

Midwest Regional Educause conference

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The Midwest Regional Educause conference, Intersections: Emerging, commonly accepted, and Best Practices in Higher Education IT incorporated a new track this year, Library and IT Collaborations. It was interesting to hear the perspectives and stories of how different institutions have fostered this collaboration.

Three presentations focused on merged model environments: Xavier University, Ohio Wesleyan University, and Carlton College. In one session, Xavier explained their integrated service desk, a desk staffed by both IT support and library public services functions. They also reorganized traditional library functions into what they called content management and discovery services. OWU is a fully merged environment; the library and IT services have been merged with a focus on being a customer service organization. A presenter from Carlton College focused on projects that the library and IT have collaborated on. Their call was for strategic ventures such as digitization projects,

During a panel discussion with the above presenters, the need to keep communication channels open between IT and libraries was stressed. Based on the survey done by OCLC in 2001, students equate good service with personal service. In other words, they want to do it themselves. Focusing on integration and collaboration will help to create on place where students can get the services they want and need. Comments included; "Go fearlessly into the future." "Create a strategic learning organization, one that is collaborative." "Get rid of the silos of IT and the library."

However, Carroll University presented another perspective in "Urge to merge...maybe not." In their environment they have found that IT and the library do not understand each other's culture/mentality. Traditionally, there have been culture clashes. However, there is a desire to work together. This collaboration does not take the form of merging or integrating the two separate environments but focuses on collaborating on specific projects. Both organizations realize the need to build relationships and the need to foster a shared understanding, but they also understand the benefit of remaining separate.

Other presentations showed successful IT library collaboration in areas of classroom support, faculty development, digitization projects, and a virtual tour pilot project. In all these projects the key to their success was focusing on shared vision, trust, building relationships, and communication. In one discussion session, this collaboration was considered to be essential as libraries move forward to build the necessary cyberinfrastructure needed to store research data and digitized content.

A different but related session was presented by Wayne State on their digital learning and development sandbox. This project stems from their awareness that the philosophy "if you build it they will come" for digital collections is not

necessarily true. Their current collections were underutilized and difficult to search. They wanted to develop a system that facilitated access to their digital collections. So they created a Digital Sandbox where users can search for images, download them to PowerPoint presentations and create learning objects. It is currently not available to the public, but visit their site <http://ditital.lib.wayne.edu> to see their collections and monitor the status of the project.

Two quick-moving sessions of the conference were the “Emerging Practices Lightning Round.” Presenters showcased current projects in rapid succession. The ones I found particularly applicable to libraries:

- Blackboard Librarian: Embed a librarian in each Blackboard class. Allow the librarian to maintain a forum where they can follow up on questions which is available to everyone in the class. Students know who to go to, can get immediate personal help from a librarian, and feel like they have a personal librarian. The service is focused and personal.
- Information literacy and academic standing; A study found that there is a positive correlation between information literacy and academic standing
- Holistic computing: Showcasing how to use the Moodle CMS for student portfolios.
- Student toolkit 2.0: 2.0 applications that can be leveraged; Zoho, Google docs, slideshow, notecentric, flashcards, swap roll, twitter, Blog it. Is this disruptive technology? Maybe not. “More than 60% of teens have created online media, 75% have shared content that they have produced.”
- iTunesU is Free? It may be a “free” hosted service by Apple that allows anyone to manage and control access to educational audio and video but there are a lot of decisions to make and the necessary support and training needs to be in place,

One theme stood out throughout the conference; the need for libraries and IT (computing services and instructional technology) to work together. The benefits of collaboration, whether there is or is not a physical and/or philosophical merging, is going to be necessary for projects and services to move forward at a time of rapid change and increased user expectations.

It is time to think of “blended” services that align with the mission of the institution based on common and shared goals. It was mentioned numerous times that remaining like “silos” can lead to redundant services and cause our users to be confused. It is also important to acknowledge cultural and social differences between the library and IT, however, collaboration and communication can help to foster trust and respect. So where do we start? Suggested areas that are particularly conducive to these new strategic partnerships are scholarly communication and data repositories, physical space redesigns, shared support services and knowledge bases.