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MIT faculty open access to their scholarly articles

March 20, 2009

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., March 20 - In a move aimed at broadening access to MIT's research and scholarship, faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have voted to make their scholarly articles available to the public for free and open access on the Web.

The new policy, which was approved unanimously at an MIT faculty meeting on Wednesday, March 18 and took immediate effect, emphasizes MIT's commitment to disseminating the fruits of its research and scholarship as widely as possible.

"The vote is a signal to the world that we speak in a unified voice; that what we value is the free flow of ideas," said Bish Sinyal, chair of the MIT Faculty and the Ford International Professor of Urban Development and Planning.

Under the new policy, faculty authors give MIT nonexclusive permission to disseminate their journal articles for open access through DSpace, an open-source software platform developed by the MIT Libraries and Hewlett Packard and launched in 2002. The policy gives MIT and its faculty the right to use and share the articles for any purpose other than to make a profit. Authors may opt out on a paper-by-paper basis.

MIT's policy is the first faculty-driven, university-wide initiative of its kind in the United States. While Harvard and Stanford universities have implemented open access mandates at some of their schools, MIT is the first to fully implement the policy university-wide as a result of a faculty vote. MIT's resolution is built on similar language adopted by the Harvard Faculty of Arts & Sciences in 2008.

"Scholarly publishing has so far been based purely on contracts between publishers and individual faculty authors," said Hal Abelson, the Class of 1922 Prof. of Electrical Engineering & Computer Science and chair of the Ad-Hoc Faculty Committee on Open Access Publishing. "In that system, faculty members and their institutions are powerless. This resolution changes that by creating a role in the publishing process for the faculty as a whole, not just as isolated individuals."

In the current scholarly publishing system, individual authors are required to transfer all or most of their rights to the publisher. Typically publishers will strictly limit access to the work through licensing and charge increasingly high subscription rates back to universities to access the articles. University libraries have faced subscription rates rising at a rate far outpacing inflation. The MIT Libraries, for example, spend more than three times as much on journal subscriptions today than they did in 1986.

"Through this action, MIT faculty have shown great leadership in the promotion of free and open scholarly communication," said MIT Director of Libraries Ann Wolpert, who worked closely with Abelson and others to move the resolution forward. "In the quest for higher profits, publishers have lost sight of the values of the academy. This will allow authors to advance research and education by making their research available to the

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world."

MIT has long focused on projects and initiatives that encourage the open sharing of knowledge, with the goal of advancing learning and education worldwide. MIT's DSpace repository contains the digital research materials of MIT faculty and researchers and allows them to be saved, searched and shared worldwide. MIT OpenCourseWare (OCW) was launched in 2001 with the goal of making all MIT course materials available, free of charge, to anyone over the World Wide Web. Since then, OCW has shared MIT course materials with more than 50 million visitors worldwide and inspired hundreds of other universities to do the same. The new open access resolution will now remove barriers to making all of MIT's research openly available to the world.

A faculty committee will work with the MIT Libraries to oversee implementation and determine a workflow for adding articles to DSpace. Under the new open access model, potentially thousands of papers published by MIT faculty each year will be added to DSpace and made freely available on the web and accessible through search engines such as Google.

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