

The journey to build a 21st century faculty-librarian relationship: A retrospective case study

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”-Henry Ford¹

This paper will reflect on how faculty and librarians built and fostered a successful cross-disciplinary relationship. The authors examine their journey to nurture an information fluent learning environment. How did we foster the connectedness as a group? How did our diverse personalities impact the relationship? How did we create a win-win relationship based on personal strengths? How did we benefit from social capital? How did we build co-mentorship? How did we practice being a community of learners? How did we employ a servant leadership model? The authors share their retrospective analysis and lessons learned, in hopes of overcoming challenges in educating 21st century learners, strengthening cross-disciplinary learning environments, and enhancing faculty-librarian relationships.

In the rapidly changing 21st century educational environment, faculty and librarian’s successful collaboration and communication can create a core community of learners. The concept of collegiality is discussed as one of most challenging and meaningful components of a successful collaboration between faculty and librarians.^{2,3} Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy web site presents many resources and ideas including various collaboration examples.⁴ ACRL points out carefully defined roles, comprehensive planning and shared leadership as requirement of successful collaboration. Respect for each party is important in order to reach the common goal, fostering successful student learning.

A faculty/librarian relationship at a regional university was formed among the library director, technical service librarian, chemistry professor and English professor. Two faculty members who attended the American Association Higher Education (AAHE) conference in 2001 started sharing what they learned from the conference with two librarians. This collaboration has produced fruitful outcomes in campus wide information literacy instruction and collaborator’s professional development. The focus of this collaboration has been the integration of information literacy (or information fluency) instruction into the existing course curriculum. The projects process and progress have been shared in various professional communities.^{5,6} For example, the collaborators’ regular meetings to discuss, evaluate, and reflect the information literacy themed projects have produced campus-wide information literacy perception assessment, inter-institutional grant activities to promote information literacy across the curriculum and seamless integration of information literacy instruction into the course via course assignments (e.g. University General Education Chemistry course information literacy assignment). The collaboration has amplified teaching effectiveness of each unit and

strengthened the collegial communication channels to share issues in academe. In this paper, the authors examine their journey to create the successful relationship.

How did we foster the connectedness as a group? We recognized our common goals (e.g. information literacy, student centered learning) and respected each other's point of view. We benefited from our diverse academic and cultural backgrounds, disciplines, ages and career stages. We capitalized on each member's diverse personality traits, benefited from social capital, focused on our strengths, co-mentored, built a community of learners and utilized the servant leadership model.

How did our diverse personalities impact the relationship? The Dominance, Influence, Conscientiousness, Steadiness (DISC) personality profile model developed by William Moulton Marston has been utilized by organizations to improve personal and professional relationships.^{7, 8} Fortunately, each member of our group exemplified one of the four DISC behaviors and our group capitalized on the personality strengths of each individual. The library director with strong dominance profile kept us focused and moving to get results. An English professor with influence behavior verbalized ideas and encouraged a friendly environment such as social events. A chemistry professor with conscientiousness traits engineered systematic/specific details and supported ideas with obtaining data. A technical services librarian with steadiness characteristics offered personal assurance of follow-up support with technology expertise and defined roles/ procedures in the overall plan. We shared our weaknesses without embarrassment and understood each other's limitations. With the rapport built on openness, we listened, respected each other's needs, were willing to take the risks, and focused on each member's strengths. Our keys to solve any conflicts included looking ways to contribute personal strength, embracing the strengths of the other members and expressing gratitude for strength contribution. We created a win-win relationship built on personal strengths.

How did we benefit from social capital? Why was social capital so important ingredient to our group? "Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible."⁹ Every successful group or organization usually has a high degree of social capital. Social capital connects people. Its major indicators are high levels of trust, robust personal networks and vibrant communities, shared understandings and a sense of equitable participation in process of accomplishing the goals. Looking back at our group dynamics, we realize now our interactive group had a large amount of social capital. Social capital was important to our group because it gave us space and time to connect, allowed us to build trust and offered opportunities for active participation not just presence. Our social capital increased as we did more and more projects together.

How did we become co-mentors? Among four mentor types (traditional mentor, step-ahead mentor, co-mentor, spouse mentor),¹⁰ our relationship was strengthened by the co-mentor aspect. Our academic experiences (2 to 34 years) and ranks (assistant to full professor) provided traditional mentor and step-ahead mentor. Traditional mentor is "similar to a wise and capable elder" and our library director served in that capacity.

Step-ahead mentor is “analogous to a protective older sibling who smoothes the path for the protégé.” Our group consisted of full-, associate-, and assistant professors, who represented hierarchical layers of academic careers, and were natural step-ahead mentors. However, being an all female group, in a male dominated engineering technology institution, encouraged us toward a co-mentor to each other “a friend with whom one shares mutual assistance.” Our group engaged in a series of interactions to discuss various aspects of teaching/scholarship/service and professional development in academe. We shared our individual and interdependent teaching goals/materials, observed each other’s classroom activities for peer review, inspired each other with scholarship and creative endeavors, and consulted each other for constructive critique during their major academe career advancements.

How did we build a community of learners? Our group shared knowledge, ideas, and practices involving common issues about teaching and student learning, specifically information literacy. “Learning happens fastest when the novice trusts the setting so much that they aren’t afraid to take risks, make mistakes or do something dumb.”¹¹ Our group understood the unique roles of teacher and librarian in student learning and cultivated positive relationships, by sharing pedagogy, instructional resources and the assessment process related to information literacy instruction. For example, the technical writing professor kept us informed on the abilities of her students to do advanced searches. The chemistry professor refined context-sensitive information literacy materials/assessment tools using the group’s feedback. The total student experience was measured, critiqued from beginning to end by all of the group members. We also shared our personal and professional needs/challenges/goals in broad perspectives. We were inspired by each other’s practical humanities which include benevolence, inclusion and respect, and unknowing followed the servant leadership model.

What is a servant leadership¹² model? How did we employ the servant leadership model? Servant leadership begins with a need to serve, followed by a conscious choice that brings people to aspire to lead. Servant leadership involves following components: listening, empathy, healing, persuasion, commitment to the growth of people, and/or building community. Servant leadership allows the opportunity for each individual to grow and provide for the highest priorities of the group. In our relationship, each of us was a servant to the other. Rather than merely dividing the work, we willingly offered individual expertise, skills, talents, and ‘can-do’ attitude to our alliance. Our team was often moved emotionally by members who practiced servant leadership. When we valued people, the project success followed.

Lessons learned:

- Focus on common goals.
- Remember that our colleagues help us accomplish our work.
- Encourage social capital such as trust, mutual understanding, shared values, and cooperative action
- Value diversity and be inclusive.
- Understand different personality behaviors and capitalize on personality strengths.
- Create a mentoring environment that promotes mutual assistance.

- Foster a community of learners to inspire each other.
- Value people, hard work, humor, knowledge and service.

¹ O'Donovan, E. "Professional learning communities" *District Administration* 43.3 2007 Vol.2 p94

² Kraat, S. B. Ed. Relationships between Teaching Faculty and Teaching Librarians. New York: Haworth 2005

³ Elmborg, J.; Hook, S. Ed. Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration. American Library Association 2005

⁴ Information literacy in action: collaboration, retrieved February 2007, from Association of College and Research Libraries Web site:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/acrlinfolit/infolitresources/collaboration/collaboration.htm>

⁵ Oh, J.; Collins, J.; Kissick, B.; Starkey, A. "Information Literacy Teams: Bridging the Fluency Divide" *2005 ASEE Conference Proceedings*

⁶ Oh, J.; Kissick, B.; Starkey, A. "Fostering Students to be Lifelong Learners with Science Literacy, Information Fluency, and Communication Skills" *2007 ASEE Conference Proceedings*

⁷ McKenna, M.; Shelton, C., Darling J. "The impact of behavioral style assessment on organizational effectiveness: a call for action" *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 2002; Vol 23, 5/6 p 314

⁸ Slowikoski, M. "Using the DISC behavioral instrument to guide leadership and communication. (Dominant, Influencer, Steady, Conscientious)" *AORN Journal* 82.5 2005 p835

⁹ Cohen, D. & Prusak, L. In good company: How social capital makes organizations work. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2001, p 4.

¹⁰ Scanlon, A. "Mentoring Women Administrators: Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling" *Initiatives* 1997 Vol.58, P39-59

¹¹ *The Nation* Nov 18, 2002 Vol.275 i17 P30

¹² Greenleaf, R. K. Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness. New York/Mahwah, NJ Paulist Press. 1997