

# Leadership by Design: Collaborations and Cornerstones

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## ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the collaborative efforts of Valparaiso University's IT department and main library over the past five years. Highlights of selected resources and services that have come from our efforts involve web sites and resources, instruction services, shared spaces, user guides, personnel issues, and facility planning. Our intent is to reinforce the idea that campus leadership on issues such as these doesn't have to happen from the administrative level—it can come directly from the frontline support units. It also doesn't take a new building or an administrator to create this synergy; anyone who is committed to a collaborative model can benefit. We aren't merging our services or units, but rather, we are enhancing the services of both with this collaboration and cross-training.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 [Management of Computing and Information Systems]: Project and People Management – *staffing, training.*

## General Terms

Human Factors.

## Keywords

Collaboration, IT department, library, user services, instruction services, personnel, user guide.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Acknowledged or not, a history of misunderstanding and/or antipathy between IT departments and the libraries may color what should be a symbiotic relationship. While both provide integral services for academic support, each often knows just enough about the other's situations to make uninformed assumptions or react territorially when problems arise. Perhaps it's a Technology-R-Us attitude at work. Consider a few examples of where Technology-R-Us can lead:

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**Whose computers are they anyway?** Budget, administration, expertise, history, staff, location, and so on, may have caused confusion in responsibility for the purchase, replacement, maintenance, and support for the computer equipment and peripherals in the library. IT may regard the equipment in the same way as other equipment it is responsible for with the same rules and support applying. The library may see the technology as highly specialized, essential for resource access, and in a different category than equipment that might appear in labs or classrooms.

**Just call the Help Desk . . .** As each unit has its own best practices of handling requests for assistance, these methods can lead to misunderstandings when applied to issues dealing directly with one another. Librarians may not expect to go through the same help channels as may apply to academic departments and administrative purposes. They may wish to have insider information or personal alerts about an unexpected outage or scheduled maintenance. IT may believe the library will get the best service through the normal channels of the Help Desk.

**Are they just reading e-mail?** IT and librarians may have a difference of opinion over priorities, especially when resources and computer access are limited. Should computers in certain areas be reserved for certain purposes?

**Who wrote these web pages?** When common purposes overlap, it may be hard to decide who writes documentation that explains how to connect to the library using an ISP, how to load pdf software to read library database articles on-line, or how to best evaluate web resources.

**Don't try this at home . . .** Each staff plays the "true" expert--a sense of superiority in degrees, experience, or expertise can create friction, or as can often happen, each staff dispenses part of the story causing patrons to make several stops. Can't log in? Go to the Help Desk. Can't find a journal article? Go to the library. Can't write an APA bibliography entry? Check with the Writing Center.

**And finally from students:** "The library? I just use the Internet." Students don't always distinguish between resources on the campus network and the Internet, don't know the relationship between IT and the libraries on their campus, and often do not differentiate between search engines like Google and subscription databases offered through their library. Who should address these instruction needs for network resources (word processing, CAIs, courseware, etc.), Internet search engines, and research databases? If students don't view them as entirely separate situations (after all, these resources can all serve to support the academic process),

should IT and the library consider that point of view more closely?

Common ground is easy to find, however, when the public user service units in libraries and IT begin to talk and work with one another. At Valparaiso University we aren't merging our services or units; rather we are enhancing the services of both with this collaboration and cross-training. At VU, collaboration between the library and IT became the cornerstone for planning, user services, and instruction long before the granite block was laid for the Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources (CCLIR), projected to open Fall 2004. This new building will house all library services, the Writing Center, and Electronic Information Services Instructional and User Support (IUS), including the Help Desk. But before the building was more than a heartfelt wish, many of us working these frontline positions chose not to wait to see if it would even get funded.

Both conscious decisions to confer, circumstances, and chance have drawn us into a fruitful collaboration over the past four years that has defeated the Technology-R-U's model so frustrating to both our patrons and staff. Since that time, just four years ago, our co-workers, services, resources-and our campus--continue to enjoy the benefits of this strategic collaboration.

Our experiences reinforce that campus leadership on issues such as shared spaces (virtual, technical and actual), personnel support, and student instruction doesn't have to be initiated from the administrative level. Leadership can (and often should) come directly from the frontline support units. It doesn't take a new building or an administrator to create this synergy; an analysis of our experience has lead us to suggestions and circumstances that can serve as the impetus for collaboration:

- Small projects lend themselves easily to a collaborative model which can then be suggested for possibilities within other units within the same departments (i.e., EIS Network Services and Library Technical Services).
- A small group of people involved initially leads to quicker demonstrations of collaborative success.
- Sharing information outside of that group (within appropriate departments across campus) keeps awareness heightened without creating unrealistic expectations.
- This situation allows us to be proactive rather than reactive all of the time. Since so much of our work for our users is reactive to their needs and problems, it's nice to alter that situation when working with one another.

A loosely chronological look at our experiences shows the derivation of these suggestions.

## 2. FIRST ENCOUNTERS

EIS Instructional and User Support (IUS) unit organized in 1991, and took the Writing Center (established in the late 1970s) under its wing. This unusual pairing was due to both a staffing/facilities convenience and an intentional inclusion of academic programming with technology. While the Library Instruction Services program began in 1985, session numbers increased when the library catalog went on-line in 1991 with Internet and CD-ROM database access available in the library in 1993. Librarians

were among the first to take interest in the HTML classes and search engine classes offered by EIS in the early 1990s, both for their own edification and for helping library patrons. Ms. Mileham's hire in 1998 coincided with increased use of the Internet for both web searching and database access. As our library and IT interdependence grew due to both systems and personnel support, our paths began to cross more purposefully.

## 3. WEB SITES and RESOURCES

The library's web site was established in 1996, consisting mainly of a home page, access to the on-line catalog via telnet, information pages about each department, and some instruction on various CD-ROM databases. Since Spring 1999, the site has grown in depth and complexity (400+ pages), adding on-line resources, services, and information. Ongoing consultation and feedback from IUS has enhanced many of these changes. During combined user guide discussions in Spring/Summer 2002, EIS Network Services proposed the use of a dynamic content management system for the EIS web site. Following that launch, the library web site will also move to this system.

Creating a way to keep outside web link listings up-to-date while also providing support for all VU academic departments, Library Instruction Services is currently working with both IUS and Network Services to create and manage a database that offers subject categorized access to recommended and evaluated web links. Students will be able to easily search for library and academic department recommended web resources by entering subject terms and departments will be able to avoid the time-consuming task of continuously checking their recommended links pages. The library's current evaluated web link listings and cataloging expertise partners well with Network Services' technical expertise to create a resource useful to all on campus.

No doubt a surprise to some who aren't aware of the teaching aspects of academic librarianship, Library Instruction Services were included on the campus courseware selection committee in 2000. After attending all the company training, library staff assisted EIS in all the major faculty workshops the first year of implementation. Now during a shift in courseware, Library Instruction Services again has a representative on the committee. Concerned with frontline issues such as electronic reserves, database access, and student support, as well as the underlying pedagogical issues, such as distance and on-line learning, librarians join IT in offering other important perspectives to the campus courseware conversations.

## 4. INSTRUCTION SERVICES

As technology changes continue to directly impact the services and resources of both libraries and IT departments, instruction of our users in best practices challenges our units in both time and personnel. Working to empower the user to adapt to format changes in familiar tools is a primary focus, pushing us beyond the demonstration "how-to" and "click here" instruction into areas of hands-on, learning-style driven sessions.

**Electronic Resource Instruction** In the mid 1990s, IUS expanded the instruction given in its workshops from "How to use Netscape" to "How to maximize search engine performance with Boolean operators" and "How to evaluate a web site." It was not uncommon for librarians to sign up for the courses. Within two

years as more databases went on-line and library Internet connections proliferated, librarians took over this role both within their instruction sessions and work with patrons at the reference computers. EIS dropped the search offering from its workshops.

Instruction given to the College of Nursing students nicely demonstrates this collaborative instruction. Originally, nursing students spent a class period in a computer classroom where IUS gave instruction in e-mail, Netscape use, searching for health-related resources, the on-line library catalog, accessing the nursing CAIs, and off-campus connectivity. Another class period was then spent at the library exploring print resources. Soon instruction shifted to the library where Library Instruction Services took over everything but the CAIs, e-mail, and connectivity. Today, a one-stop-shopping approach works well, as library staff can answer all but the most complex connectivity and resource support questions. These, students address to the EIS Help Desk.

**Library Pathfinders** Many librarians have used teaching tools called “pathfinders” for many years. Usually in print format and created by the librarian for a specific class assignment or topic, pathfinders contain subject call number ranges and suggested books, journals, electronic resources, arranged in the loosely sequential order of the research process. Desiring to arrange common library classroom experiences and decrease paper use, the instruction librarian created comprehensive pathfinders on-line in Fall 1999 for every class receiving library instruction. As content is individualized to meet class assignments, these pathfinders provide one-stop access for recommended electronic resources as well as suggestions for appropriate print resources and search tips. They have been wildly successful with our faculty. They also support an easy format for guiding students to various IUS support services, such as the Writing Center and Technology Enrichment classes: < <http://www.valpo.edu/library/path/index.html> >.

**Bibliography Instruction** Perhaps the most frequent questions asked at the Writing Center (and at the library reference desk) concern citations and bibliography. When dealing with print resources only, the answers used to be easy. Now, answers are more complicated due to the complexities presented by electronic source access and resources reached through subscription databases. It’s not just a matter of style anymore (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) but also issues of resource retrieval and the all-important future access. Through the library instruction sessions, the pathfinders guide students to the Writing Center resources for help. And when matters are too complicated for reference desk assistance, students are referred to the Writing Center once again.

## 5. SHARED SPACES

A remodel project in 1996/97 added two classroom spaces to the lower level of the library. With the campus migration to DATATEL, training was needed so the smaller classroom (A) was outfitted with 10 workstation computers, all low-end operating units. The larger classroom (B), used for library sessions, had one instructor station and an LED projector panel. Fall 1999 saw library funds become available for improving projection in both classrooms while also updating classroom A units and furnishing classroom B with 14 student workstations. Collaboration between Library Instruction Services and IUS was elemental in getting the most optimum room configuration, assisting in equipment

choices, and assuring a speedy installation process once the machines arrived in Spring 2000.

Both classrooms are now used heavily by both units, with scheduling, and the necessary changes, smoothly organized. This success greatly enhanced the ideas we proposed for the CCLIR building project, and due to our shared vision, there are four classroom spaces in CCLIR that will allow us great flexibility and creativity in our instruction.

## 6. USER GUIDE

Both Moellering Library and IUS have always published a variety of guides to services. In 2001, the IUS 40-page guide, which devoted three pages to the library, cost \$2.23 per copy to print, not counting staff time for writing. Moellering’s 24-page guide had cost \$1.68 per copy for a run lasting two years.

With distinctions between library and technology melting and the potential for economy, the idea grew for combining the guides. Also, who knew where did either of these tomes land once in the hands of the students? In late June 2002, editors from both staffs began work on a handy-looking 9 ½" x 4 1/2" 60-page book-- hopefully too inviting to toss. Some of the headings showed the relative seamlessness of library and technology:

- Accounts & Access
- Library & Computer Facilities
- Information Resources
- Research & Writing Tools
- Policies & Advisories

Our award-winning guide, titled “Connecting Minds to the World: The Guide to Resources 2002 - 2003,” brings in the third instructional resource player, the Writing Center, at appropriate places. For example, citations in MLA and APA styles are included for sources retrieved electronically. Though the cost per book crept up to \$2.30 thanks to the spiral binding, by publishing only one book, not two, the actual savings was \$1.61 per book over the previous year.

The project meant various collaborative efforts occurred: budgeting, designing, and writing, of course. Also, not-so-obvious collaboration occurred like using each other’s computer clusters, acquiring shared network space, teaching each other software, and discovering the work style of each other’s environments. Campus reaction to these guides has been overwhelmingly positive. A popular section turned out to be the pages at the back of the book devoted to how to write citations and bibliography. The Writing Center suggested problematic areas and an instruction librarian wrote entries in APA and MLA. These inclusions have presumably inspired interest--both student and faculty--in other parts of the guide as well. At last, something practical!

Due to the success of this venture, the future of the guide project is secure. Now, instead of having to focus both on content and the “how will we actually do it” staff issues, we are spending our creative energy planning for improvements in the upcoming guide. While these enhancements may include an index, a

glossary, and alternate section tabbing, the collaborative model of producing the guide is already in place.

## 7. PERSONNEL

When students ask for assistance because the technology they are using isn't working right, it isn't their responsibility to know whether it is a "library" or an "IUS" question--they just know they need help. Neither staff enjoys continually having to refer someone who needs help to another area, especially when that other area is in another building entirely. So while each staff should enjoy a mutual respect and referrals for their expertise, awareness of more in-depth help resources and strategies only serves to strengthen our front-line personnel's ability to help someone as fully as possible at that moment.

The relationships built from our collaborations really do lessen the territoriality and fear that someone is giving out the incorrect information. While we are small units on a small campus, our focus on providing the best support for our students has made it easier to sustain our dedication. We aren't afraid to run things by one another, to ask for (and use) others' opinions, or to change the way a situation is handled due to new information. This is exemplified in ways ranging from our student assistant training to our on-line FAQs to our service request management tool.

A further-reaching example came about when we instituted our proxy server for off-campus use of library databases. Both staffs heard the same tales of woe told differently from the same group of students. The starting point was a great conversation between the instruction and network services of both staffs. At one point, we likened it to our being the parents of teenagers who were playing us off of one another. While not meant to be demeaning, this highlights the humor of the situation, rather than the finger-pointing that could have been. Today, everyone involved is better off in their now fully informed position brought about by this circumstance. Once again, strategic collaboration has laid the groundwork for even more collaborations once we are in shared spaces.

## 8. FACILITY PLANNING: CCLIR

As previously noted, the CCLIR building will provide four distinct classroom areas for our use. In addition to those areas, a "commons" area on the first floor is the setting for the Writing Center, the Help Desk, various IUS offices, and a large computing area providing a range of technological options. That area is directly adjacent to the Media Library area. A shared support desk at the entrance to this space will be staffed by those on both payrolls, but no outward distinctions will be made as to which types of services or questions will be addressed by whom. Cross-training at its most detailed will be provided for those working here, supported by some of the paths we've already created.

Planning the commons and classrooms involved more collaboration than we envisioned. We assumed the first architectural drawings would show perfect teaching spaces and computer cluster areas in the commons. Although skilled in aesthetic matters, the architects were not versed in layout of an on-line training facility, so IUS and library staff began to talk about this. First conceptions were not entirely compatible since the principal instructor for EIS came from a corporate training environment and others who instruct were from more academic

settings. Each party had a different idea about configuration but because of their previous work together, the talk was constructive and directed toward consensus-building. One of the librarians also researched the subject of ideal electronic classrooms and sent information to the architects, who tried to please with more drawings.

The commons area provided some of the same difficulties with the Writing Center, the Help Desk, Instructional Media, and User Support staff all having distinct opinions. To more easily visualize this space, and then create it, a road trip to a facility already addressing these issues seemed in order. A mixed group of architects, librarians, and IUS personnel (from the Help Desk and Writing Center) headed for University of Chicago to visit the new computer cluster and cyber cafe of the Crerar Science Library. After touring, architects, who finally saw our vision, spread paper on the lunch table and sketched in plans that have held--well, more or less.

Collaboration between the staffs in CCLIR planning is not limited to IUS and Library Instruction Services. Network Services continues to work closely with the architects and University Librarian to establish optimum placement of utility closets, wiring configurations, and other network concerns. Many of us feel strongly that due to previous work together, these conversations take place in person, with many levels of staff involved, instead of solely through messages, memos, and e-mails.

## 9. NEW ISSUES & CONSIDERATIONS

New issues occur constantly, both within the day-to-day workplace and in planning for CCLIR. Some issues are more involved than others, but the fact that they are able to be freely discussed and responded to without heightened emotions makes a huge difference in their potential resolution. Here's an overview:

**Writing Center reference books and hand books** Do they join the general collection, have their own special checkout system, or just remain for use within the Writing Center itself? How do the librarians handle personal collections that are also part of their student support? Are there classroom instruction materials that also fall into this category? How should they be handled?

**Cross training of appropriate personnel** This will be important to aid the one-stop approach we'd like to achieve as fully as possible. Conversations have already started about issues for both professional and student assistant staff support. A great benefit is that both units already use highly trained student assistants/consultants to assist in many interactions. Building upon that model increases the respect and awareness that we all bring to these conversations, the end result being better workspaces and support for all involved.

**Customer service models** Decisions will need to be made about service attitudes, timelines, and even details like terminology for those needing assistance (users? clients? patrons? customers?) will need to be agreed upon.

Each staff may encounter unfamiliar attitudes from those seeking help: people with technology questions tend to be more assertive about what they need, as they see a technical solution to their problems; those with library questions seem more hesitant, as their questions are usually more open-ended. Helping one another

construct knowledgeable responses to these different question-styles will be key to the ongoing success of our user/client/patron/customer support.

**Questions at the Media Desk / Help Desk service point** How to first direct them? In addition to training for answers given on-the-spot, the staffs will need to decide which kinds of questions will be entered into the service request system now used by the Help Desk (HEAT by FrontRange Solutions). Since last spring, service requests for the VU web coordinators (responsible for design, consistency and identity) on the University Relations staff began to use the request recording and routing software. How will this system coordinate with request routing now used by the library? Will both staffs use HEAT? How will library patrons, used to immediate and direct assistance, react to such a possible change?

**Repair of media materials** Whose system, EIS or the Media Library, is more applicable for use in CCLIR? Right now, physical separation of these units makes the initial decisions a little more self-evident, but once these units are on the same floor of the same building, what criteria should take precedence?

## 10. CONCLUSION

The issues involved in libraries and academic computing working together first began surfacing in the professional literature around the mid-1980s, as computing became more a part of academic library research, librarians became more involved in electronic instruction, and IT professionals became more integral to academic resource access, especially in the library. While the titles of articles have varied from the jarring (“Librarians vs.

Computer Professionals”) to the jocular (“Open Relationships, De-Facto Marriages, or Shotgun Weddings?”), the overall view is that whether by accident or on purpose, the convergence of libraries and academic computing is a positive one.

As stated initially and detailed through our examples, collaboration between IT and library units doesn’t depend on shared spaces, administrative mandates, or artificial constructs. While not every experience is without some instance of miscommunication or misunderstanding, and every person involved is as positively committed to a shared vision, we’ve found that building upon small successes has lead us to a larger reward—and it’s not the brand new building we are all anticipating. It’s the knowledge that we can serve our campus needs better than ever by learning more about, and working more purposefully with, the people and their jobs that are increasingly affiliated to our own. Collaboration is a mighty cornerstone.

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