

Second Draft -- 11/20/91  
Disclaimers -- Prepared by  
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comment and revision by other  
subcommittee members

## **SUBCOMMITTEE ON INFORMATION DISSEMINATION**

### **I. OBJECTIVES**

By the year 2001 information resources critical to the research, study, and teaching of faculty and students at Cornell should be distributed electronically throughout the physical campus and beyond. Every faculty member at Cornell through a work station at his or her office or lab should have the support, software, network access to find and receive the information relevant to his or her teaching and research. Every student at Cornell should have access to similar information resources in settings ranging from a dormitory room or off-campus housing to work areas in library and class room buildings to the class setting itself. In short, what is coming to be called the "virtual library" -- information resources defined not by physical location but by distribution through a far-flung information network should be available to students and faculty -- "any person, any study, any time, any place" -- to borrow a phrase from CIT's "A Vision for the Nineties." But if Cornell's faculty end up simply as users of the virtual library, these technological changes will have diminished the institution. Cornell's scholars, writers, information gatherers will increasingly be drawn to "publish" or distribute electronically. Just as the university has provided tangible incentives and mechanisms to encourage print publication it will need to find appropriate means to foster electronic dissemination of faculty research. By the year 2001 electronic publication of material originating at Cornell should be widespread.

These new information dissemination paths can make it possible:

- \* for teachers to assign their students course materials that are both more current and more closely shaped to actual course content than current printed texts (not necessary by skipping print but by allowing electronic assembly of materials that are printed on demand)
- \* for students' explorations beyond the assigned course materials to be freed of the limits of the Cornell Library's physical collection and to be possible at "any time, any place" -- most importantly where they live
- \* for faculty scholarship, research and teaching to draw upon the resources of the "virtual library" at "any time, any place" -- most importantly in the office, laboratory, and classroom

The extent and pace at which these benefits of technology become significant at Cornell (and, indeed, whether they will be significant by the year 2001 across disciplines and departments), will depend not so much on technology (The technology is presently available.) but on institutional, cultural, and cost factors. If the realization of these benefits is to be more than something that happens to or at Cornell serious attention needs to be given to certain critical facts, issues, and institutional factors.

## II. THE NEED FOR BETTER FACTS AND CLEARER GOALS

Cornell needs to set some reasonable goals and then monitor progress toward them. For example, if Cornell does aspire to be an institution in which every faculty member and every student has access to the "virtual library" in office, dorm room, classroom, and laboratory and particularly if access is defined to include the skills necessary to access and manipulate that information, Cornell should affirm that goal and start regularly assembling information about faculty and student access to and use of such electronically disseminated information.

Costs represent another critical fact element. If "any time, any place" requires a workstation and network connections in places where they do not presently exist, the University needs to be working with the best available information about the combination of individual (faculty and student) and institutional expenditure that realizing the vision will require.

## III. ISSUES WITHIN AND BEYOND CORNELL

### **Issues**

Most although by no means all of the information needs of faculty and students have until recently been funded and managed through the University Library system. A fundamental issue posed by the evolving "virtual library" is the extent to which its distribution to faculty and students will be accomplished within the administrative structure and budget of the institutional unit called the library, as distinguished from other cross-college and cross-department entities such as C.I.T. or the campus store and as distinguished from academic units or even individual faculty members and students.

Not simply administrative and budgetary coherence are at issue. The acquisition of material by the library for storage and distribution by it has historically carried policies of responsibility for the material and universal no-fee access that electronically distributed information from outside on the one hand or the maintenance of information by an individual faculty member or unit (with the library perhaps as clearinghouse) may violate.

More fluid distribution paths inevitably erode central control. How will trade-offs between centrally acquired information (library

acquisitions) and information delivered and billed more directly to individual faculty members or units to be made?

Decentralized information acquisition can result in huge inefficiencies for the University as a whole. Just as site licenses for software negotiated at an institutional level can be far preferable to deals struck by myriad individuals and departments site licenses for use of information originating outside Cornell will be desirable. Responsibility for determining when such action is desirable and for taking it on behalf of the entire institution needs to be clearly assigned.

On the originating side lie equally challenging issues. Are there opportunities to distribute information out from Cornell that the new technology makes possible -- opportunities that Cornell should not simply anticipate but try to effectuate? Should Cornell, for example, establish an "electronic university press"?

### **Institutional Factors**

Cornell needs to address two kinds of institutional questions beyond those noted above. In addition to issues of where within the Cornell structure the responsibility for addressing particular issues should lie, Cornell needs to study those elements of staffing, culture, and division of institutional responsibility that may prevent or alternatively encourage realization of the information access gains technology makes possible. The second type of institutional question looks beyond Cornell. Much of Cornell's vision for 2001 depends on developments beyond Ithaca -- again, not technology, but the reshaping of the arrangements for distribution of scholarly and teaching materials. Here the questions are what should Cornell (as a whole) attempt together with similar institutions and scholarly societies and publishers? Should Cornell work to bring about electronic distribution of particular materials currently acquired in print -- e.g., scholarly journals? Are there copyright licensing arrangements that no one university could achieve, but a consortium might?