Reference Publications Office

The Reference Publications Office (RPO) works in concert with academic and administrative offices throughout the Institute to publish timely, accurate, and authoritative information about MIT's organization, programs, and policies.

This year, the MIT Course Catalogue received a good deal of attention as we began to consider how its format and presentation might be updated for next year's edition. Simple changes, such as adopting the American spelling of *catalog* (at long last) proved to be complex in execution, requiring numerous coding changes as well as adjustments to the programming of the Institute's web server, Athena, to ensure a seamless transition for online catalog users. The biggest change contemplated was a plan to shrink the bulk of the print catalog by one-half in order to help reduce paper consumption at MIT. The reduction would be accomplished by removing MIT subject descriptions from the print catalog, on the grounds that most catalog users already preferred to go online to obtain this information. To verify this observation and broaden our understanding of current usage patterns, we conducted a survey of students, faculty, and staff and endeavored to share the results with colleagues and stakeholders. After extended consultation, we arrived at a consensus that removing MIT subject information from the print catalog made sense, based on current usage patterns, and that a separate book of subject descriptions should be created for limited distribution on campus in order to meet the needs of community members (such as undergraduate advisors and staff working on registration and enrollment) who depend on the convenience of a paperbound volume. The expectation, based on our survey data, is that most catalog users will be little affected by these format changes, yet the net result will be a savings of some two million pages, or four tons of paper, each year, beginning in 2009–2010.

During these catalog consultations we also saw that we could achieve a more coherent presentation of MIT's educational offerings by consolidating the sections describing MIT's interdisciplinary work that previously had been dispersed in different areas of the catalog. With the agreement of colleagues in the academic departments and the Registrar's Office, we have now created a new Part 3 devoted entirely to Interdisciplinary Programs.

In graphic design, the four issues of the MIT Bulletin displayed some noteworthy achievements this year, including a painterly treatment of MIT course numbers by Tim Blackburn Design for the cover of the 2008–2009 Course Catalogue; a new hand-drawn map of the MIT campus by Jeffrey C. Shumaker '01 for MIT Facts; and some eye-catching photo documentation of Sol Lewitt's magnificent *Bars of Color within Squares (MIT),* a terrazzo floor commissioned for the Green Center for Physics through MIT's Percent-for-Art program. The images of the vibrantly colored squares were artfully deployed on the covers of the Student and Faculty & Staff directories by Forsythe Design.

Retail sales of MIT Facts, which were initiated toward the end of FY2008, have now climbed to more than 300 copies sold through the MIT Museum and more than 100 copies sold through the MIT Press Bookstore—a modest but rewarding sign that offering

the booklet to the public through selected outlets does seem to meet a need for an inexpensive, informative souvenir of a campus visit.

In staff news, RPO is pleased to report that it was able to survive in very good fashion the maternity leave of editorial assistant Jen Schoonover, mostly due to the careful planning and preparation that Jen invested in her leave-taking. In extracurricular service, RPO director Stuart Kiang participated in the drafting of the institutional self-study document prepared for MIT's 2009 accreditation by researching and writing the section of the document describing MIT's policies, practices, and commitments relating to public disclosure.

Plans for 2009–2010 include continued work on developing an open-source content management system to eventually replace Engenda, a proprietary system first customized for RPO's purposes in 2003–2004. Owing to financial and temporal constraints, the planned redesign of the Reference Publications Office website was whittled down to a remake of the homepage cover collage, leaving open the possibility of a more ambitious redesign later.

Stuart Kiang
Director

More information about MIT's Reference Publications Office can be found at http://web.mit.edu/referencepubs/.