in cycles, almost a sine wave. Thirty years ago, we were developing large time-sharing systems; I worked on Multics as part of Project Mac. Time-sharing was the way to go based on the cost of computer technology and the state of telecommunications at that time. Then we went to minicomputers, then microcomputers, or PCs, then we started with networks, and guess what happened? We started to put larger and larger computers on those networks and went back up the slope of the sine wave. Personal computers can be thought of as highly sophisticated terminals to a very large time-sharing system, like we had 30 years ago. So we have to look at where we are now on that sine wave.

In the next five years, we're going to see further expansion in the use of Internet technology that will impact us directly at MIT. There are a lot of new devices coming in. Although PDAs (personal digital assistants) are not yet used heavily on this campus, there is a huge penetration of cell phones with short text messaging, and these devices are starting to have PDA and web browser functionality. That's going to have a big impact.

Today, almost everyone owns one or more computers, yet they still access very large computers, sometimes in other parts of the world. We're going to have to figure out how to integrate

all of these trends, to provide services for a range of computing capabilities wherever people may be, and as they move around.

As to short-term challenges, I have to acknowledge MIT's financial situation and the budget cuts. Everyone is aware of the situation and concerned about the implications for information services.

First and foremost, IS&T has been looking at how to minimize the impact of the cuts on central services, and we are working with advisory groups for different areas to make sure that we set priorities in the best possible way. There will be impacts – you can't cut 20 percent of the staff and budget without there being impacts. But we will work with the community to make sure that the business of MIT goes on.

At the same time, we're very cognizant of the need for us to look at *how* we do business. If we can change the way in which we provide certain services, over time we can provide even better services at lower cost.

What have you heard from clients as you've started to make the rounds?

I've been meeting with deans, department heads – administrative and academic – professors, and researchers, and also plan to meet with student groups, to get a feel for the pulse of the community. Overall, many people are happy with the level of computing services they get from IS&T. However, others are not so happy, whether it's because they don't have good wireless access or enough bandwidth or don't get enough personalized support. Sometimes the problem is with IS&T, sometimes it's a broader issue of how IT services are provided at MIT.

The challenge for IS&T is to understand those areas where clients are not satisfied and find ways to work with them to improve the situation. In some ways, it's that simple. But if what's going to make them happy is gigabit service to their desktop, that will cost a great deal of money, and we will have to find creative ways to meet their needs.

I have found that members of the community understand the situation IS&T faces as a result of the budget cuts. People are supportive of our efforts to involve the community in setting priorities and supportive of us as we determine our new organization. But we have to continue delivering service at the same time.

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A TALK WITH JERRY GROCHOW

continued from page 3

When I came to MIT, I was told that we would be merging Information Systems (IS) and Financial Systems Services (FSS). I was also told that one of my goals was to expand the service orientation of this combined group. I asked at that time that we make an important, though perhaps symbolic, change in my title – to Vice President for Information Services and Technology. As I like to point out, “Services” comes first.

You’re both head of a department, IS&T, and the vice president for information services and technology at MIT. Do these two roles overlap closely or do they stretch you in different directions?

I believe they overlap, but they are two roles. As a whole, MIT does not know how much it is spending on information services and technology. One of my jobs is to answer that question and bring to the surface enough information so that decision makers at all levels can look at that data and make better resource allocations.

IS&T provides less than half of the information services on this campus. There are at least 20 other groups on campus that provide IT services. One of my goals as Vice President for Information Services and Technology, not just as a department head, is to make it possible for all these people to work together to find ways to provide better information services to MIT.

I’ve started a group, IT Leaders, and I’m very pleased that many people who head these various groups accepted my invitation to come together on an informal basis. We will continue to do that.

There are many IT organizations on campus, but we don’t present a common face to customers. Sometimes there’s confusion about which group is providing which services. We can all do a better job by understanding what each group does and presenting a common face to the community. That will call for a lot of cooperation among these groups.

How can members of the community weigh in with you on their technology needs or concerns?

I’m looking at the whole structure of advisory groups related to information technology. There are groups with a

specific orientation: the Council on Educational Technology, the SAPbiz group, the Administrative Systems and Policies Coordinating Council (ASPCC), and others. Each provides advice in a specific area of technology and that’s important. So we will continue to work with these advisory groups. I do want to make sure that they are representative – that the people on them take their roles seriously as representing a larger constituency. We will publish the names of the people in these various groups, so that one way to give input will be to talk to your peers in these groups.

What we don’t have, but will be forming, is an overall information technology advisory group. Bob Brown (Provost) and John Curry (Executive Vice President) will appoint members of a group – the Information Technology Coordinating Council – which will have broad oversight for IT on this campus. This group, which I’ll chair, will advise Brown and Curry on the higher-level issues and resource allocation decisions.

Also, by forming the IT Leaders group I mentioned earlier, we’ve now got direct communication with the IT groups in the various departments. And we’re working with the members of IT Partners. So if you talk to your local IT person, that provides an indirect conduit to me. And, of course, I do respond to e-mail!

IS&T will provide several ways for members of the community to participate in making sure that MIT has the best information services and technology it can afford. It’s going to involve a lot of different moving parts.

Do you have any message to the community that you’d like to end with?

I got a call from a recruiting firm last March, looking to fill the role of a CIO in an academic institution, and I really wasn’t interested. Then the recruiter said, “It’s at MIT,” and I said, “That’s very different.” It wasn’t just because of my connections with MIT. I immediately saw the possibilities of where we could go and what we could do. I saw how I could bring my 30 years of experience to this campus, to provide information services in a way that will enable students to be better educated, and professors to do better teaching and research. That’s really what it’s all about. It’s very exciting, and I can’t think of anything else I’d rather be doing. ☉



This column presents announcements about IS&T-supported software. For more information about recent releases, see <http://web.mit.edu/swrt/>

OpenAFS Client for Stand-alone Red Hat Linux

In response to requests by Linux users on campus, Information Services and Technology (IS&T) has released an MIT-tailored installer for the OpenAFS client for stand-alone Red Hat Linux 9. This is the first installer provided by IS&T to allow non-Athena Linux users at MIT to gracefully utilize the AFS file service.

The OpenAFS 1.2.10 client gives authenticated, secure access to MIT’s AFS file service infrastructure, as well as to AFS file service infrastructure worldwide.

For details about the product and how to obtain it, see the OpenAFS at MIT page at

<http://itinfo.mit.edu/product?name=openafs&platform=Linux>

If you have questions about OpenAFS or need assistance in using it, contact the Computing Help Desk at <computing-help@mit.edu> or 253-1101.

Getting Started with MathML

MathML (Mathematical Markup Language) is an XML-based standard from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for describing mathematical notation and capturing both its structure and content. It provides a much-needed foundation for representing mathematical expressions on web pages. For equations, MathML offers several advantages over traditional file formats, such as GIF or JPEG images, or PDF – including fast loading speed, interactivity, accessibility, and archiving and searching capabilities.

To better support MathML, IS&T has created a web site with details on browser support, font installers, and tools for building web pages with MathML. You can access it at

<http://web.mit.edu/is/topics/webpublishing/mathml/>

If you want more information about MathML or need help in using it, contact the Academic Computing Support Team at <f_l@mit.edu> or 253-0115. ☉



Dreamweaver MX 7.0 (2004): Security and Styles

• Tim Griffin

Dreamweaver MX, from Macromedia, Inc., is MIT's recommended software for HTML editing and web page creation. The latest version, referred to as Dreamweaver MX 7.0 on campus, is also known as Dreamweaver MX 2004. It offers many convenient new features and some long-awaited additions.

New Features

In Dreamweaver MX 7.0, the interface is less cluttered. A smaller, updated insert bar has a customizable "favorites" area. A new start screen gives quick access to recently used files, many new templates, and help resources. Dreamweaver now supports the ability to copy and paste from Microsoft Word and Excel, along with cross-browser compatibility checking.

Macintosh users can manage files from the docked Assets panel instead of a separate window. For Windows users, a window shade feature joins the tabbed document feature for ease of movement between documents.

These interface improvements are welcome, but the real win for MIT web publishers is Dreamweaver's new support for secure file transfer and web standards.

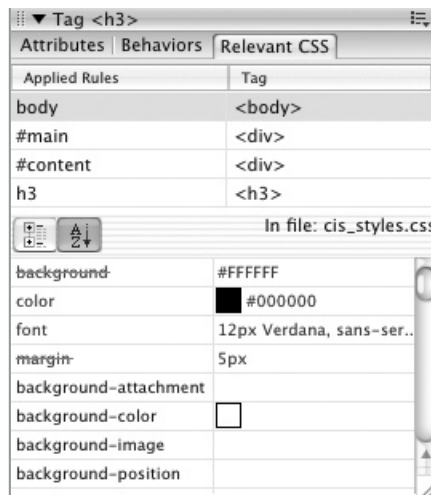
Integrated Secure File Transfer

Non-secure connections to the main MIT FTP servers are prohibited. Dreamweaver MX 7.0's secure file transfer utility lets you move files using the Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP). No third-party application is needed.

Information Services and Technology (IS&T) continues to support secure file transfers using Dreamweaver MX 6.x – in combination with helper software that encrypts usernames, passwords, and all data being transferred.

Promoting Web Standards

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) publishes a recommended set of web standards. Their purpose is to ensure that web content is accessible to as many viewers as possible via as many devices as possible – including wireless and hand-held devices. Developing with web standards makes universal access possible at a lower cost and with fewer resources.



The Relevant CSS tab lets you review and edit all styles.

Dreamweaver already supported accessibility and XHTML, the W3C's recommended markup standard. The key improvement in this version of Dreamweaver is its support for another web standard: Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). With this addition, Dreamweaver MX 7.0 enables developers to fully adhere to W3C web standards. To learn more about the benefits and legal obligations of developing with web standards, see the Code Standards page at

<http://web.mit.edu/is/web/reference/create/standards.html>

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

By default, the Dreamweaver MX 7.0 development workflow uses CSS. If you prefer to use tables for positioning page elements and the deprecated font tag for typography, you will need to switch these in the preference settings.

The interface makes using CSS much easier and renders your styles accurately in the Design view. The **CSS** tab in the Design panel lists all styles associated with the current document. From this panel you can

- Double-click and go straight to the code of your style sheet
- Left-click (click for Macintosh) and see all CSS selectors and their declared values in the **Relevant CSS** tab of the Tag Inspector panel (formerly the Code panel)
- Right-click (control-click for Macintosh) for a contextual menu with new style creation and editing options.

The **Relevant CSS** tab lets you review and edit all styles. The top section of the **Relevant CSS** tab lists the rules applied to the current selected page element. The lower section lets you edit the value of each CSS selector property. Properties defined for respective selectors appear in blue. Properties that aren't inherited or have been overridden are marked with a red strikethrough.

Another way to iteratively adjust property values is through the CSS Properties Inspector. You can access this by double-clicking a rule or selector in the **Relevant CSS** tab. The CSS Properties Inspector lets you focus on one selector rather than all selectors and should not be confused with the main Property Inspector. The Property Inspector (F3 from the Window menu) – a carryover from previous versions of Dreamweaver – lets you set font styles and page properties according to your general preference settings.

Accessibility

Dreamweaver MX 7.0 offers improved support for screen readers, some new accessible templates, and full keyboard navigation. These, along with existing features such as the Check Accessibility command and an accessibility validator, will aid in producing web sites that are compliant with MIT Accessibility Guidelines. You can view these at

<http://web.mit.edu/atic/www/sw/developweb.html>

Support

To learn more about Dreamweaver's new features – and which ones are supported by IS&T – go to the Dreamweaver at MIT web site at

<http://itinfo.mit.edu/product?name=dreamweaver>

This web site also has information about getting, installing, and using the software, including known issues. For help with features not supported by IS&T, consult the Macromedia Dreamweaver Support Center at

<http://www.macromedia.com/support/dreamweaver/>

Dreamweaver's Reference panel and built-in Help documentation are also extensive. If you have questions that these resources cannot answer, contact the Computing Help Desk at x3-1101 or <computing-help@mit.edu>. ☉



Quick Guide: Getting Help with Your Computing Problems

• Nate Herzog

If you work with computers, sooner or later you're going to need help. You may get a repeated error message, need assistance with a network connection or printing problem, or reach an impasse using a program. Where can you turn for answers?

Most applications include extensive built-in help, so that's a good place to start if your problem is software-related. You may also want to look at vendor materials – in print or on the Web. Information Services and Technology (IS&T) maintains an online FAQ for information technology (IT), called Stock Answers. It's available at <http://itinfo.mit.edu/answer/>

Still stuck? If your department or lab has its own technical support staff, you may want to ask for their help. You can also turn to the Computing Help Desk, run by IS&T. You can reach a Help Desk consultant in several ways:

- Phone: (617) 253-1101
- E-mail: <computing-help@mit.edu>
- Online via Casetracker: <http://casetracker.mit.edu/>

Fruitful Interactions

What follows are suggestions for making the most of your interactions with the Computing Help Desk – and other technical support venues. While these tips focus on interactions over the phone, some apply to submitting information via e-mail or Casetracker.

- *Understand that each consultant has areas of expertise.* When you call the Help Desk, you will talk to a consultant with wide-ranging computer experience; however, he or she may not have expertise in solving your particular problem. You may have to wait until your case can be brought to the right person's attention. No matter who you reach, be aware that some problems can take a long time to diagnose and fix.

- *Be prepared to give the Help Desk details about your computer setup.* This includes information about your computer configuration and answers to basic troubleshooting questions (see box).

Feel free to describe your computer problem in detail. The more informa-

tion consultants have to work with, the better. For example, if you're experiencing problems with e-mail, tell the consultant which e-mail program and operating system you're using, and how you're connected to the network.

Also tell the consultant about any recent changes to your computer (such as installing or upgrading software or downloading a virus).

If you don't know the answer to a question, it's okay to say so. Guessing at the answer may complicate the troubleshooting process.

- *Realize that not every problem merits a red alert.* Everyone who calls the Computing Help Desk wants his or her problem resolved as quickly as possible. Please keep in mind that the Help Desk is a shared community resource. The consulting staff works hard to address everyone's needs in a timely manner. Most calls are answered in 60 to 90

seconds, and staff usually respond to voice mail messages within 30 minutes. Simple problems are resolved within 15 minutes. If the problem is complex or needs to be passed to another IS&T group, resolution does take longer.

- *Speak clearly.* MIT is a diverse, multicultural community, and language barriers can sometimes cause confusion. Please don't be offended if a consultant asks you to repeat something or asks you to talk more slowly.



Also, while it may be easier for you to use the Speaker Phone feature, it's difficult for Help Desk staff to understand you when you do. Whenever possible, use your

handset or headset. Cell phone reception can also be poor, depending on your coverage area. Please cooperate if a consultant asks you to call back using another phone.

- *Timing is everything.* If you are going on a trip and taking a laptop, test it at least a week in advance. Make sure all your applications and network connections work. It's easier for consultants to fix problems when there's a reasonable amount of time to explore different solutions. If you give the Help Desk only a few hours notice, consultants may not be able to solve the problem in time.

- *The Help Desk can't fix everything.* Some problems are beyond the ability of the Help Desk to fix (e.g., your online banking web site won't work). If you are having a problem with software that IS&T does not support, the consulting staff will try to help you, but their expertise and experience with that software will be limited.

To find out what software is supported at MIT, start at

<http://itinfo.mit.edu/product?>

Helpful Information to Have on Hand Before Contacting the Help Desk

- Computer make and model (e.g., Dell Optiplex GX270)
- Operating system and version number (e.g., Windows XP Professional with Service Pack 1a)
- Your physical location (e.g., at MIT or working via a home network)
- For problems that appear to be network-related, your IP address (see <http://web.mit.edu/is/topics/network/ip.html#find-ipaddress>)
- For problems that appear to be software-related, the software name and version number (e.g., Eudora 5.2.3)

Basic troubleshooting questions to expect:

- Can you describe the symptoms exactly, including any error messages?
- Have you been able to do before what you are having trouble doing now? If so, when was the last time you did the task successfully?
- Has anything changed on your system recently – for example, have you installed new software?
- Have the circumstances of the problem changed over time?
- Is the problem repeatable?



Use MIT's NameConnector Service to Get in Touch

• Lee Ridgway

You need to call a faculty or staff member on campus, but there's no MIT Directory in sight and you don't have access to MIT's online directory. What to do? Call (617) 452-4111, say the person's name, and let MIT's NameConnector service put you through!

NameConnector is a voice-response directory system that was upgraded to extend operator-like service when the MIT switchboard was closed. MIT's initial implementation covered only departments and residence halls. In December, the service was expanded to include the names of faculty and staff.

How It Works

When you call x2-4111, the system presents a series of prompts:

- To ask for a faculty or staff member, press 1.
- To ask for a department or residence hall, wait for the beep after the

prompts, or press the * (asterisk) key to go directly to the beep.

- For a medical emergency, press 8.
- For a police emergency, press 9.
- To connect to the MIT operator, press 0 (zero).

After the you say the name of the person or department you want, the system repeats it for verification. If NameConnector responds with the wrong name, press * to cancel and follow the prompts to try again. If more than one person has the same name, the system will respond with a tie-breaker, usually by adding the person's department to the name.

Your Entry in NameConnector

NameConnector's information for faculty and staff consists of the first and last name as found in the MIT Directories. If you are also known by a nickname or an alternate last name, you can submit up to five alternatives to be added to your entry in the system.

To check your entry, call x2-4111 and ask for yourself. The system will repeat

your name – or its closest approximation. If the system pronunciation is incorrect, you can submit a correction.

Corrections and Problem Reporting

To submit corrections of pronunciation or additional names, send e-mail to <nameconnector@mit.edu>. Entries are usually updated within 24 hours. When using NameConnector, you can report problems with unrecognized requests and incorrect connections by pressing * and saying "problem report line." Leave a message stating your name, phone number, and the problem.

Caller Hints

When using NameConnector, speak clearly and naturally. You don't need to insert pauses between words, or over-enunciate. In situations with heavy background noise, especially when using cell or speaker phones, you may need to speak up or get closer to the phone.

For more about the NameConnector service, see

<http://web.mit.edu/is/services/telecommunications/nameconnector> ☎

High-Performance Computing: Building a Community of Practice

• Phillip Long and Patrick Dreher

The past decade has seen striking advances in computer networks, hardware, and software. These advances are reshaping how faculty use computing in their research and teaching. In 2002, a discovery project on Computationally Intensive Computing (CIC) was launched to examine needs, identify resources, and suggest ways to support faculty doing high-performance computing. Led by Pat Dreher, Associate Director in the Laboratory for Nuclear Science, the project team filed its report in February 2003:

<http://web.mit.edu/is/discovery/intensive/>

The recommendations address CIC services in communications, education, research, and infrastructure support.

- *CIC Communications.* As is typical at most complex research universities, MIT faculty find it hard to learn what CIC assets exist in the community.

There is deep and broad expertise among MIT faculty and research staff, but there hasn't been a clearinghouse for posting CIC-related questions or connecting with those who have specific expertise. What's needed is a community of practice for those doing work in high-performance computing and a place to share knowledge. In answer to this need, Information Services and Technology (IS&T) has established the CIC Community of Practice web site at

<http://stellar.mit.edu/S/project/computationallyinten/>

Open to anyone in the community with an MIT network account, this web site contains information, pointers, and a discussion forum, including a FAQ for researchers and instructors. The web site is intended to evolve, based on the community's needs and responses.

- *CIC in Education.* The use of high-performance computing for simulations, visualization, and other computationally intensive problems can significantly enhance teaching and learning. Work is starting on a pilot project to make high-performance computing resources available to selected undergraduate courses.

- *CIC in Research.* The CIC team has recommended that MIT avoid trying to deliver a "one-size-fits-all" high-performance computing solution to meet the diverse needs of the MIT research community. Researchers know best how to provide for their high-performance computing needs. Better infrastructure support, on the other hand, is needed.

- *CIC in Research Computing Infrastructure.* Although the CIC team recommended that MIT should not be in the business of providing research computing, it did identify areas where MIT and IS&T can play an important role in assisting researchers through support of the MIT infrastructure. Such areas include high-speed networks and facilities to locate high-performance computing clusters at the Institute. IS&T is currently investigating options based on the team's report.

For More Information

If you have ideas about the CIC initiative that you'd like to discuss, contact Phil Long at <pdlong@mit.edu> or Pat Dreher at <dreher@mit.edu>. ☎



If you don't know where to get help for your computer, network, or telephone problems, dial one of the help lines listed to the right.

If you prefer to use e-mail, you can send your questions to the corresponding e-mail addresses on the far right. (When logged into Athena, you can also use the `olc` command to send questions to Athena's online consultants.)

You can also submit a question online via CaseTracker at

<http://casetracker.mit.edu/>

For help with...

Dial...

Or send a message to...

General computing questions (Macintosh, Windows, Linux, and network/connectivity)	253-1101	computing-help@mit.edu
Administrative applications	252-1177	business-help@mit.edu
Athena Computing Environment	253-4435	olc@mit.edu
Computer and printer repairs	253-0815	pcservice@mit.edu
Computer presales consulting	253-7686	mcc@mit.edu
Disabilities and computing	253-7808	atic@mit.edu
Telephone repairs	253-4357	3help@mit.edu
Unix (by subscription)	253-1103	unix-vms-help@mit.edu
Voice mail	253-3677	telecom-csr@mit.edu



Surf Sites: Resources for Relieving Stress

Many Americans report feeling high levels of stress, and members of the MIT community are not exempt from this trend – in fact, they may personify it. Technology probably contributes to this phenomenon by making us more available than ever before: through e-mail, cell phones, instant messaging, and the portability of laptops and PDAs.

It's important to take the time to unwind. The sites on the right – suggested by MIT Medical's Center for Health Promotion and Wellness – give insights on ways to relieve stress. To visit the Center's web site, go to

<http://web.mit.edu/medical/a-center.html>

Desktop Yoga – Prevention and Healing of RSI and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

<http://www.mydailyyoga.com/>

Insomnia? 30 Simple Tips to Help You Get to Sleep

<http://www.well.com/user/mick/insomnia/>

Mind/Body Medical Institute

<http://www.mbmi.org/>

Relaxation Techniques, Meditation, Imagery for Stress Management

<http://stress.about.com/cs/relaxation/>

Stress at Work

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress/>

Stress – Coping With Everyday Problems

<http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/41.cfm>

Yoga Journal Magazine

<http://www.yogajournal.com/>

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