Collaboration with Faculty - A Tough Nut to Crack

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Welcome and introduction

The purpose of this session is to explain the Open Polytechnic Library's collaboration with faculty. In particular, I'll focus on why we think it is "a tough nut to crack" and what we do to make collaboration easier. Finally, I'll look at how we can place all the work the Library does within a collaborative framework.

What is our situation? How is the Open Polytechnic Different from Other Tertiary Institutions?

The most obvious difference is that 99.9% of all teaching is at a distance - there are no on-campus students.
Rather than faculty developing their lectures, courses are produced by a team of specialists. This course material, originally in print, but now online is taught by Faculty. These courses range from basic level 1 through level 7 and some post-graduate papers.
A quick word about our 30,000 students. The majority (70%) are working adults studying part-time towards qualifications, and 93% are over 20 years of age.

You can probably see that the Open Polytechnic Library has an ideal opportunity to engage in collaboration through the course production process but I'm getting ahead of myself. I think first of all we have to know what we mean by "collaboration".

The dictionary defines collaboration as
1. act of working jointly; "they worked either in collaboration or independently"
2. act of cooperating traitorously with an enemy that is occupying your country
Wikipedia is more expansive
"Collaboration is a recursive process where two or more people or organizations work together in an intersection of common goals by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus."

The positive and negative connotations of collaboration are very interesting. While I'm sure we all view collaboration as a good, positive thing, there is still the whiff of something that might be seen as betrayal. By collaborating there is a sense that you give away something and give the other side an advantage. I think in most collaboration it's necessary to give up some of your ingrained practices and entrenched beliefs.

I think the following attributes are at the heart of what it means to collaborate.

Firstly, collaboration (from Wikipedia) stresses that there is a common goal. This means that all the parties to the collaboration know what they are aiming to achieve. The common goal has to be negotiated and articulated, and should be the beginning of the process. It is obvious, but without stating what you are trying to achieve it is impossible to work together to reach that goal. The real danger in not articulating a common goal is that it will be assumed. These assumptions can be polar opposites.

Collaboration is a shared activity. It cannot be done in isolation; it has to be done with at least one other person. I'd go further and say that it has to be cross-team or cross-organisational. No single team within an organisation has a monopoly on knowledge. That is a feature of the Wikipedia definition: there is a sharing of knowledge, learning and a building of consensus.

Let's look at that. It means there is something recursive happening. There is feedback and learning but also a mutual understanding and arrival at a consensus.

How is what we traditionally do different from Collaboration?

Our image of collaboration, then, is of cross-silo teams coming together to work on a project, sharing their expertise and knowledge in an environment of mutual respect, in which, although the goal may be defined, the means to achieve it is not, as part of the collaborative process a way will be found to implement the goal.

Two points come from this.

Firstly, the Open Polytechnic course development process is cross-team, involving faculty, course writers, learning design specialists, editors and library staff all working to produce course material that meets the learning and teaching objectives of the course.

The second point is that a lot of what libraries do is not collaborative.

For the purpose of this presentation we've defined the "other stuff" as "providing a service". One way to think about the difference between collaboration and "service provision" is to consider the retail example. I don't think we'd ever consider that the supermarket where we bought the weekly groceries has collaborated with us in any way. They have simply provided us with a service. We weren't involved in setting up the layout of the supermarket, choosing the stock to be sold, negotiating the opening hours. Nor were we consulted about the marketing plan and staffing. All we did was choose some items off the shelf take them to the checkout where their barcodes are passed under a scanner packed and paid for.

I wonder, if we stop and think, just how much of what we do in a Library is like the retail provision of services? On one level there is absolutely nothing wrong

with providing a service: our patrons, rightly, demand good service and we strive to provide it. Great service is important – you won't find me arguing against it – but is great service enough?

Why is collaboration important?

Collaboration by the Library with other parts of the organisation is important precisely because it is far more than just the provision of Library services. At its best collaboration interweaves the skills and knowledge of Library staff, non-Library staff and students in the pursuit of a shared goal. It involves co-operation, teamwork and feedback among non-Library and Library staff. It is very visible and it cements the Library within the organisation. The Library is at the table taking part in the conversation about what the organisation is doing.

At the end of a successful collaborative process staff have developed the common goal and the solutions – there is an understanding and appreciation of all roles and how staff will work together.

We believe this is the key benefit of collaboration from the Library's point of view. It's less likely that the Library will be cut off and its services ignored if it has been integrated into the fabric of the entire organisation.

Why is Collaboration so tough?

Collaboration involves time, co-operation, acceptance and respect for different skills and knowledge, a willingness to be open to new ideas and the possibility of letting go of traditional or accepted ways of doing things.

In contrast, our traditional approach is much easier. It relies on specialists implementing the received wisdom of their professions. Everyone saves time.

How do you Crack the Collaboration Nut?

Given the above is it little wonder that collaboration is difficult to achieve? Even when everyone recognises and values the individual skills and expertise of everyone else, isn't it just easier to leave things up to the experts? In such a world the Librarian and the Library are expected to get on with their job. The academic is responsible for teaching the course, the librarian for supplying and organising the resources. If the academic has a student who needs help finding information they send them off to the "search pro".

In a worst case the skills of the Librarian are ignored – the academic refers the student straight to a favourite text.

What is missing is the explicit, shared goal developed through collaboration. The librarian and the academic need to work together, share their understanding of what the students need to learn, who is best to teach it, and how that teaching should be delivered.

To get to the point where you talking about a shared goal you need to have first got to the table. The Open Polytechnic Library approach is ongoing relentless promotion of the Library and Library staff.

This promotion occurs in three areas. Firstly, professional relationships are fostered. Librarians are encouraged to get over to faculty offices, often on the pretext of delivering books, to find out what is happening in faculty. For Library staff this means being out and about around the campus. Faculty should recognise their Librarian who is interested and involved in what they are teaching and researching, an active listener and a partner in delivering their courses.

The second area is contribution to the wider life of the organisation. The library is naturally included on Academic, Research and Programme Committees. The Library has also been on other less obvious committees. In fact, a librarian should be on all organisational projects. Contribute, contribute, contribute should be the mantra.

The third area is ongoing learning. This includes a librarian's professional development but it also needs to wider than just librarianship; they should include subject area knowledge and teaching skills. In academia it is essential to develop your credentials as a teacher and knowledge of teaching theory, so too the academic librarian.

Although we have done all of these things and the library has an excellent reputation within the organisation, there is no room for complacency –, staff turnover and organisational change mean an ongoing need to press the Library case.

But, despite everything we've mentioned there is still no guarantee of collaboration. However you will be ready, willing and able to collaborate when the opportunity arrives.

Some Examples of our Collaborative Work with Faculty

Design and Course Revision Process

Earlier I mentioned the course design process and how the Open Polytechnic Library was well-placed for collaboration. This is true but it has always been a battle for the library.
For course development the library is seen as important but only as the resource provider. The course revision process is triggered by a written request to create or redevelop a paper. The form is completed by a tutor and has a tick box to show the Library has been consulted. Often, this consultation didn't occur, happened at the very end of the process, or was seen simply as a need to let the Library know there were changes to the course readings.
The Library had to push hard to be included in the meetings that kicked off a course development or revision. We knew that we needed to be there at the beginning of the process because we had skills to share.
We have search skills and collection knowledge to support the writer during the development process and get the best available resources to support the course. We know how students have coped with previous assignments. We

know the questions they've asked about their courses and the resources they've used. We ask tutors about the quality of assignments and what they want their students to be reading and referencing. We suggest ways to direct students to appropriate, up to date readings for their assignments. Most of all we bring our passion for knowledge and for empowering students to become information literate.

We've had some success but it has been hard going.
Perhaps the best example of success is the Information Access course. This level 5 course is offered as an introduction to information and study at tertiary level. It was co-written by a member of the Library staff and Librarians are tutors for the course. This co-teaching role is much wider than just being the "search pro"

Ideally we'd like to see the Information Access course as a model for other courses.

One of the barriers to bridging this gap is whether or not the academics will let us into the teaching space.

One way we have bridged this gap is the inclusion of a Library forum within the level 5, 6, and 7 courses. This has been a major success of our involvement in the course development process. To date there are 90 courses with a Library forum on their course pages.
We now have a direct channel in the teaching space, with carte blanche to promote the Library and information literacy. Well, almost carte blanche.
There are a couple of problems with the forums. The first problem is that the Librarian needs to be invited by the tutor onto subsequent iterations of the course. The Librarian needs to both remind the tutor they need to be included and show their value. A subject librarian who isn't on the ball risks the tutor dropping the Library forum form the course. It is very easy for a Librarian to fall off a course and then difficult to get back on.
At their best though the forums are an excellent way of collaborating with faculty in the teaching space and many teaching staff and students value the library presence.

A Framework for Examining All our Work

We think this way of seeing our work can be applied to everything we do. Although we may believe that the services we provide are exemplary collaboration allows us to test the assumptions and create even better or more appropriate services.

In the remaining few minutes I'm going to go through some of the library services and put them on a continuum from those that involve little collaboration to those that are fully collaborative. Current services that have little or no collaboration are the most obvious to re-examine. We think that asking ourselves whether or not we have collaborated before providing a library service is very worthwhile; it should make us think more carefully about what and why we are doing what we do.

Subject and Assignment Guides

Subject guides sprang from a desire to guide students to the appropriate databases and resources for their subject. They were extended by adding specific information for individual assignments. These assignment guides aim to make available the best information to answer common, repeat questions for which the Library already had a standard response. Now they are open for all to see many have become a joint project between faculty and library and are being regularly revised.

They are now collaborative but only really with faculty. How we ask could student also be involved in creating and fine-tuning these guides?

Workshops

A small number of courses are delivered face to face and we took the opportunity to deliver face-to-face workshops. These were an introduction to the Library and basic searching skills. They have been replaced with a CD-Rom. They are a very traditional response to the need for Library instruction. There is considerable room for greater collaboration with faculty. Rather than delivering these CD-ROMs to students we'd like to discuss how the various elements can be integrated into the flow of the course material. Rather than an added extra the material on the CD-ROM would be available when the student needed with relevant search examples matching assignments and exercises.

Post-Course Feedback

The Library provides post-course feedback to tutors about student use of the Library. It is an opportunity for the Library to start a conversation with tutors that might lead to collaboration.
One of these post-course feedback conversations led to collaborative research involving a librarian and an academic. Discussing the use patterns of recommended readings and searches in assignment guides they are working on a piece of research to examine how these readings are being cited in assignments.

Supporting Faculty Research

Literature searches, citation checking, interloaning – the bread and butter of academic Library support for faculty research.

Could we be more collaborative? – I think there are possibilities – Connecting our faculty with overseas researchers is one example. Another is identifying journals for academics to read and in which to publish.

InterLibrary Loan

At first glance this is clearly a service. But the records we keep provide a clue to the research interests of faculty. They could be mined for more information and used to develop the collection. This knowledge could again be a catalyst for a conversation with Faculty.

Indexing and Cataloguing

Cataloguing and indexing skills should be shared with other parts of the organisation involved in indexing or applying metadata to documents. Web, intranet and archiving projects should be key targets for collaborative library involvement.

Library Catalogue

This is clearly a service provided by the specialists – the librarians. The Library leads any developments or redevelopments, checking in with users via usability testing and user surveys.

Web 2.0 and open source are more collaborative ways of developing the Library catalogue. The catalogue could be opened up to allow collaboration with users. Some examples include crowd knowledge through the addition of LibraryThing. Another collaborative undertaking is patron-generated acquisition of ebooks.

So there is a spectrum of services that we provide. These range from the collaborative to the very traditional provision of services. We are looking at all our work and asking ourselves how we can be more collaborative. We need to collaborate with faculty, students, suppliers, all of our community. We need to determine common goals with them and then sort out how we can achieve them.

In Conclusion

Collaboration is not quick nor is it easy and straightforward but it can be very rewarding. If successful, collaboration will lead to mutual appreciation and understanding. If very successful the Library will be seen as an essential and integral part of the organisation. A challenging and difficult nut to crack for sure but a sweet one all the same.

Thank you.