information services and technology

IS&T MIT

News about Information Services and technology throughout MIT

Volume 21 • Number 2 November / December 2005

Inside! Schedules of Hands-on Training Courses and Free Computer Events

Freshman Seminar Makes the Most of Weblogs

• Katie Livingston-Vale

First-year students at MIT have the option of enrolling in a freshman advising seminar, a weekly class taught by an academic advisor. Members of IS&T Academic Computing have been involved in teaching some of these subjects over the last few years; this past semester Dr. Katie Livingston-Vale and Dr. Philip Long co-taught a new advising seminar centering on the topic of blogs – with help from associate advisor Vivian Leung. The class was offered under the auspices of the Edgerton Center.

Because weblogs, or blogs, have become so popular – Harper's Index states that a new blog is created every second! – the advisors thought they might be a useful tool in helping new MIT students reflect on their transition to the Institute. Here's the class description that appeared this past summer in the advising handbook:

> **SP.727**
> **Blogs, Diaries, Journals and Portfolios: Reflecting on Your First Semester Here**
>
> Learn how to use different multimedia tools such as blogging software, e-portfolios, and photo-editing programs to create and maintain an online journal. We'll also examine specific examples of online and traditional diarists, and discuss ways in which blogs and portfolios can help you think about your experiences inside and outside of the classroom. During our meetings you will create an entry that looks back over your classes or events of the previous week. Because MIT is such a fast-paced environment, many students feel that their lives are just "happening" without any time to actually process the events. This seminar offers you a unique opportunity to take the time for reflection. After taking this seminar, we hope that you will continue to practice reflection throughout your MIT career – and beyond.

Six students, five female and one male, signed up for the class. It came as something of a surprise to the advisors that four of the six already had blogs. Several blog and other Internet content companies – including Xanga, Facebook, and MySpace – have been marketing heavily to high school students, and these freshmen were interested in keeping blogs as a way to stay in touch with friends and family back home.

Because Livingston-Vale and Long wanted the students to feel comfortable writing about potentially personal topics, they also set up a private blog site for the class using a pilot Academic Computing blog service. This Movable-Type-based blog allowed students to choose whether to make their posts readable to the rest of the class or only to the instructors and associate advisor. For the most part, students used their Xanga blogs, which are world-readable.

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Weblogs

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In Class

At the start of each class, the group chatted about the events of the week, and enjoyed snacks provided by the associate advisor – an integral part of most advising seminars. Next, the advisors provided a list of blogs for the students to view as inspiration for the day. These included

- *Citizen journalism blogs* such as those written by survivors of the summer London suicide bombings, West Bank settlers faced with eviction, and people displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- *"Stuff I found interesting blogs"* by people who like to collect and share information about technical or cultural items (e.g., notmartha.org, kottke.org, drivetime.ravijain.org – the latter a video-based blog by a resident of Boston).
- *Project blogs* by individuals who want to document a complex project they've undertaken. Examples included a blog by Mark Bridger at

  `http://www.atsweb.neu.edu/math/cp/blog/`

  analyzing the math and science in the TV show *Numb3rs* and the Blue Blog at

  `http://alison.knitsmiths.us`

  by knitter Alison Hansel, who guest-lectured about life as a knitting blogger.
- *Technical and productivity blogs* with advice on personal productivity, gadgets, and the like (for example, lifehacker.com, 43folders.com, digg.com, and technorati.com).
- Other resources such as *Wikipedia*, the free online encyclopedia that anyone can edit; RSS feeds; and aggregators such as Bloglines.

After the lecture portion of each class, the students were given time to compose a blog entry for the week. While some students blogged a few times a week outside of class, others relied on the in-class time to reflect on the previous few days.

Toward the end of the semester, Livingston-Vale and Long gave the students directed exercises and links provided by the Academic Resource Center to help them plan how they would get their work done and manage their time through exams. Each week the advisors reviewed the students' blog entries and commented on them.

A Better Lens on Student Lives

The process of presenting blogs and reading student blogs enabled Livingston-Vale and Long to get to know their advisees in a way not previously possible. Students who normally might have put on a brave face about their trepidation at being so far from home admitted or at least alluded to this in their blogs. Students who felt overwhelmed by a subject but were embarrassed to ask for help seemed more likely to come clean about it in their blogs. The advisors no longer had to wait until fifth-week flags were issued to have an idea of whether or not a student was struggling.

Reading blog postings also gave the advisors glimpses into student lives that they had never had before – the social norms in particular dormitories and living groups, issues relating to substance use among peers, and new insights as to how students manage their time. Even if this class isn't offered next year, Livingston-Vale and Long plan to ask their future advisees for the address of their blogs. The role of an academic advisor is to help students learn how to be successful at MIT. Based on the experience of SP.727, blogs are proving to be a vital tool in doing that well.

MIT Press Launches Insightful Weblog

Why is the Silicon Valley more innovative than Boston's Route 128? One theory, proposed by economist James Rebitzer, is that Silicon Valley has a strong culture of job-hopping, so innovation bleeds from one firm to another. He makes reference to *Design Rules: The Power of Modularity*, an MIT Press book which argues that "when there is a lot of technological uncertainty, the fastest way to find the best solution is to permit lots of independent experiments. That requires modular designs rather than tightly integrated systems."

You can find stimulating musings like this – on topics ranging from architecture to science fiction – by visiting the MIT PressLog at

`http://mitpress.mit.edu/presslog/`

This weblog provides breaking news on MIT Press books and fresh perspectives from its roster of authors. Contributors include MIT professors such as Thomas Kochan, Yossi Sheffi, and Eric von Hippel, along with experts such as Bruce Abramson on the digital economy, and John Thackara on design trends in a device-crazed world.

The MIT PressLog

Keeping It Current

The MIT PressLog focuses on current events and issues – from Hurricane Katrina to the morality of music file sharing. Recent posts have discussed how the Internet changes everything for scholarly communication; whether China and India are ready to become superpowers; and even why there are no restaurants along the Charles River.

To keep up, subscribe to the MIT PressLog's RSS feed. The MIT Press also welcomes feedback. You can post comments on any of the blog's entries, or contact the MIT Press by sending mail to <publicity@mitpress.mit.edu>.

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`http://web.mit.edu/ist/news/`

Dreamweaver 8 Boosts Support for Cascading Style Sheets

• Esther Yanow and Margaret Wong

Dreamweaver is the software for web design supported by IS&T. The latest version from Macromedia, Dreamweaver 8, makes it easier to work with Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). It also has new features for page layout and an evaluation tool for accessibility.

A Slew of the New

Visual aids for CSS probably top the list of important new features in Dreamweaver 8, but many new tools enhance productivity.

User Interface

Dreamweaver 8's user interface lets you move around a file more efficiently.

- *Snap-to guides* let you accurately place and align objects on a page.
- The *Zoom tool* lets you quickly zoom in for close work or zoom out to preview a page.
- The *Coding tool bar,* in the left gutter of Code View, provides buttons for common coding tasks – from selecting parent tags to inserting comments.
- *Code collapse* lets you highlight sections of code and temporarily hide them from Code View. This is especially useful when you are working with large files, letting you jump from one relevant area of code to another.
- The *tabbed interface*, new for the Macintosh and already standard on Windows, gives you easy access to open files when editing.

CSS Visual Aids and Panel

Dreamweaver 8 offers three visual aids for CSS, under **View>Visual Aids**.

- *CSS Layout Backgrounds* add color to different classes/IDs, highlighting complex nesting schemes.
- The *CSS Layout Box Model* displays margin and padding.
- *CSS Layout Outlines* add dashed lines around the tags that mark sections of the page.

The new CSS panel gives you access to all of Dreamweaver's CSS functionality in one place. This panel reduces clutter, lets you quickly see all the styles applied to an element, and makes it easier to edit properties.

The CSS Panel puts styles and properties at your fingertips.

For an overview of CSS in Dreamweaver 8, go to

`http://www.macromedia.com/devnet/dreamweaver/css.html`

Background FTP (File Upload)

In previous versions, if you uploaded a large file to a server, you had to wait for it to finish loading before you could work on other files. Dreamweaver 8 now uploads files in the background.

Previewing

Previewing no longer creates temporary files by default. Instead, previewing loads the local file into your browser. You can "refresh" the browser and see updates made to the local file.

Default Extension and Doc Type

In Preferences, you can now specify the default extension to be .html and also set the default document type (e.g., XHTML transitional, strict).

Obtaining Dreamweaver 8

IS&T has negotiated a volume license agreement with Macromedia to provide a limited number of Dreamweaver 8 licenses to the community. In an effort to increase the types of software that IS&T can provide faculty and staff at significant discounts, IS&T has begun to charge a nominal fee for selected software, such as Dreamweaver. IS&T's goal is to recover some of its costs so that it can purchase other volume-licensed software that the community wants. For details on this nominal fee experiment, visit

`http://web.mit.edu/ist/products/vsls/nominalfee.html`

Faculty and staff should first check with their local software liaison to find out if a Dreamweaver 8 license has already been ordered for them. **Note:** For a list of liaisons, see

`http://web.mit.edu/ist/services/software/msca-osliaisons.html`

If an order has not been placed, faculty and staff can fill out a request form for Dreamweaver 8 (certificates required) on the Volume Site License Software page at

`https://web.mit.edu/ist/products/vsls/`

This same page also links to a form that MIT students can fill out to apply for one of a limited number of Dreamweaver 8 licenses available for academic use, on a temporary basis, at no charge.

Training and Documentation

IS&T has developed a free Quick Start class on Dreamweaver 8's new features, and has updated its web publishing classes. For details, go to

`http://itinfo.mit.edu/article.php?id=7991`

To find out more about using Dreamweaver at MIT, visit these sites:

Macintosh
`http://itinfo.mit.edu/product.php?vid=695`

Windows
`http://itinfo.mit.edu/product?vid=697`

In addition, Macromedia's site at

`http://www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver/`

provides a good introduction to the software. To get the latest news updates from Macromedia, subscribe to the Dreamweaver RSS feed at

`http://www.macromedia.com/go/rss_dreamweaver`

Support

IS&T supports some Dreamweaver 8 features and not others. For details, see

`http://itinfo.mit.edu/article.php?id=7974`

For help with features not supported by IS&T, consult the Dreamweaver Support Center at

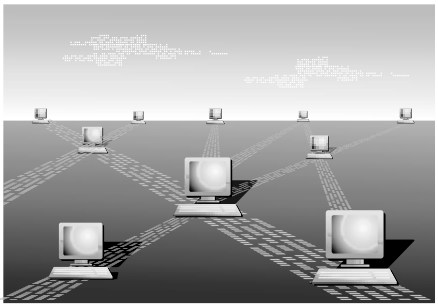
`http://www.macromedia.com/support/dreamweaver/`

Dreamweaver's Reference panel and built-in Help are also extensive. If you have questions that these resources can't answer, contact the Computing Help Desk at 253-1101 or <computing-help@mit.edu>.

Network Terms: How Your Computing Device Connects

• Jag Patel

Most computing devices these days, including laptops, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and printers, can connect to a network. If you're about to connect a device, you may encounter some terms that are new to you. This article covers some of the terminology you may come across.



Wired and Wireless

A "network ready" device uses a card or built-in hardware to connect. If you can connect a device to a network with a cable, it probably has built-in **Ethernet**. Ethernet is a networking standard for wired local area networks. If you can connect a device using wireless, it probably has wireless network hardware that supports one or more wireless standards. Any **Wi-Fi**-compliant card that supports **802.11 a/b/g standards** will work with MIT's wireless network infrastructure. Wi-Fi (short for "wireless fidelity") is a certification for wireless products that have passed interoperability testing requirements set by the Wi-Fi Alliance.

If your device uses a cable, you'll need to plug it into a **jack** that's been activated for **MIT network service**. A jack is a piece of hardware fastened to the wall into which you can plug your phone and computer. Behind the wall, the jack is wired to IS&T network equipment. This equipment facilitates communication between your computer and others on MIT's network (MITnet) and the Internet. Phone and Ethernet connections use the same physical jacks, but are wired differently. IS&T typically labels network jacks with a green label that says "data" or "network."

Devices with wireless hardware connect to the network by interacting with MIT's **wireless access points**. These access points are, in turn, wired to MITnet, enabling you to use your wireless device in the same way you would use a wired machine. On campus, wireless coverage continues to increase in availability and speed.

Address for Success

Once connected, each device needs a unique address on the Internet. This address, known as an **IP address**, is numeric (e.g., 18.7.22.69). IP stands for Internet Protocol, the method by which data is sent from one computer to another over the Internet. On campus, an IP address works anywhere in the building for which it was created.

Since IP addresses are difficult to remember, the Internet also lets you specify a computer by name using the **domain name service (DNS)**. For example, an MIT computer might have 18.92.0.209 as its IP address and a hostname of student.mit.edu. The first part ("student") is the name of the machine itself, while everything else ("mit.edu") is the domain name. A series of special DNS servers around the world (known as "name servers") keep track of the name/address information for all the computers on the Internet. MIT runs local DNS servers to translate host names into equivalent IP addresses and vice versa.

The MIT community is increasingly mobile, carrying computing devices that access the Internet in many locations. IS&T runs **Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP)** services, which allow computers to connect to MITnet without having to reconfigure network settings (including the IP address) each time the computer is moved to a new location. DHCP services let staff, students, and visitors quickly register a new computing device for use on MITnet. If you have connected to the Internet using open wireless services at an airport, hotel, or café, you were using DHCP services to get connected.

For More Information

For a collection of links about MITnet and network services at MIT, go to

`http://web.mit.edu/ist/topics/network/`

This page includes information on getting network-related help.

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

IS&T Offers Training for Email Migration to IMAP

In support of the strategic direction to use IMAP technology for email services, IS&T now supports Microsoft's applications (Outlook Express or Outlook 2003) for Windows users and Apple's application (Apple Mail) for Macintosh users. These full-featured applications – which come standard as part of your operating system (OS) – simplify the maintenance of your computer because they can receive automatic upgrades and security fixes, much like your OS.

IS&T has scheduled various IAP sessions to ease the migration process for users of Eudora 5.2.1 (Windows) moving to Outlook Express or Outlook 2003 and for users of Eudora 6.1 (Macintosh) moving to Apple Mail. With other IT colleagues at MIT, IS&T will offer the following sessions for the community:

- *Migration Overview* – a discussion of the overall migration process
- *Walk-in Clinic* – hands-on assistance for those with a laptop who are ready to migrate
- *Quick Start* – a class on email management for users who have already migrated

For a schedule of these IAP sessions, see

`http://web.mit.edu/swrt/releases/emailmigration/#events`

As needed, IS&T consultants will make on-site visits to those who have asked for assistance but don't have a portable machine. If you're an IT Partner in a department, lab, or center that needs assistance, send mail to <email-migration@mit.edu>.

For more on email migration, see

`http://web.mit.edu/ist/topics/email/migration.html`

Eudora Versions Slated for Retirement

On a related note, IS&T will ramp down support for Eudora 5.2.1 (Windows) and Eudora 6.1 (Macintosh) on January 31, 2006. This decision has been made in consultation with IT colleagues across campus. For details, see

`http://itinfo.mit.edu/article.php?id=7940`

Key Steps for Coping with Identity Theft

• Andrew Shafer

In the previous issue, this column offered tips on how to mitigate the risk of identity theft. But even when you exercise caution, there's still a chance your identity could be stolen. If this does happen, you need to act quickly. Here's what to do to recover from identity theft.

Forms, Phone Calls, Records

Responding to identify theft requires a lot of form-filling, phone calls, and record-keeping. When you suspect or know that someone has fraudulently used your name – for example, to open an account – follow these steps.

1. Contact one of the three major credit bureaus – Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion – to place an initial 90-day fraud alert on your report. (For contact information, go to the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse; see the URL at the end of this article).

   The company you contact will notify the other credit bureaus.

   Examine the credit report you receive for any inaccuracies. Report these inaccuracies, explaining your situation, to both the creditor and credit bureau.
2. Contact your local law enforcement to file an identity theft report. Be sure that the report lists the fraudulent accounts. You may need to send a copy of this report to creditors who ask for it. Also send a copy to the credit bureau and ask to have a seven-year fraud alert placed on your account.
3. File a fraud complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that includes your police report number. Also fill out the FTC's standard identity theft affidavit. You can get the form and affidavit from

   `http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/`

   The FTC acts as an information clearinghouse, providing data and statistics to law enforcement.
4. Contact the creditors on any new or tampered accounts to have the account closed or the number changed. You may need to provide the police report and/or FTC affidavit, or fill out the creditor's own affidavit.

In all of these steps, use certified return-receipt mail for your records. Log all conversations in a notebook, and follow them up with a letter noting what was said and with whom. In the letter, ask for written confirmation (e.g., that the account has been closed and you are not responsible for the charges). Keep track of your time and expenses in case you need to file a civil suit or can deduct the expenses on your taxes. Last but not least, don't pay any portion of the bill on a fraudulent expense or account.

In-Depth Guidance

For a detailed fact sheet on dealing with identity theft, go to the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse site at

`http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs17a.htm`

From Blogs to Usability, IS&T Embraces IAP

• Kate Kibbee

It may be cold out there, but the light from countless computers and PDAs glows on. Information technology continues to advance, and IS&T covers new trends and continuing concerns in its IAP offerings. The sessions noted here are just a sampling. For a complete listing, see

`http://student.mit.edu/iap/nsis.html`

Why Usability? – Redux

This series addresses why making things usable and accessible is important at work and in our everyday lives.

Making a Business Case for Accessibility
Jan 11, 1:30–3:00pm, 3-133

HCI and Lower Literacy Populations
Jan 18, 1:30–3:00pm, 3-133

Interface Design: The Last Stumbling Block
Jan 25, 1:30–3:00pm, 3-133

Bringing Research Tools to the Classroom
Jan 12, 1:00–2:00pm, 1-115

This session will feature a live demo of GenePattern as a front end for the High Performance Computing (HPC) Beowulf Cluster. The instructors will discuss the potential of computational tools in undergraduate teaching, identifying support requirements and assessing the educational value of HPC clusters.

HR-Payroll Project "Sneak Preview"
Jan 20, 9:00am–4:00pm, 10-105

Come see demonstrations of the new Employee Self Service (ESS) and SAPweb applications that will be available when the SAP Payroll system is implemented. Jim Morgan, Controller, and Laura Avakian, Vice President for Human Resources, will be on hand to discuss these initiatives.

9:30–10:30am *Demo of ESS Support and Service Staff Time Sheet Entry Application and Time Sheet Correction Form*

10:45–11:45am *Demo of ESS Student Time Sheet Entry Application and Time Sheet Correction Form*

12:15–1:00pm *A Conversation with Project Sponsors Jim Morgan and Laura Avakian*

1:15–2:15pm *Demo of SAPweb Time Sheet Approval and Distribution Review Application, and Time Sheet Correction Form*

2:30–3:30pm *Demo of SAPweb eDACCA and eSDS Applications*

Using Blogs and Wikis for Education
Jan 26, 2:00–3:30pm, 3-133

This panel focuses on staff who are using blogs to support teaching or other work at MIT. One highlight will be a discussion about the blogs maintained by members of MIT's Office of Admissions, who write to give potential students and others a better idea of the place. Curious yourself? Check out blogs by presenters Matt McGann (http://matt.mitblogs.com/) and Ben Jones (http://ben.mitblogs.com/).

This column presents tips about computing. If you have a question you would like to see answered here, send it via email to <techtips@mit.edu>.

For more information technology Q&As, check the IS&T Stock Answers database at

`http://itinfo.mit.edu/answer/`

Q I want to paste text from a formatted Microsoft Word file into Dreamweaver, but strip out the formatting so that I can apply my own CSS style sheet to the text. How do I do this?

A Dreamweaver 8's Paste Special command gives you more options than in previous versions. To apply a CSS style sheet to a file created in Word, follow these steps:

1. Select the text in Word and copy it to your clipboard.
2. In Dreamweaver, create a new blank document, then choose **Edit>Paste Special**.
3. Decide how much formatting, if any, you wish to keep. You can choose from four options:
   - Text only
   - Text with structure (paragraphs, lists, tables)
   - Text with structure plus basic formatting (bold, italic)
   - Text with structure plus full formatting (bold, italic, styles)
4. Click **OK**.
5. Select the text. Choose **Text>CSS Styles** and pick the style you want.

For an excellent tutorial on the Paste Special command, go to

`http://www.macromedia.com/devnet/dreamweaver/articles/paste_special.html`

Q Do I need an FTP program such as Fetch or SecureFX to upload the web site I created in Dreamweaver to Athena?

A No, you don't need other software to securely transfer your files. Whether you're on a Windows or Macintosh machine, you can configure Dreamweaver 8 to use SSH to connect to your Athena web space. For instructions, see

`http://itinfo.mit.edu/article.php?id=7980`

Q I read that Dreamweaver 8 supports adding Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds to web pages. Does this involve much coding?

A Dreamweaver 8 offers drag-and-drop integration of RSS feeds into web sites. However, for security reasons, IS&T does not support this implementation. Instead, you can use the IS&T RSS Feed Converter at

`http://rss.mit.edu/`

Q I'm an early adopter of Dreamweaver 8. Where can I find out about issues that other users are encountering?

A Macromedia has an "Emerging Issues" section for each of its products. For Dreamweaver 8, see

`http://www.macromedia.com/cfusion/knowledgebase/index.cfm?id=a3f38dcf`

Speak Up or Listen Up: Podcasts at MIT

• Lisa Mayer

As a web trend, podcasting hit its stride in the spring of 2005. By August, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) officially moved the term "podcast" from technology jargon to certified vernacular. The word is defined by the OED as "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player."

How Does It Work?

A podcast is composed of an RSS feed written in XML plus multimedia "episode" files. The RSS feed tells your podcatching client software (e.g., iTunes or Juice) when there is a new episode ready to be downloaded. Originally podcasts were limited to audio MP3 files. Recently, video files have become popular as podcast episodes.

Anyone with a computer and software such as iTunes or iPodder can subscribe and listen to podcasts. Once you've downloaded the files to your computer, you can transfer them to a handheld multimedia player. Any MP3 player will work for the audio files – you are not limited to iPod!

IS&T Support

IS&T recently launched the Podcasts at MIT web site at

`http://web.mit.edu/ist/podcasts/`

to increase awareness of this new technology. MIT departments, labs, and centers can use the submission form on the site to post podcasts of lectures, seminars, and other presentations. MIT-sponsored events such as forums and readings are also welcome. Documentation on the site steps you through how to create a podcast.

Members of the community can post less formal fare – such as radio programs – on the IS&T Podcast Wiki at

`http://istwiki.mit.edu/istwiki/podcasts/`

All submissions must be free of copyright infringement. IS&T recommends that contributors look into getting a Creative Commons license, which enables copyright holders to grant some of their rights to the public while retaining others. For details, see

`http://creativecommons.org/`

Staying Tuned In

If you are interested in posting and receiving information on podcasting trends, initiatives, or peer support, you can subscribe to MIT's podcast mailing list. Visit

`https://ca.mit.edu/moira/request.jhtml`

and add yourself to the podcast-news@mit.edu list (certificates required).

IS&T welcomes your feedback on this project. Send suggestions or questions to <podcast-pilot@mit.edu>.

Tips for Running Web Surveys at MIT

• Jag Patel and Greg Harris

In the last two years, the MIT Web Survey Service administered close to sixty surveys for the MIT community. Survey topics included undergraduate satisfaction with campus resources, graduate student assessment of advising, alumni and parent satisfaction, faculty quality of life, commuting habits of students and employees, and feedback to improve publications. Several tips have emerged from running these surveys that may be useful as you plan your own. (Many of these tips also apply to paper-based surveys.)

Contacts and Clearance

At the outset, consider consulting the Institutional Research (IR) staff in the Office of the Provost. IR staff provide analytical and research support to the Provost, academic departments, research laboratories, and centers. They run large-scale MIT surveys, promote good survey practices, and coordinate an Institute survey schedule to avoid overlapping surveys.

The questions you are trying to answer may have been asked on a past or upcoming survey. IR staff can assist MIT groups by supplying feedback on the survey questions and methodology.

Before any survey can go out at the Institute, it must be reviewed by the MIT Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES). Many MIT surveys fall under exempt status, but you must still file an application with COUHES. To download the application, or to read the COUHES guidelines for surveys, go to

`http://web.mit.edu/committees/couhes/`

Remember, too, that each population at MIT has an "owner" who must grant approval before that population can be surveyed. Undergraduates fall under the authority of the Dean for Undergraduate Education. The Dean for Graduate Students must give permission to survey graduate students. The Chair of the Faculty and Provost must approve surveys sent to faculty, and the Vice President for Human Resources must approve surveys sent to other employees on campus. In addition, you can't send surveys to members of bargaining units without agreement from their unions.

Questions and Then Some

Designing a survey involves more than the questions. You also need to develop an invitation, a codebook, and a closing page.

It's common to send an invitation to alert people to the survey. If possible, have the sender of the invitation be someone the survey population will recognize, such as the head of your department. This invitation may include a number of statements:

- Purpose of the survey
- Compelling reason (if any) to fill out the survey
- Incentives
- How long the survey will take (*"This survey has 3 short pages of questions that should take 8 to 10 minutes to fill out."*)
- How the data will be used
- Who to contact with questions

Every invitation should include a COUHES-approved statement telling respondents that the survey is voluntary. The invitation may be sent by physical mail or email. Often this wording is repeated on the welcome page of the survey instrument.

When creating the questions, focus on the purpose of the survey. This will help you prioritize the content, in case you need to shorten the survey. For every question, think about how you will analyze the response and possibly act on it. Keep the questions short and clear. If any words or phrases could be misunderstood, provide a definition or reword the question.

Don't forget to include relevant demographic variables. If you're interested in gender differences, you need to know the gender of the respondents. Demographic variables can help you determine if your survey sample is representative of the population at large.

Survey questions can be formatted in many ways, but usually fall into one of three categories: they allow people to pick one answer, pick many answers, or write in an answer. For each of these, create a variable name that will capture the results, such as GENDER=1 for Female, 2 for Male. You can view a sample codebook at

`http://web.mit.edu/surveys/energy/codebook.html`

The final part of the survey is a closing page with a thank-you message to tell the person the survey is complete. On the closing page you can link to a web site of interest, such as the service or department that was the topic of the survey.

Once you have a draft of the survey ready, be sure to test it with a few people who haven't seen it before, preferably drawn from the same population who will take the survey. They can reveal problems with wording, instructions, or the web site. You may also use this sample data to validate how you will analyze your data.

Survey Administration

Other issues to keep in mind include the following:

- Will your survey overlap with another one, possibly reducing the response rate? The Provost's Office maintains a schedule of known MIT surveys in TechTime. To view the calendar, log into TechTime and search for Provost as a Resource. You will be able to view the calendar for "Provost's Office: Surveys."
- Are you "authenticating" survey responses to ensure only one response per person? On web surveys, this is done with MIT certificates, access codes, or unique URLs. In addition, if you authenticate responses, it makes it possible for people to return to the survey to complete their responses.
- If your response rate isn't high enough, will you send reminders? If so, who will they come from, and will they go to the entire population you are surveying or just non-responders?

Getting Help

Staff in both the Office of Institutional Research

`http://web.mit.edu/ir/`

and IS&T's Web Survey Service

`http://web.mit.edu/surveys/`

can help MIT groups plan, create, and host surveys. For more information, send mail to <web-surveys@mit.edu>.

Getting Help

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 email, you can send your questions to the corresponding email 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, network/ connectivity, business applications, computer buying advice	253-1101	computing-help@mit.edu
Academic computing	253-0115	et-consult@mit.edu
Athena Computing Environment	253-4435	olc@mit.edu
Computer and printer repairs	253-0815	pcservice@mit.edu
Disabilities and computing	253-7808	atic@mit.edu
Telephone and voice mail services	253-3670	telecom-csr@mit.edu
Telephone repairs	253-4357	3help@mit.edu
Unix/Linux	253-1103	unix-linux-help@mit.edu

Surf Sites: In the Spirit of Sharing

The freshman class on blogs and the MIT PressLog (see pp. 1–2) typify how blogs are changing the way we communicate. The Web has taken on new life as users around the world share not only their thoughts but also photos, favorite bookmarks, and expertise. Perhaps the ultimate expression of this spirit is Wikipedia, the free, collectively edited encyclopedia at

`http://www.wikipedia.org/`

Likewise, online social networks let users connect with those who share similar interests. To get a taste of how the Web is creating community and, in turn, being shaped by user contributions, visit the sites on the right.

Blogger *(Weblog publishing)*
`http://www.blogger.com/`

CiteULike *(Citation bookmarking for academics)*
`http://www.citeulike.org/`

del.icio.us *(Social bookmarks manager)*
`http://del.icio.us/`

Flickr *(Photo management and sharing)*
`http://www.flickr.com/`

Meetup *(Social network service)*
`http://www.meetup.com/`

Ourmedia *(Grassroots media archive)*
`http://www.ourmedia.org/`

There *(Online virtual world)*
`http://www.there.com/`

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