

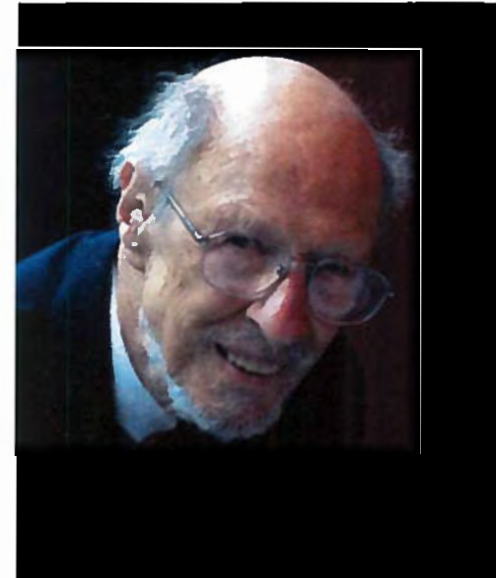
Gifts in memory of Corby may be made to MIT's
Fernando Corbató Fellowship Fund
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Fernando J. Corbató Memorial Gathering

November 4, 2019

MIT Stata Center
Kirsch Auditorium



1926 - 2019

Today we gather to commemorate Fernando J. Corbató, 'Corby,' Professor Emeritus in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at MIT

Fernando Corbató was born on July 1, 1926 in Oakland, California. At 17, he enlisted as a technician in the U.S. Navy, where he first got the engineering bug working on a range of radar and sonar systems. After World War II, he earned his bachelor's degree at Caltech before heading to MIT to complete a PhD in Physics in 1956. Corbató then joined MIT's Computation Center as a research assistant, soon moving up to become deputy director of the entire center.

He was appointed Associate Professor in 1962, promoted to Professor in 1965, and served as Associate Department Head for Computer Science and Engineering during 1974-78 and 1983-93. At retirement in 1996, he held a Ford Professor of Engineering Chair.

Corbató achieved wide recognition for his pioneering work on the design and development of multiple-access computer systems. He was associated with the MIT Computation Center from its organization in 1956 until 1966. In 1963 he was a founding member of Project MAC, the antecedent of CSAIL. An early version of the Compatible Time-Sharing System (CTSS) was first demonstrated in November 1961 at the MIT Computation Center. In the fall of 1963, after further development, the system began daily operation at Project MAC.

Decades before the existence of concepts like cybersecurity and the cloud, Corbató led the development of one of the world's first operating systems. His "Compatible Time-Sharing System" (CTSS) allowed multiple people to use a computer at the same time, greatly increasing the speed at which programmers could work. It's also widely credited as the first computer system to use passwords.

After CTSS, Corbató led a time-sharing effort called Multics (Multiplexed Information and Computing Service), which directly inspired operating systems like Linux and laid the foundation for many aspects of modern computing. Multics doubled as a fertile training ground for an emerging generation of programmers. Multics was available for general use at MIT in October 1969 and became a Honeywell product in 1973. Corbató and his colleagues also opened up communication between users with early versions of email, instant messaging, and word processing.

Another legacy is "Corbató's Law," which states that the number of lines of code someone can write in a day is the same regardless of the language used. This maxim is often cited by programmers when arguing in favor of using higher-level languages.

CTSS was also the spark that convinced MIT to launch "Project MAC," the precursor to the Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS). LCS later merged with the Artificial Intelligence Lab to become MIT's largest research lab, the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL), which is now home to more than 900 researchers.

Corbató was a member of the National Academy of Engineering, and a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1990 Corbató was honored for his work with the Association of Computing Machinery's Turing Award, often described as "the Nobel Prize for computing."

PRELUDE

*Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, J.S. Bach
recorded performance by Alon Goldstein*

Welcome

Daniela Rus

Andrew (1956) and Erna Viterbi Professor, MIT
Director, CSAIL and Deputy Dean of Research,
MIT Schwarzman College of Computing

L. Rafael Reif
President, MIT

Remarks

Frans Kaashoek

Charles A. Piper (1935) Professor, MIT
video recollections of Corby from MIT archive

Jerry Saltzer
Professor Emeritus, EECS, MIT
video message

Richard G. Mills, Sr.
Assistant Director Emeritus, Project MAC

Tom Van Vleck
Project MAC alumnus

Bob Daley
Software Architect (retired)

Peter Neumann
Principal Research Scientist, SRI International

Jack Dennis
Professor Emeritus, EECS, MIT

Paul Penfield
Professor Emeritus, EECS, MIT

Joel Moses
Institute Professor Emeritus, MIT

Arvind
Johnson Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, MIT
*reading letter from Jayadev Misra, Schlumberger Chair
Emeritus, University of Texas at Austin*

Carolyn Corbató Stone
Daughter

video tribute

Jason Gish
Stepson

Emily Corbató
Wife

POSTLUDE

*Traumerei, Robert Schumann
recorded performance by Vladimir Horowitz*

Please join us for a reception in the Stata Center
R&D Commons on the 4th floor