Center for Epigraphical Studies focuses on ancient inscriptions

Ohio State's new Center for Epigraphical Studies is open for business in Pressey Hall. The College of Humanities center provides important resources for research in epigraphy — the study of ancient inscriptions — and is the only university-based center of its kind in the country.

The center's focus is on ancient Greek and Latin texts, says Stephen Tracy, center director and a professor of classics. Tracy specializes in Greek epigraphy and has studied nearly 100,000 inscriptions.

"This center is the first in the college dedicated exclusively to basic research, an endeavor that is fundamentally important," says Tracy.

"Epigraphy is extremely valuable as an ancillary discipline. It sheds light on the history, literature, politics and culture of the ancient world. It improves our understanding of Western Civilization."

Housed in the center are 5,000 "squeezes," which are paper impressions of inscriptions. Squeezes are made by laying thick, wet filter paper across an inscribed stone's surface and then using a stiff brush to work the paper into the letters' grooves. After drying, the paper is peeled off, creating an exact impression of the stone.

The center also contains the scholarly library of noted classicist A.E. Gordon and the offprint collection of A.G. Woodhead. Epigraphical journals will remain in the Main Library, but complete sets of recent studies and offprints in Greek epigraphy will be kept in Pressey Hall.

Tracy says he hopes to secure support for a visiting fellowship and for a chair in epigraphical studies.