

Library and IT Collaborations –An EduCause Conference

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The EduCause conference track on library and IT collaborations had many sessions on library information technology collaborations but also considered library collaboration with other departments such as instructional technology departments. The Xavier University presentation described the need for an Information Resources Center and integrated services desk at Xavier and illustrated the challenges involved in their creation. Examples of quality collaborative projects undertaken by four liberal arts colleges provided much inspiration for developing collaborative projects across any campus environment.

Information Commons to Learning Commons?

According to Yohe and AmRhein (2005), a personal learning environment in which scholars feel completely at home while having full and convenient access to the resources they need to pursue their work can be created when the information technology and library services cultures are present in "a seamless fashion and in an environment designed to be in harmony with the physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of the scholar." Their experience at Valparasio Univerisity with the new Christopher Center resulted in a "quadrupling of traffic" in the new center. Many university libraries are moving beyond the idea of the Information Commons to the idea of a Learning Commons which provides even more services to faculty and student. This type of Learning Commons environment could be more suitable to the 21st century student population.

Xavier University in Cinncinati, Ohio is considering the future and is investigating the resources and services required to support students in the 21st century. They want their services to reach all four generations from ; the war babies, boomers, Gen X, and the Net generation. Xavier are designing a "new service model for a new learning environment. " The Learning Commons which will be the result of the investigation into resources and services for students in the 21st century will be opened in 2010.

Xavier prepared for the design of the new Learning Commons by integrating its library services into the wider academic community on campus and by establishing a first floor Information Commons in the library.

In Xavier's model, Discovery Services and Content Management Services are integrated with Xavier's Information Resources division. Discovery Services and Content Management Services both have staff librarians. Discovery Services and Content Management Services work directly with the Xavier community, including all the University's administrative and academic departments, to provide access to the division's resources and services.

Discovery Services primarily helps students with computer issues, answers reference questions and helps faculty members with software and hardware for their classes. Content Management Services primarily does collection development, cataloging, and assembling of digital data. Xavier's website at <http://xavieredu.localplacement.net/information-resources/about/discovery.cfm> has detailed information about Discovery Services and Content Management Services.

Xavier university, with 4,700, undergraduate students has an integrated service desk which provides information technology, instructional services and other services to students. Library staff and technicians work on the same desk responding to students' needs. A student, for instance, who needs a laptop configured, can go to the integrated service desk, manned by Discovery Services staff, instead of going across the campus. The integrated service desk is "an experimental test bed to assess the appropriateness of the new services" in the design of the new 2010 Learning Commons according to the conference presenters.

As part of the integration of library and other services, library staff needed to be "blended" with technical staff. How could librarians answer technical questions and how could technical staff answer reference questions? A technical training department which

opened in December, 2007 helped to create a knowledge base with Microsoft Sharepoint and a quick help blog. A cross-training program for librarians and technical staff was implemented and extended.

The Information Commons on the first floor of the library not only contains the integrated service desk but also space for collaborative learning . Students will often create semi-private areas for study. Faculty have been able to design more group work assignments and student reactions have been positive. (More information on the redesign of computer labs and learning spaces can be found at [Uses of Labs and Learning Spaces](#) The link includes a video from Cornell describing transformation of the computer lab space into a collaborative learning space.)

Quality Collaboration Projects

Faculty and staff from Beloit College, Earlham College, and Lawrence University have worked together since summer 2007 to create a working project on collaboration entitled the Cultivating Quality Collaboration project. The project was aided by a \$1000 National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education. (NITLE) Midwestern Regional Advisory Council planning grant awarded to Earlham.

The project leaders acknowledge that, “The deep, synergistic linkages that exist among information, teaching, learning, and technology require concomitantly deep and synergistic partnerships among librarians, technologists, and faculty to advance our campus’ learning goals.”

The goals of the Cultivating Quality Collaboration project include; improving existing collaborative service delivery models, developing new collaborative initiatives, assessing new collaborative initiatives, identifying and disseminating relevant scholarship on collaboration in higher education, identifying, and disseminating relevant scholarship on collaboration and technology, and sharing ideas about collaboration with NITLE institutions

A workshop in July 2008 for the collaborating institutions sought to “identify the characteristics of effective collaboration, permit participants to apply the tools and techniques at their own institutions and assess the outcomes, and distill the ideas and experiences for wider dissemination.”

Eight colleges participated in the workshop and agreed to undertake collaborative projects which were reported to the group leaders. Examples of the collaborative projects undertaken by the group can be seen at <http://sites.google.com/a/earlham.edu/cultivating-quality-collaboration>

As part of their collaborative project, Earlham College librarians and instructional technologists held a series of weekly pizza lunch meeting with faculty to introduce them to technologies that they can use to enhance teaching and learning with Moodle. Sample workshop topics included YouTube, RSS, and podcasting.

Lawrence University, which does not have a merged library, implemented a course redesign project in which the Center for Teaching and Learning, the library, and Instructional Technology collaborated to help faculty redesign courses with the purpose of adding more interactivity. The progress is being documented on their blog at <http://lucourseredesign.blogspot.com>

The movement towards more collaboration between librarians and other services in the campus environment is significant. Xavier’s Learning Commons could be a new model for the Net Generation while the Quality Collaboration project will help libraries design collaborative projects that work not only with merged libraries but also within the campus environment.

References

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