The April 13, 1992, *Time* magazine described an emerging environment in higher education in which new sources of income have been exhausted and where existing means of finance and appropriation must compete with other priorities, increasingly subject to public scrutiny. At the same time campuses are renewing emphasis on undergraduate education, questioning the almost universal attention paid to faculty research, increasing their reliance on technology (through such mechanisms as interactive television and computerized library catalogues), and increasingly recognizing the needs and achievements of diverse populations.

Today's popular culture attributes metaphorical leanness to that which is disciplined, powerful, competitive, desirable. Mean is not only tough, determined, and firm of resolve, but possibly also mean-spirited, parsimonious, perhaps cruel, and certainly short-tempered. *Time* magazine showed that higher education is itself becoming leaner in its response to changes in the American economy, but the article also suggested that higher education has for too long enjoyed the benefits of privilege, of free lunch at taxpayer and student (or parental) expense. *Time* suggested that the price of survival may be a degree of meanness, or mean-spiritedness, directed toward the labor force and a renewed concern for a presumably deprived client, in this case the students who are being educated. That message, frequently repeated, is evidence of public sentiment that higher education should be forced to follow practices that are now being adopted in the newly competitive environment of business.

The politicization of higher education has resulted in resentment at ever-increasing costs, at the perceived neglect of teaching in favor of scholarship, and in acceptance of the notion that tenure is an abuse of privilege rather than a preserver of

William Goodrich Jones is Assistant University Librarian at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This paper was originally presented at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Preconference at the American Library Association Annual Conference in New Orleans, June 1993.
academic freedom. These criticisms and the comparison of colleges and universities with business enterprises will surely lead to efforts to impose new controls over the activities of faculty and other entities on the campus for which money is spent.

The ability of those in the academy to counter these criticisms is compromised in an economy that measures wealth by production of goods and services. Productivity is one of the principal indicators, perhaps the only indicator that is applied to enterprise in the profit-making sector, and productivity has not been impressive of late. "Many factors have contributed to the slowdown in productivity growth. Economists still seek a definitive theory that identifies all of them and their relative importance, and part of the problem may lie in the difficulty of quantifying improvements in product quality." Burton Malkiel understands that higher education, like some manufacturing and all service industries, faces a major problem in searching for measures of productivity growth. The operative word in the labor force is "downsizing," and the consequences of downsizing are that those who remain work longer and harder. Some activities went away with departing workers, and, like the workers themselves, will not return. This trimming of fat, overdue and called for or not, has usually been achieved with great suddenness. We may suppose that not everything that was swept away was unproductive, inefficient, or failed to contribute to the welfare of the organization. Employees at all levels are learning that old assumptions about their relationship to the organization have changed.

The difficulties of analyzing issues of efficiency and productivity notwithstanding, American higher education has been forced to take on many of the features of today's businesses. Many academic institutions have recently engaged in large-scale strategic planning exercises with the goal of strengthening campus missions, eliminating small or poorly funded programs, and reallocating resources internally. Administrators and governing boards are also calling for higher faculty productivity by which they seem to mean that faculty should spend more hours in the classroom.

In libraries everywhere, flat (or even declining) budgets are apportioned between competing demands and constantly escalating materials prices, while library administrators attempt to respond to administrative calls for greater visibility and outreach to the publics they serve. The slogan "access, not ownership" has become widespread as an expression for shifting ideas about what constitutes a library, and this expression was further legitimated by its use in the recently published Mellon report on university libraries and scholarly communication. But purchase of print materials in great number continues to consume a large percentage of the library materials budget and this is likely to remain so for many years. The drive to digitize, laserize, and computerize bibliographic databases and texts has led to the wildest and most improbable predictions about library collections and services from those who should know better. These predictions amount to a kind of "technological imperative" that seemingly eliminates conceptions of library services based on paper technologies and skilled librarians who have extensive knowledge of the textual record. The chancellor
of a major state university system recently looked forward to a time when all texts will be digitized. In that time, "number of volumes ceases to be a useful surrogate for access, and the forward progress of an institution might best be measured by the rate of decrease of its paper-based material. When the great bulk of a university's information assets are electronically stored at network nodes distributed around the globe, what will it do with its main library building?"

These hyperbolic statements are echoed in "responsible" mass circulation newspapers like the Wall Street Journal, which, referring to a project to digitize texts, predicts,

Such early efforts at electronic libraries foretell vast changes in academic research. When scholars go to the library in the next century, they won't have to go anywhere. The library will come to them—on a desktop computer. Need original documents from Yale or Oxford universities? No problem. Tap in a request and get what you want on your screen. If you don't know exactly what you want, the computer will find it for you. Pictures and graphs will appear. Sound from the oral history collection will come through the earphones.

Forbes magazine in February 1993 echoed this view when it wrote, "Full-text retrieval, still very limited at this point, is around the comer. When it comes, the local library as we know it all but disappears. In lieu of librarians we will have programmers and database experts."

These are not only lean libraries, they are invisible ones as well, with a concomitant disappearance of librarians to run them. Sensible analyses of computer technology and the digitization of texts argue that we are a long way from realizing these visions, but the recurrent circulation of forecasts that have the appearance of authority should cause us to be wary that those who should know better will make policy decisions based on such authority. The consequences for the major cultural institution that is the library are disastrous. Libraries have sold special collections and dismissed staff to pay for computers, and we would be foolish not to recognize the continuing appeal of these forecasts to budget-conscious administrators, whether these forecasts are misapplied or not.

These utopian visions notwithstanding, special collections are continuing to serve the needs of scholars and to play significant, even indispensable, roles in research in much the same way as they have for some time. This stable pattern of scholarly behavior in the face of predictions of change can be attributed both to continuities in methods of scholarship and to some persistent difficulties in applying technology to make special collections widely available. A combination of factors has led libraries to continue organizing and servicing their special collections in ways that must appear "unproductive" when compared with measures (such as we have them) that exist elsewhere in libraries.

To begin with, special collections are costly to operate. They require zoned temperature and humidity controls, ultraviolet-free lighting and special window
filters, acid-free boxes and slip cases, vaults, security, and waterless fire-protection systems, and the frequent advice of legal counsel over issues of ownership and copyright. Special collections also serve other needs than the support of scholarship; among them are the prestige and distinction that they confer on the institutions where they are housed and as vehicles for institutional fundraising. Scholars everywhere can be grateful that they are the beneficiaries of efforts of donors and administrators, whatever their motives, who believe special collections to be worthy of support.

Since 1987 my colleague Stephen E. Wiberley Jr. and I have been engaged at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) in talking with fellows at the UIC Humanities Institute about how they conduct their research. We have spoken with historians, litterateurs, classicists, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, and literary theorists. Growing out of a project intended to assist libraries in more effectively meeting the needs of their clienteles, we have now conducted in-depth interviews with over thirty people, and during the past year have re-interviewed eleven who formed the circle of humanists first interviewed five years ago.

We have learned that one of the features of twentieth-century scholarship is that almost any topic is researchable, and that for scholars the desire for and availability of unique and abundant research materials is almost limitless. It also means that to a great extent scholars acquire, organize, and sometimes create their own research materials independent of existing collections. Scholars often have strong geographic identifications with their subjects of study, and in fact there is little in the landscape of scholarly research that does not have some geographical context. Most research topics are embedded in events that occurred at some time and place, and much of the source material that supports them remains in greatest abundance nearby. Among the scholars we have spoken with, twenty work with sources or have consulted collections located outside the United States, in such places as England, France, Germany, Morocco, Spain, Greece, India, Belgium, Russia, Mexico, and Central America. The libraries and archives that fellows visited ranged from established, well staffed, funded, and organized collections housed in their own buildings or in large libraries to the private and unfunded. They included U.S. presidential libraries, regional archives in the American South and Midwest, the Public Records Office in London, diplomatic and colonial archives in France and Morocco, ministry of education archives in Mexico, archdiocesan archives in Central America, and small, one-room collections in Mexico, Spain, and India.

The experiences of those we interviewed, both inside and outside of established archives and special collections, raise provocative questions about how librarians might begin to shape new services in the environment of leaner and meaner.

AIDS TO RESEARCH—REPRODUCIBLE IMAGES

Humanistic scholarship depends on close reading of texts (in the broadest contemporary meanings). In working their ways towards the development of extended arguments
that constitute scholarly research, humanists take notes that summarize, quote, paraphrase, reproduce, and interpret the sources under study. UIC fellows frequently supplemented these notes by photocopying texts that exist in a variety of formats. This ability to obtain reproductions of sources is of obvious benefit, enabling researchers to conduct much analysis in their offices or studies, or in libraries close to their habitual places of work.

Microfilm has long been in use as a surrogate for source materials, and in some cases that is as close as the scholar gets to the original. One fellow did much of his research for a book on the American South during Reconstruction, relying almost exclusively on microfilm copies of Civil War-era newspapers located in the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library.

The photocopier has become universally available in United States collections during the past thirty years, but even that ubiquitous technology is not always to be found beyond the U.S. border. An anthropologist working in India found it cheaper and easier to have a scribe make handwritten copies of the materials that she needed, and if she did find that a photocopy was necessary, her only recourse was a machine located in a U.S. Information Agency library.

Where photocopy machines were available, UIC fellows photocopied primary and secondary sources extensively. Some then annotated, underscored, filed, and recopied them for placement in various files of their own according to some topical arrangement. One historian even made use of a small, hand-held copier that she took to the archives she worked in. The convenience, accuracy, and ability to produce multiple copies of important sources offered by the photocopier contributes significantly to scholarly work, not only because these copies are usually cheap, but because passages of text can be highlighted, marginal notes added at relevant locations, and the copies discarded at the conclusion of the project.

Other scholars spoke of their need for good quality photographs, despite the long delays sometimes occasioned in getting them.

These technologies of image generation and reproduction that we presently consider conventional—microfilm, photocopy, and photograph—have a wide range of scholarly application, although, versatile as they are, they cannot meet all needs. Epigraphers study Greek and Latin texts from "squeezes," impressions lifted from stone using a stiff brush and a sheet of soft paper, or they use latex to lift inscriptions from stone. Both paper and latex squeezes can be rolled and transported easily, but there is still no simple way of reproducing squeezes, although they, too, are sometimes photographed. Film studies scholars have been greatly assisted by the development of videotape and the videodisc. Much current discussion focuses on the digitization of text, but the fact of the matter is that only a few libraries will be able to invest in the range of reproduction equipment that is required for the many varieties of scholarly analysis employed today. Fortunately, relatively inexpensive forms of reproduction meet most of the general needs of scholars, although the pressure to invest in new technologies may divert funds from the support of older, less exotic forms.
FINDING AIDS

In most archives, finding aids, when they have been developed, will provide access to classes of material rather than to specific items. Some finding aids are detailed and comprehensive, but many archives and collections have only sketchy descriptions of their contents. Sometimes even rudimentary finding aids are not available, and scholars occasionally find rooms of materials that are not organized in any manner. Printed guides may be simple but invaluable, and uniform systems of organization like those used by the U.S. Archives and Records Administration can reduce the amount of time that scholars must devote to searching. However, scholars report that even the most sophisticated systems for retrieving archival materials are not a substitute for careful review of the contents of records boxes and collections. Robert Ferrell, historian and Truman scholar, recently reported that materials of significance in the Truman archive had been known to other scholars before his use of them, but had been overlooked, because these scholars had not recognized their importance.

SEARCH STRATEGIES

Frequent archive users develop their own strategies to insure that they do not overlook material of importance, but apparent to all is their dependence on archivists, a dependence that one historian described as “absolute.” This American political historian always writes to arrange a visit to an archive with the resident archivist. He has learned to be persistent in archives, not to take “no” for an answer. Asking the right questions can make the difference between success and failure.

Although all scholars accept the inevitability that some sources likely to be of use will not have survived, they also report that in this, also, it is wise not to be too accepting of reports of loss. The historian of European colonial history discovered that many of the files essential to his work had been destroyed following World War II by the newly independent government in a North African country, freed from colonial domination. The presence of records that might indicate who had collaborated with the colonial government could embarrass those occupying positions of influence in the new government, so files likely to have this information were destroyed. However, the colonial officers had been systematic in their record-keeping and made duplicate files of much material that they filed under related topics. These duplicate files were overlooked when the primary files were destroyed, and the historian was able to carry out much of his work using the duplicates.

ABUNDANCE OF DATA

Scholars often report that they have more data than they can use. The difficulty they face is not just that of locating a body of material to analyze, but of reviewing it, organizing it, evaluating its significance, and placing it in a meaningful context according to the problems of contemporary scholarship. One of the historians that we re-interviewed this year told us that he was placing his study of European colonialism
in a broader context as a result of the new interest in studies of cultural contact, interest that has been sparked by the review of the impact of Columbus on the New World. One of the consequences of these new scholarly interests is that there is opportunity for revisiting materials and conducting further analysis for materials already well described by scholars.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY
In spite of the strong emphasis on uses of computers in the workplace, the humanists with whom we have spoken largely confine their use of computers to word processing and occasionally to those programs that aid in formatting bibliographies, like Nota Bene. Of the eleven humanists we interviewed in 1987, seven used computers for word processing then, and another three have bought one in the past five years. The fourth is part of a household in which a computer is used, but she observed that the “computer will never be more important than the telephone to the humanist.” Special applications of computers, like generating maps to show distribution of shards by an archaeologist, the building of a database of paintings that can be sorted by various characteristics (date, topic, ownership), and the analysis of voting records by a sociologist, are exceptions to the more common use.

Some scholars have made use of specialized databases like the Thesaurus Linguae Grecae; this use has involved the database not as a substitute for print text, but for identifying certain words and expressions in various contexts. The availability of films on videodisc has also made film studies commentary and analysis much easier for historians and theorists of film. Data collected by the Modern Language Association show that few scholars take advantage of options for online access of their library's online catalogue from office and home, and almost no use is reported for access to system-wide online indexes. Although Wiberley’s and my re-interview data suggest that such usage is also still uncommon among Humanities Institute fellows, the number of system users on campus who make use of interlibrary loan, renew books, and recommend titles for purchase is expanding.

THE ROLE OF TIME IN RESEARCH
Our interviews with humanists have made it clear that the greatest percentage of their time is spent analyzing their data, developing their arguments, and drafting their texts. Emphasis in the humanities is on book production, and humanists in our project report that it may take them from six to eight years to bring a project from its beginning to the publication of a book at its conclusion. As a result, many scholars have developed large personal libraries and have attempted to bring as many of the sources that they rely upon heavily to their offices at home or at work. Even a year’s leave is enough only to assemble the notes and sources that form the base for the subsequent analysis. That is why photocopy, photography, and microfilm (as cumbersome as it is) are such valuable tools for scholars.
SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE
The leaner environment of the 1990s is forcing us individually and collectively, scholars and librarians, to adopt new ways of getting work done. Scholars tell us that increasingly over the past two decades they have had to conduct their work without the assistance of secretarial support. This is one of the reasons for their greater use of computers for word processing. The changes they will have to make in the future may include accepting heavier teaching loads, experiencing greater difficulty in obtaining extended leave for research, and having fewer sources of financial support for assembling the materials they need to conduct their research. Digitization of texts, especially of those that exist only on paper, will continue to be a costly undertaking. Conventional forms of duplication—the photocopy, the photograph, and microfilm—will remain in wide use.

In light of the persistent behaviors of humanists revealed by our investigations, I would suggest that the following strategies for modifying services to scholars may result in more productive environments for both scholars and librarians:

1) Improve in any way possible the opportunities for scholars to obtain photo-reproductions of sources used in their research. An example of good progress in this activity is the RLG shared resources agreement which states that libraries will either lend or duplicate from special collections whenever and wherever possible. Timely processing of requests at reasonable cost is consistent with good service. Differential pricing systems for those asking for rapid turnaround and special services may be employed in some situations.

The new environment of leaner and meaner acknowledges the legitimacy of paying for services beyond the standard. Scanning technologies and uses of telefacsimile transmission may lend themselves to some document reproduction, whether a matter of permitting scholars to bring their own scanners into the archive or of providing scanning devices attached to departmental computers, permitting scholars to create their own disks.

2) Scholars are accustomed to making appointments for the use of collections, but they may also expect that having made the appointments, the collections are there for their use when they arrive and that they have the fullest possible access while they are there. The reports of humanists interviewed by Jones and Wiberley show that some archives make special accommodations for use of materials.

While acknowledging the need for security and preservation, we should explore possibilities for leaving some special collections materials with library units that are open at times that archives and special collections are closed (e.g., reserve collections). Special surveillance may be arranged in such circumstances, and secure cabinets or safes may be made available for the materials to be stored in until the special collections department opens again. It may be that special collections can find ways of facilitating access to materials that are heavily used or that do not require utmost security.

3) Libraries have long experience with interlibrary loan systems. In the same way that materials are exchanged by libraries through interlibrary loan, might it not be
possible for many special collections items to be made available through a loan to a special collections department at another institution? If leaner and meaner also applies to scarcity of support to scholars for travel to collections, perhaps some document delivery and consortial agreements will become more critical to research. The lending institution can specify the type of surveillance and use the loaned items may be subject to, including whether they may be photocopied and the duration of the loan period.15

4) One of the difficulties of providing photocopies in timely ways is the need for special collections staffs to do photocopying themselves, both for security purposes and to insure that the materials are not damaged. Alternative staffing arrangements that result in training of those outside special collections to photocopy these materials might result in more rapid turnaround and lower unit costs. Placement of photocopiers in special collections departments would solve some of these problems, although questions about pricing, volume of copying that could be supported, and access by staff and the public would have to be thought through.

5) Although the cataloguing and processing of special collections materials require specialized and trained staff, much brief collection information already exists on personal computers and is generated relatively quickly. The increasing accessibility of the Internet and gopher systems can provide a modest level of access to special collections contents and should be considered for materials in demand by scholars. Brief, even superficial inventories of collections entered onto gophers can lead scholars to collections they knew nothing about.

6) Dispassionate analysis may reveal that not all materials now housed in special collections departments have to be there, and not all materials must be treated as if they were going to last 500 years. They will not, and we may not be able to move quickly enough to preserve them before they crumble. A discriminating review of what is and is not appropriate for housing in special collections, what does and does not deserve the utmost care, and which policies must be followed to the letter and which policies may be flexibly applied are appropriate topics for further review.

The leaner and meaner environment of higher education is leading to renewed preoccupation with productivity and certainly to attempts by administrators to improve efficiency by imposing change from the top down. Underlying the slogans of leaner and meaner is a new social Darwinism that requires fewer people to work longer hours to create a product of higher quality. But leaner and meaner is not necessarily better unless there is agreement on common goals and some assurance that they will be implemented intelligently. And we must be wary of the revival of arguments based on the supposition that inexorable workings of natural selection in the animal kingdom are also leading to the elimination of the shoddy and flabby in our socially constructed world. We cannot permit the determinism of these arguments to obscure our understanding that much of what has occurred is the result of fallible people making better or poorer decisions within socially established norms, nor can we excuse behaviors that in other, better-funded times we would find unacceptable.
In a discussion about issues of quality assessment, an economist told me, “If special collections were to vanish from the earth today, it would be fifteen years before economists learned about it, but they would be sorry for the loss when they did.” And a friend who directs a large academic library in the Southeast mentioned that on every occasion her president asked her if the library were using its augmented book budget (a budget augmented by the president himself) to acquire electronic journals, and when would it begin dropping subscriptions to its paper journals.

These anecdotes exemplify two of the sources of danger to the preservation of special collections departments. I know that special collections are not going to vanish tomorrow, and I also know that it will be a long time before the library’s paper journal subscriptions will be replaced with electronic ones. But I take it as illustrative that in the world of universities where we may think we share a common idea of what a university is, two such widely diverse perspectives are possible—the one, sympathetic but disengaged, the other focused on developments that are only a part of what is important about libraries.

There is a third source of danger to the preservation of special collections. I have remarked on the apparently ever-enlarging opportunities for research in the humanities. Historian Neil Harris has called this phenomenon the “Explosion of the Canon.” This explosion offers scholars the opportunity of building their own collections, and special collections the possibility of sweeping up an almost unlimited number of potentially researchable ones, but probably unable to process even a fraction of them. In time, homes, libraries, and archives would collapse under their weight. Travel to remote sites will continue to be required, drawing scholars away from the collections located at their own institutions, even as they scramble for resources to support that travel. This will require special collections to provide for an increasing number of visits from scholars, who are consulting an ever-widening body of materials.

The great strength of special collections is their provision of unique source material to faculty and scholars. Their weakness is that they may have slight relationship to the major instructional programs of the university that owns them, programs that rely heavily on print and (probably) electronic resources in more or less abundant supply. What would ordinarily be the supportive constituency of special collections, the institution’s own scholars, may not be served by the institution’s own collections. Special collections may indeed serve the world of scholarship, but those served are themselves responding to the exploded canon. Few in number and spending as little time as possible in the archives they visit, these peripatetic scholars are not visible sources of support to campus or even library administrators.

The suggestions that I have made are principally ways of redistributing costs within the library, although they might still lead to improvements in efficiency and productivity. While mindful of the difficulties of introducing changes that may lead to higher expectations for service in an environment of declining support, we need to recognize that special collections, and many other operations and services, are deeply
embedded in the social and political fabric of the university. Efficiency and productivity are reasonable and worthy goals, but we must keep before us the essentially non-cost-effective, even nonrational nature of the university, "a loose confederation of diverse and mutually competing interests, which sometimes formed crude ad hoc alliances by means of mutual back-scratching." Special collections will have better chances for surviving in the new environment of leanness by taking advantage of this fact of organizational life. Special collections librarians must intertwine themselves and their operations thoroughly with other units inside the library and outside it, so that they are more completely integrated into the broader systems of the library, of the university’s academic community, and of the scholarly world at large. In addition (and perhaps without exception), special collections will benefit from having university librarians who, through their singular authority and visibility on the campus as the spokespeople for libraries, share an understanding of how important these collections are to the scholarly life of the university.

NOTES
6. I acknowledge the imagination of Charles Perrow, Department of Sociology, Yale University, for the phrase "computerize, digitalize, laserize, and automate." It appears in his "On Not Using Libraries," in Humanists at Work: Papers Presented at a Symposium Held at the University of Illinois at Chicago on April 27–28, 1989 (Chicago: The University Library, University of Chicago at Illinois), 29–42; this phrase is on page 42.
11. This research was first described in Stephen E. Wiberley Jr. and William G. Jones, “Patterns of Information Seeking in the Humanities,” *College and Research Libraries* 50.6 (November 1989): 638–45.

12. Personal communication to the author.

13. The April 21, 1993, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A27, reports that in a survey of 7,000 members of the Modern Language Association, “Most were using computers for word processing and not using electronic mail or other services available on computer networks.”


15. I am told that RLG libraries already have a special collections loan program in place. *College & Research Libraries News* 54.5 [(May 1993): 267–69] contains “Draft Guidelines for the Loan of Rare and Unique Materials,” developed by the ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section’s Ad Hoc Committee on the Loan of Rare and Unique Materials, that may contribute to greater exchange of special collections materials between libraries.


17. In George Ball’s “The Rationalist in Power,” a review of Deborah Shapley’s *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (Little, Brown), *New York Review of Books* 40.8 (April 22, 1993), he describes the Defense Department in these terms. They are so apt that in this essay I have applied them to universities.