Collaborating to Shape New Information Services

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portal: Libraries and the Academy has as its mission to address library and information services in a campus-wide context, focusing on librarians’ engagement with learning services, joint technology initiatives, cross-disciplinary and cross-functional research, faculty partnerships, and scholarly publishing and public policy. But encouraging research that results from innovative collaborations or that shows the integrative potential of libraries with other campus units has been challenging, as was described in an earlier portal editorial.1 Fostering writing that brings together authors from different disciplines or academic functions, however, derives directly from the shared thinking and leadership that goes into creating a campus project or organization. At every turn, we talk about needing such projects to reshape our universities to meet pedagogical demands and resource challenges, but it is still surprisingly difficult to bring such initiatives to fruition in an ongoing way. How can we incentivize sustainable innovation within our existing traditional academic environments?

In 2016, three separate national, invitational gatherings highlighted and sought to expand campus and scholarly collaborations on new models of information services that can advance research and teaching in today’s interdisciplinary and multi-institutional contexts. The meetings had distinctive emphases—museums, university presses, and scientific publishing—and libraries had a leading role in all three. Each was an inaugural event that is expected to continue generating conferences, documentation of best practices, and sustainable projects and organizational models. The author was present at all three and offers summaries of the presentations and the issues addressed. We can gain some sense of the future directions that these communities—none a tight formal structure—might pursue, and we can actively promote wider exploration and implementation of these approaches.
Academic Art Museum and Library Summit

Fourteen teams of museum and library directors came together on January 27–29, 2016, for this event hosted by the University of Miami, in conjunction with the Association of Research Libraries, Coalition for Networked Information, and Association of Academic Museums and Galleries, with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Samuel H. Kress Foundation. The Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) has published a newsletter report that highlights several of the presentations, and a longer white paper is in preparation. Teams had to prepare in advance for the summit by compiling examples of previous collaborations, themes of shared interest, and brief proposals for potential future work of greater intensity. On site, presentations and speakers were grouped into sessions on collaborative teaching and learning; collections sharing and exhibitions; and strategic alignments and institutional priorities. Specific discussions convened around topics such as shared staffing; digital humanities; digital infrastructure and preservation; and laboratories for learning, which suggested creative uses of facilities and curricular integration. Throughout, participants candidly examined the challenges faced in designing and achieving such diverse collaborations, including budget, governance, discrepancies in expertise, incompatible technical infrastructure, inadequate space, and staff expectations. The mood of the summit was energetic and productive, and there was a great sense of the achievability of more venturesome collaborative models. Most of the teams already had relationships that went well beyond simply lending library items to a museum exhibition, or using museum expertise to help stage library displays; and there were several examples of shared spaces or merged organizations. New ways to expand student, faculty, and community engagement were explored by all participants. In July, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation issued a call for expressions of interest from the library/museum teams to submit proposals for shared, sustainable initiatives.

Publishers Reporting to Libraries (P2L) Summit

This meeting was patterned directly on the museum/library summit and built on a more established cohort of university presses that report to or are merged with their campus libraries. Hosted by Temple University in Philadelphia on May 9–10, 2016, this summit also was developed in conjunction with the Association of Research Libraries and the Coalition for Networked Information, with funding support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and extensive planning led by the Association of American University Presses (AAUP). Teams attended from 33 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada along with representatives from the Library of Congress, the National Information Standards Organization (NISO), the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC), and the sponsoring organizations.

Prior to the meeting, teams completed a survey of activities and policies, yielding data and insights into the degree and characteristics of any shared strategic planning, organizational leadership, budget and staffing, technology infrastructure, and engagement with faculty digital scholarship and publishing support. Preliminary results reveal a wide range of organizational models and philosophies even within this domain, which
has had overlapping interactions for many years. Some reflect a totally integrated operation where it is no longer relevant to speak about the “library” and the “press.” In other cases, they are truly two separate entities that just happen to report to the same dean. Creative models are seen in universities where the press is more recently established, or where the library may have taken the lead to undertake formal publishing. The summit preparation also drew from the 2012–2013 survey of library-press collaboration published by the Association of American University Presses (AAUP)4 and the report on libraries as publishers from CLIR.5

During the two-day workshop, the participants got down to hard analyses of the opportunities and challenges faced in developing collaborative publishing services: what are the obstacles from the perspective of the press? Of the library? (The dichotomy immediately prompted some objections!) Can alignment of goals offer strategic advantages in planning shared processes? Will closer collaboration help manage the total cost of the scholarly publishing system? What are the possibilities opened by digital scholarship to maximize access and to better support interdisciplinary learning and research? How is open access viewed differently by the publishing and library communities? There were no simple answers, but many lively and positive discussions.

As of this writing, a final summary of the meeting and synthesis of ideas for the future is still in preparation, but it is already clear that this area of academic information services will expand its reach across more institutions and develop more complex layers of collaborative activity and organizational models.

Open Scholarship Initiative

Of the meetings described here, the Open Scholarship Initiative (OSI) was the largest, with the greatest diversity of participants and the longest framework for its agenda. The conference took place at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, April 19–22, 2016. Participants came from libraries, scholarly and commercial publishers, scientific and disciplinary societies, public and private funders, government agencies, university faculties, and various independent organizations. Coordinated by the National Science Communication Institute (nSCI), with funding from UNESCO, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, commercial publishers, and others, the OSI envisions a 10-year effort among “key stakeholders in scholarly publishing . . . to improve the scholarly publishing system.”6 Participants were invited based on nominations from the various sectors listed earlier, but they did not come as teams or with the expectation that they were making formal plans on behalf of their home organizations. The final attendance included 196 delegates from 12 countries.

This event was structured much like a research development workshop. Broad questions and background tutorials provided the framework for 15 work groups to analyze issues, develop outlines of key challenges, and formulate proposals.7 Open access, current publishing models, preservation and repositories, peer review, use cases, deposit mandates—just about every angle of the scholarly communication debate was reexamined. Over the course of several days, each work group made two presentations and wrote up a summary of its area, though no single set of overall conclusions was articulated at the event. The work group reports have been compiled into formal proceedings,8 and a
white paper proposing next steps is about to be posted which will likely focus on how to keep discussing the issues rather than putting forward breakthrough proposals for scholarly publishing.

There was a level of uncertainty as to how these proposals would be approved or implemented, since the OSI is not itself a formal membership body. Although many of the participants were active in major scholarly communication initiatives and policy-making groups, other such groups were missing from the event or lacked any organizational link to OSI. The usual disagreements and tensions were evident across the stakeholder groups. Responding to criticisms of this first event, OSI coordinators are already seeking to put in place more representative participation and governance models for future forums. A flurry of commentaries has been playing out on blogs and OSI lists, debating both the substantive topics and the potential of OSI as an international communication or organizing mechanism. The next OSI conference is set for April 2017 at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Sustaining New Models through Collaboration

These events, and others like them, illustrate the complexities of moving beyond pilot projects and into ongoing innovative services that reframe the ways we create and disseminate information. In each case, the participants came from constituencies we already “know and love,” but these short, concerted bursts of effort pushed us to more active and integrated commitments. Although the three conferences tackled different sets of issues, each necessarily confronted the fundamental shifts in the landscapes of higher education and research, and the need for new business models as well as new services.

It may seem self-evident, but one can identify core elements that help effect multidimensional collaboration:

• Extensive communication, advance planning, and substantive preliminary work help develop a common base of understanding;
• Leveraging local projects and national interaction fosters a crucial back-and-forth dynamic;
• External funders not only facilitate events but also provide neutral ground and motivate follow-through;
• Partnership communities benefit from including both similar institutions and “outliers”;
• Cross-sector collaborations must demonstrate institutional alignment and a compounding of strategic impact, in order to achieve buy-in and multiyear sustainability.

The future of academic libraries—indeed, the present—resides in these collaborations, even if it is only on a single campus and not as part of a national effort. Countless local projects go undocumented. That said, these national conferences galvanize and transform libraries, museums, publishers, and educational enterprises in ways that should lead to an outpouring of new services and research.
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