Bringing 'Beginner's Mind' to Global Resource Collaboration

Barbara McFadden Allen, Executive Director
Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC)

"*In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,*
in the expert's mind there are few."
Shunryu Suzuki

It is often observed that higher education doesn't change; but it is changing every day, and often in very profound ways. Perhaps we haven't been bold enough in imagining (or reimagining) the structures that best support faculty and scholarly connections and collaborations. At least in the sciences, it appears that faculty engagement is moving faster than institutional engagement and collaboration. Maybe it is time to step back and take a "beginner's mind" approach.

While we have made significant headway as a community in using collaborations, consortia and partnerships to make more efficient decisions about (e.g.) library acquisitions, data curation, archiving of digital content, and print storage, we have not tapped the potential for collaboration as a tool to facilitate and accelerate research and to broaden the reach and impact of academic programs. In short, we seem good at extending partnerships to realize efficiencies in areas where our institutional independence and autonomy are not threatened -- but in so doing; we have perhaps abandoned the opportunity for positive, transformational change by being too faint in our institutional collaboration.

Further, there is strong evidence to suggest that, at least in the sciences, substantive collaboration among scholars is outpacing the creation of structures to support such collaboration. The National Science Foundation reports the following trends in publishing for science and engineering, for example:

> "Two-thirds of all S&E articles were coauthored in 2010. Articles with authors from different institutions and different countries have continued to increase, indicating

increasing knowledge creation, transfer, and sharing among institutions and across national boundaries.

Coauthored articles grew from 40% of the world's total S&E articles in 1988 to 67% in 2010. Articles with only domestic coauthors increased from 32% of all articles in 1988 to 43% in 2010. Internationally coauthored articles grew from 8% to 24% over the same period.

Between 2000 and 2010, the U.S. share of the world's total citations in S&E articles declined from 45% to 36%, reflecting the broad expansion of the global literature. China's share of these citations increased from 1% to 6%. The EU share remained steady at 33%, and Japan's share fell from 7% to 6%."[1]

Co-authorship, as one indicator of scholarly collaboration, is on the rise, and the dominance of the United States in the literature cannot be presumed into the future. Increasingly, it would appear that those scholars who can collaborate --and who are affiliated with universities and institutes that support collaboration --will have greater impact in their fields. Assuming that these trends hold true in the social sciences, and increasingly in the humanities, we should look to find ways to structure and support academic and research collaborations that are transformative in nature, global in scope, and responsive to researchers and scholars.

A Primer on Collaboration

A review of the literature related to corporate partnerships and joint ventures provides a helpful frame within which to consider the creation of academic partnerships. Obviously, academic partnerships must differ significantly from corporate partnerships, particularly in terms of their impact and outcomes, but there is shockingly little research analyzing academic partnerships. We know that corporate entities cooperate to accomplish several objectives[2]:

1) Compensate for a weakness in the resource base

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2) Drive down costs through collective action

3) Enhance competitive position

4) Innovate and acquire new knowledge

5) Spread the risk of innovation

If collaboration is such a powerful tool, then why is it not employed more often? Again, a look at the research related to corporate alliances also teaches us something about the durability and structure of partnerships:

1) An estimated 60% of all corporate partnerships fail, and they fail for the same reason that 50% of all U.S. marriages fail: lack of shared goals, lack of alignment, and poor partner selection.

2) For those partnerships that survive, there is a high probability of repeat alliances with the same partner.

3) Most partnerships operate only as fast as the least trusting partner.

From this, one might draw the conclusion that a high tolerance for failure is required, that several approaches to collaboration might be necessary before settling on the optimal structure, and that there is an ever-present danger that partners will simply not be open to working together to the degree necessary to accomplish objectives on time and on task. Such performance issues must be addressed by organizers and designers of the systems. And, project managers and leaders must exercise discipline in approaching their creation and evaluation.

In the realm of academic collaboration, it might be useful to reflect upon the (apparent) growth of scholar-to-scholar collaboration, versus the general lack of large-scale institutional collaborations that support such scholars. Obviously, people collaborate and institutions do not – but how can we align the two interests and constituencies more effectively?

Global Resource Collaboration

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The library landscape is littered with collaborative efforts. There are stellar examples in global and international library collaboration, particularly, with the following serving as different approaches to leveraging collections, human capital, or other resources. This list is not exhaustive, but illustrative – there are many and varied examples upon which to draw.

HathiTrust[3]

HathiTrust seeks to build a reliable and increasingly comprehensive digital archive of library materials converted from print that is co-owned and managed by a number of academic institutions.

Center for Research Libraries[4]

CRL acquires and preserves newspapers, journals, documents, archives, and other traditional and digital resources from a global network of sources. Most materials acquired are from outside the United States, and many are from five "emerging" regions of the world: Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Latin America.

Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials[5]

SALALM is both a supportive network of librarians and scholars, and a consortium aimed at the development and bibliographic control of collections of Latin Americana.

Triangle Research Libraries Network[6]

Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) is a collaborative organization of 4 North Carolina universities, dedicated to marshaling the financial, human, and information resources of their research libraries through cooperative efforts.

CIC Shared Japanese Studies Librarian[7]

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The CIC is a consortium of 13 research universities dedicated to sharing and leveraging resources, courses, and other assets. The CIC Shared Japanese Studies Librarian project leverages the expertise resident at one or another of the CIC libraries to provide support for staff, faculty and students on other campuses.

These several projects fall generally into the following categories of collaborative activities:

- Virtual research and service groups, with related infrastructure to support large-scale collecting, digital capture, management, preservation, and access.
- Shared bibliographers, course developers, or other specialized staff.

Several examples are also emerging of coordinated academic efforts in the following dimensions:

- Virtual academic departments, wherein the human capital is distributed across a number of participating institutions. (The Five Colleges, Inc. leverages academic offerings from the member institutions).[8]
- Aggregating and delivering language instruction across a group of institutions. (The CIC CourseShare program enables member universities to share access to instruction in the 120 languages taught across the consortium).[9]

Lessons Learned

Naturally, there are challenges to be addressed: the closer you get to the core mission of an institution, a unit, or an individual, the more difficult the alignment (as they say in the military, you aren't going to catch any flak until you are right over the target); differing appetites for speed and autonomy can be frustrating and difficult to manage. A surfeit of patience and diplomacy, coupled with unerring direction and will is crucial. We've learned from corporate joint ventures that the following are critical points of consideration.

1) Choose your partners carefully (aspirational, cultural and strategic alignment is critical).

2) Fit the complexity of the governance, funding, and management models to the complexity of the effort (there is cost of implementing any collaborative system – make sure the investment pays off in actual collaborative impact).

3) Exercise patience and use a deliberate approach in evaluating programs, and be disciplined in adjusting or ending efforts that are not productive.

Scholars are embracing collaborative research, scholarship and teaching. Those institutions that can foster and enable scholarly collaboration will be more competitive in the bid for the world's best researchers, faculty, scholars and students. Libraries have traditionally embraced some measure of cooperation in order to achieve their aims, and this provides a good foundation upon which to build.

If one assumes that the success of large-scale collaboration depends upon the marriage of a good idea with sound management practice, then the development of better analytic tools to inform project development should also be of interest. Reliable, easy-to-use collection and resource analytics could dramatically shift the way collections are "ranked" and thereby disrupt unhealthy incentives (bigger isn't always better in a networked environment). A deep understanding of collections at a meta level was always the aim of the Conspectus approach, which aspired to provide a framework within which libraries could self identify and report collection strengths.[10] Analysis by language, region and other global dimensions would be particularly helpful, as would analytics that identify particular strengths and weaknesses of collections and resources. World Cat analysis and the emerging Harvard analytics tool are very promising efforts that might address the previous (yet unrealized) objectives of the Conspectus. Such high level collections metrics, coupled with the identification of ways to measure the impact of specific collaborative resource programs could inform efforts aimed at improving the performance of collaborative efforts and provide a "blue print" for the future. If we in higher education had a better understanding of the performance and impact of scholar-to-scholar and

institutional collaboration (in the same way we understand the well-documented dynamics of the corporate sector) we could be more intentional and, I believe, more effective in our partnerships.

So, where do we go from here? We might take up the following questions to provide some context:

> 1) What can we learn from an examination of scholar-to-scholar collaboration that will inform the ways we structure institutional collaboration?

> 2) How can we approach analytics more effectively to inform and drive collaboration?

Such questions get us closer to understanding how to accelerate institutional collaborations to keep pace with and support scholarly collaborations in a global context.

We know that the best collaborations are founded upon strong partner selection, commitment to a long-term relationship, and alignment on shared goals. We also know that faculty, more than ever, are embracing collaboration. Let's seize the moment, and let's do so with "beginner's mind."

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[1] National Science Foundation, Science & Engineering Indicators, 2012
http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind12/c0/c0i.htm

[2] Gulati, Ranjay. "Alliances & Networks." Strategic Management Journal, vol. 19, 293-317, 1998.

[3] Hathi Trust www.hathitrust.org

[4] Center for Research Libraries http://www.crl.edu

[5] Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials http://salalm.org

[6] Triangle Research Library NetworkTrln.org

[7] CIC Shared Japanese Studies Librarian
http://info.cic.net/eNews/CLI/Article.aspx?List=e2b6f931%2D966b%2D48a1%2Da375%2D36f2c6a5860d&ID=48

[8] Five Colleges, Inc. www.fivecolleges.edu

[9] CIC CourseShare
http://www.cic.net/Home/Projects/SharedCourses/CourseShare/Introduction.aspx

[10] The RLG Conspectus was an inventory of research libraries collection strengths, created in the 1980s, and used to help focus collection development and enable cooperative collection management.