A Letter from Frances D. Fergusson,
Chair of the Overseers’ Committee to Visit
the University Library

Dear Friends,

In a few months, Sidney Verba, preeminent scholar, political scientist, and long-serving director of the Harvard University Library, plans to retire. To his many friends and admirers, this seems an inconceivable loss. Much will be said about Sid’s extraordinary legacy, but, for the moment, I’d like to put his distinguished leadership of the Harvard Libraries in its historical context.

Time moved slowly for the Harvard library following John Harvard’s 1638 bequest. Nine decades passed before the College published its first catalog, in 1723. That catalog, covering a total of 3,100 books, cost £20 to produce, and its primary purpose was not to disseminate information but to stimulate contributions for collections that were admittedly meager.

Real innovation came in 1840, when librarian Thaddeus William Harris proposed something called a “slip catalog”—the precursor to the card catalog—which would give students and faculty the ability to locate books based on title, author, or subject, instead of finding books based on their fixed shelf locations.

The complex, multifaceted, world-renowned research library that is Harvard’s today took shape very slowly indeed. Collections grew, buildings were built, funds were endowed, and increasing levels of scholarship emanated from the University.

Present-day Harvard gathers nearly 90 libraries in a single system that forms the largest academic library in the world. Library science had, however, assumed a comfortably familiar shape, and a slow process of evolution, from the development of those slip catalogs in the 1840s to the suddenly insistent presence of technology in the 1980s.

All at once, time began to move much more rapidly, and the Harvard Libraries were facing technological change of a magnitude that was literally unimaginable.

In 1984, President Derek Bok appointed Sidney Verba as Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and Director of the University Library. In Sid’s epoch-making, 23-year tenure as director, virtually every major library at Harvard has undergone physical renewal. But beyond majestic reading rooms—Loker in Widener and Stamps in Baker—beyond 21st-century climate control systems, safe and accessible stacks, and a community of librarians increasingly connected to the classroom, the Harvard Libraries have been transformed under Sid’s leadership. Here are a few of the hallmarks:

• the development of the online HOLLIS (Harvard Online Library Information System) catalog (as well as related catalogs for images, archival materials, and geospatial data), which can be searched by users anywhere in the world;

• the establishment of Harvard’s library preservation program, including the

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Harvard’s Open Collections Program Launches

Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930

The Open Collections Program of the Harvard University Library has launched Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930, a web-based collection of selected historical materials from Harvard’s libraries, archives, and museums that documents voluntary immigration to the US from the signing of the Constitution to the onset of the Great Depression. The online collection is located at http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration.

Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930, is made possible with the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The collection is part of a burgeoning international movement to provide educational materials on the Internet that the Hewlett Foundation has helped to pioneer and towards which the Foundation has disbursed more than $60 million in grants to advance the promise of open educational resources—or OER, as it is known to educators.

In addition to thousands of items that are now accessible to any Internet user, the collection includes contextual information on voluntary immigration and quantitative data. The site also provides links to related digital resources that cover other aspects of immigration to the US, including vital materials on the African diaspora.

Concentrating heavily on the 19th century, Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930, includes approximately 1,800 books and pamphlets, 6,000 photographs, 200 maps, and 13,000 pages from manuscript and archival collections. By incorporating diaries, biographies, and other writings capturing diverse experiences, the collected material provides a window into the lives of ordinary immigrants. For example:

- Images from Harvard’s Social Museum, which was established in 1903 by Harvard professor Francis Greenwood Peabody, illustrate “problems of the social order” related to the rapid influx of immigrants.
- Original manuscript and archival materials—ranging from records of the Immigration Restriction League to the papers of New Jersey librarian Jane Maud Campbell (1869–1947)—document the plight of newly arrived immigrants.

Each of these areas of extraordinary accomplishment reflects Sid’s pervasive concern with expanding access to Harvard’s library materials and ensuring that those materials are available to future generations.

Sid recently announced his plan to retire as of June 30, 2007. He is already the longest-serving director in the history of the Harvard University Library. As President Bok recently noted, “Sid’s foresight has helped to preserve our valuable collections and opened Harvard’s vast resources to scholars, researchers, and students throughout the world. I believe that generations of students will benefit from the doors that Sid has opened.”

It is clear that Sidney Verba’s legacy is enormous—that in the history of Harvard’s libraries, his tenure has brought about more profound change than any or all of his predecessors could have imagined.

But if you ask Sid what is most important in his legacy, he puts it very simply:

- a sustained and expanded tradition of great collection-building;
- an unwavering concern for the needs of users; and
- a commitment to opening Harvard’s collections to the world.

We have the opportunity to honor Sid’s legacy in the way that Sid would want: by building on it dynamically, and—in my estimation—by emulating his foresight and following his path as a visionary leader and legendary consensus builder.

We will meet this challenge in one way only: through collaborative effort that will include faculty, researchers, librarians, IT professionals, and alumni/ae and friends who read the publication that you hold in your hand right now. There can be no better or more meaningful time to be involved with the Harvard Libraries.

Cordially,

Frances D. Fergusson AM ’66, PhD ’73
“With the explosion of scholarship in so many fields related to so many immigrant groups, only the largest of research libraries can serve teaching and scholarship well,” commented Richard Ekman, president of the Council of Independent Colleges. “For smaller colleges and universities, collections such as *Immigration to the United States* are an extraordinary boon.”

*Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930*, is part of Harvard’s Open Collections Program (see [http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu](http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu)), through which the University advances teaching and learning on historical topics of great relevance by providing online access to historical resources from Harvard’s renowned libraries, archives, and museums. OCP’s highly specialized “open collections” are developed through careful collaborations among Harvard’s distinguished faculty, librarians, and curators.

The goal of the Open Collections Program is to offer a new model for digital collections that will benefit students and teachers around the world.

Harvard launched its first open collection in 2004: *Women Working, 1800–1930*, located at [http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww](http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww), was also developed with the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Additional open collections are under development now, including *Contagion: Historical Views of Contagious Disease*, supported by the Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund, and the *Islamic Heritage Project*, supported by Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud.

According to Sidney Verba, Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and Director of the University Library, “The experience of working with this University’s historical materials has long been an irreplaceable part of a Harvard education. Now, by developing subject-based digital collections on topics of contemporary concern, Harvard is making that experience available to students and teachers everywhere.”

The libraries and museums of Harvard University provide open, online access to a rich array of digital materials, including photographic collections, documents, musical scores, prints, drawings, historical maps, books, legal transcripts, diaries, manuscripts, and more. To explore the growing number of subject-specific collections available online, visit “A Selection of Web-Accessible Collections” at [http://digitalcollections.harvard.edu](http://digitalcollections.harvard.edu).

**Celebrating 90 Mt. Auburn Street**

Originally, it was President Neil Rudenstine who envisioned a new building at 90 Mt. Auburn Street where the Harvard University Library could achieve new synergies by gathering its strategic programs—the Office for Information Systems, the Open Collections Program, and the Weissman Preservation Center—in a single location. Rudenstine’s vision became a reality last spring when the Harvard University Library inaugurated its new multiservice facility at 90 Mt. Auburn Street.

Central to most of Harvard’s major libraries, the 90 Mt. Auburn Street building—which has distinction as one of Harvard’s greenest structures—has already become an important locus for collaboration across Harvard’s library system.

On September 15, University Library Director Sidney Verba led members of the Visiting Committee and special guests on a tour of the new building. A highlight of the day was a guided tour (see photos above) of the new state-of-art special collections conservation lab in the Weissman Preservation Center.
Orway also authored, co-authored, or edited more than 30 books; wrote over 300 articles; and served as technical advisor to Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke for the 1968 film 2001: A Space Odyssey.

“I just knew what I wanted to do from a very young age,” said Orway. “Those magazines put a spark under me.” His collection eventually became more sophisticated, venturing from sci-fi into astronomy and from 20th-century magazines to books dating as far back as the 1500s. “I moved beyond them,” he said, “but I always loved the pulps.”

In 2002, Orway donated his collection of approximately 900 science-fiction pulp magazine issues dating from the 1920s onward to the Harvard College Library (HCL), after a casual conversation about the collection with library staff revealed how valuable they could prove for students and researchers.

“I wanted to keep it all together,” said Orway. “I was delighted to have it at Harvard—it made me very proud, very happy.”

For HCL, the collection was also a reason to celebrate. For a research library, the significance of the collection is twofold: it represents an uncommon glimpse of popular culture in the first half of the 20th century, and it presents a major preservation challenge.

Pulp magazines came about in the late 1890s following the development of very cheap paper made from wood pulp, which helped make possible the mass production of magazines. The Orway collection raises its own preservation issues. Just as the pulp magazine’s research value is indicated by the passage of time, so, unfortunately, is degradation of materials.

At the root of the problem lies acidity, which causes paper to darken and become brittle. The chemistry of aging lowers the pH of paper, according to Jan Merrill-Oldham, Malloy-Rabinowitz Preservation Librarian. Uncoated wood-pulp paper exacerbates the problem, being already very acidic at the time of its manufacture. Furthermore, it still contains lignin, a component of wood that is chemically removed from refined papers.

Orway’s pulp magazine collection is many things: old, unique, certainly intriguing. Filled with titles from the 1920s through the 1950s like Amazing Stories, Astonishing Stories, Startling Stories, and Thrilling Wonder Stories, it’s pure science fiction.

“It’s a collection about the engagement of intellect and spirit, science and imagination, work and fun,” said Alison Scott, Charles Warren Bibliographer for American History, Widener Library, who stewards the collection. “It’s the perfect way to build a collection. Orway combined highly sophisticated technical professionalism with his interest in what is flat-out fiction, but on the same general topic.”

The collection features much more than fantastic stories and futuristic what-if’s. Each magazine, containing approximately 100 pages of imaginative fiction, ads, editorials, and letters to the editor, represents unadulterated pop culture, churned out quickly and cheaply. As such, it also provides a genuine look at race, class, and gender attitudes of the day even while the illustrated covers, the only part in color, depict the sci-fi sub-genre of space travel.

“You’re not just seeing pure flights of fancy. You’re seeing minds embedded in their era working to construct imaginative fiction that is embedded in a particular time and place,” explained Scott. “In addition to stereotypes, you can get a more nuanced understanding of how people thought and felt and understood their world. Popular culture is one of the best sources of primary insight into the way we imaginatively deconstruct our sense of being in the world.”

One can’t always know how and when a library item will be used, but pop-culture materials are being accessed more and more for research and teaching at Harvard. The bottom line is that it can be hard to predict what researchers will find important. In the case of Orway’s pulp fiction, its relevance wasn’t obvious to librarians in the 1930s and ‘40s, but going back now and trying to piece together a collection item by item would prove incredibly difficult, which is why Orway’s carefully assembled collection is such a boon for HCL. And when researchers of the future want to study a little Astounding Science Fiction from 1940, they will find a solid dose of 20th-century pop culture, perfectly preserved in the Harvard College Library.
Giving to Harvard Libraries

Beginning with John Harvard’s 1638 bequest of 400 books, gifts have proven essential to the growth of the Harvard Libraries. Today, the generosity of alumni/ae, friends, foundations, corporations, and other organizations is a dynamic and inspiring force among the University’s libraries, their services to students, and their renowned collections.

Much More Than Books
The need for library support is greater than ever. The expansion of resources to include photographs and other visual images, music, poetry, and other audio recordings, as well as a growing number of resources that exist only in digital formats, has placed increasing demand on the Harvard Libraries. In addition to acquisition of both traditional and new formats, today’s library must preserve its collections and make them accessible both in reading rooms and online.

Unique Opportunities
A gift to the Harvard Libraries gives you the unique opportunity to make a gift to an area of personal interest or intellectual commitment. The extent of Harvard’s library collections, in combination with evolving faculty and student needs, creates an almost limitless array of gift opportunities.

Harvard seeks to increase funding for the Libraries in four crucial areas:
• preservation and conservation
• access and technology
• collections
• positions

Examples of current needs in the Harvard Libraries include
• support to digitize library resources and make them freely available on the web
• acquisition funds for resources in new areas of study and research, including South Asia and Africa, life sciences, and jazz
• gifts designated to preserve Harvard’s rare and unique materials, including illuminated medieval and Renaissance manuscript collections

Meaningful Gifts
The Harvard Libraries will work with you to create a gift that is meaningful to you and meets true needs. Endowment opportunities begin at $25,000. Gifts of any size are greatly appreciated for current support. If you are an alumnus/ae, you will receive full class credit for your library gift or pledge.

All gifts to Harvard’s libraries are tax deductible under the full extent of the law. You may receive additional tax benefits by making a gift of securities. Please contact the Harvard Management Company at 866.845.6596 or security_gifts@hmc.harvard.edu.

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Please send your gift or pledge commitment to:
Peggy Davis Molander
Director of Development
Widener Library 110
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After Word
On September 26, 2006, members of the Harvard community received the following letter from Interim President Derek C. Bok.

Sidney Verba, Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and Director of the Harvard University Library, announced today that he will retire as University Professor and step down from his duties as Director of the Library at the close of this academic year. I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation for Sid’s lifetime of service to the University and his friendship to me and countless other colleagues at Harvard and in the broader academic community.

A scholar of high distinction, Sid has been a pioneer in comparative research on civic culture and is recognized as one of the world’s leading political scientists. His incisive analysis has made significant contributions to his field of scholarship and greatly enlarged our understanding of participatory democracy and civic life. His scholarship has been felt in both academia and policy circles.

Closer to home, Professor Verba has led the Harvard libraries during one of their most transformative periods in the University’s history. I have greatly valued his friendship and counsel over the years. When I appointed him more than 20 years ago, we were only beginning to realize what the revolution in information technology would mean. Sid’s foresight has helped to preserve our valuable collections and opened Harvard’s vast resources to scholars, researchers, and students throughout the world. I believe that generations of students will benefit from the doors that Sid has opened.

Identifying a successor to Professor Verba will be a matter of high priority. I intend to appoint an advisory committee this fall to assist me in the search, with the goal of identifying a successor before Sid steps down.

For now, I hope that all of you will join me in thanking Sid for everything he has done for scholarship around the world, but especially for what he has meant to Harvard.

Sincerely,
Derek Bok