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ABSTRACT

The increasing sophistication of information technologies and the nearly universal access to computing have blurred distinctions among information delivery units on college campuses, forcing institutions to rethink the separate organizational structures that evolved when computing in academe was more localized and less prevalent. Experiences in planning for information services delivery with computing and media service colleagues in a library that is part of the City University of New York illustrate the problems and possible solutions of the planning process. Work toward an envisioned Information Systems and Services unit, comprising the library, media services, and two computing centers, is proceeding slowly for a number of reasons. One significant cause of this delay is the fact that initial planning did not include enough staff members and did not represent their viewpoints adequately. The element of the planning process that has most successfully promoted respect has been establishment of project teams in the matrix management mode. Cooperation between library and computing personnel is essential to create and nurture partnerships that can meet the challenges of effective technology use. (Contains 10 references.)
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PRIOR CONSENT: NOT-SO-STRANGE BEDFELLOWS PLAN LIBRARY/COMPUTING PARTNERSHIPS

Kristin McDonough

April 12, 1992

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The increasing sophistication of information technologies and the nearly universal access to computing have blurred distinctions among information delivery units on campus, in particular the computing centers and the library. This phenomenon is forcing higher education institutions to rethink the separate organizational structures that evolved when computing in academe was more localized, isolated, and minimal.

According to the EDUCOM/CAUSE National Survey of Desktop Publishing in Higher Education¹, over 33% of colleges and universities have reorganized computing and related activities in the last two years, with another 20% anticipating similar restructuring in the near future. At present only an estimated 16% of these reorganizations include the library.² Rutgers and Cal State (Chico) follow the model where a librarian oversees comprehensive information and computing services while at Bradley and Stanford Universities, the information czar has come the other route, i. e. computing or media services. There is every indication that this trend toward the close collaboration and joint reporting, if not convergence, of libraries and computing centers under a vice-president for information or a chief information officer will continue.

For the remaining 80% of academic libraries facing the probable prospect of some sort of administrative consolidation, it is imperative to begin now to forge crucial alliances. As a library director who for the past year has been engaged in intensive

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planning with computing and media services colleagues at my medium-sized library (one of the 18 units of the City University of New York) I feel strongly that relationships established among staffs during the formative planning process are crucial to realizing the vision shaped by directors.

Clearly, among the daunting challenges that lie before campus information providers, the human issue of cooperation is as important -- and as thorny -- as the technological ones of connectivity and networking. The negotiations that precede the integration of technology-based units on campus are delicate and require strong leadership, interpersonal skills, and even empathy on the part of directors. The planning process is best entered into with the realization that the end product, the formal planning document, "may well be far less important than the process of discussion with all involved constituencies."³

At my institution, our year's efforts have yet to produce the final proposal for the envisioned Information Systems and Services unit comprised of the library, media services, and the two reorganized computing centers under a chief information officer (with the library reporting to an academic dean for curricular and faculty matters.) The reasons for the delay are many, ranging from an interim college administration, to tensions between the academic and administrative sides of the house. But at least some of the foot dragging is clearly due to the fact that early on we did not encourage full staff participation and feedback -- with the result

that extra effort and time has been spent more recently in bringing our reluctant staffs along.

The information revolution has impacted on organizations by creating a more flattened management environment than the hierarchical one that has heretofore existed in higher education.⁴ With information flowing (leaking?) informally across divisions and units rather than in a more formal vertical reporting structure, it is important, especially in a reorganization in a rapidly changing environment, that the official, occasionally confidential, sometimes tentative, and often cautious deliberations at the directors' level are fueled with input from fully informed and invested staff members in each of the principal units. We realized this a bit late.

Our initial (and I think misguided) effort had the chief administrators of the two computer centers (administrative and educational) and the library working with the associate provost to characterize the requisite information-provision functions (grouped under umbrellas like "operations management," "applications systems delivery," "training and instruction," "information retrieval.") We aimed to identify duplicative activity that might be funneled into one unit (e.g. maintenance) or administered centrally (e.g. ordering supplies). After several iterations, these streamlined functions, appearing as footnotes in a new organization chart, were then presented to our respective units' senior managers for their response. They were quick (and

correct) to point out those responsibilities -- most minor, though a few major -- that the directors had not clearly delineated. They questioned as well, rather defensively, the assignment to another unit or the chief administrator's office -- of functions that they felt were "theirs." It became clear that we had not anticipated how for some staff members in each unit our proposal presaged the loss of something -- prestige, power, autonomy, or authority. In some cases, it also made staff feel vulnerable, when for instance, we proposed that software installation in microcomputer labs be assigned to technicians who were used to working solely in a mainframe environment.

This inability of a director to articulate clearly her unit's unique functions and expertise was noted. Initially, the librarians in particular seemed to feel that by accommodating to a new organizational paradigm we were sacrificing needed autonomy in areas ranging from library software applications to pursuing our own technology-based grants. Then the academic computing managers felt that their role as liaison to the university's mainframe computer center was being minimized. At this point, months into the process, we knew that it was best to adopt the approach used at Bradley University where each unit in that institution's new Information Technologies and Resources reorganization had come to the process with a mission statement, and a set of goals and objectives, as well as a description and evaluation of both present and future functions and services.⁵ Syracuse University used a similar planning approach when their academic and administrative

computing functions were merged. ⁶

With each unit thus engaged in internal self study -- and avid self-justification -- it was perhaps not surprising to discover when we were about to circulate the draft document to administrators and the faculty senate that our proposal's "rationale for change" was singularly unsuccessful in communicating to our consumers -- students, faculty and staff -- how the proposed reorganization would make life easier for them. Fixated on turf and ownership issues, we had never developed as part of the "sell" the concept about which we had, early on, been so enthused: a central point of inquiry and referral for all technology-related issues, an IT "hot line," if you will.

At this point we opted for democracy input by holding a series of open meetings to which all staff from the three units were invited. Attendees asked a lot of hard questions, aired grievances, vented frustrations; after this, shifts in attitudes were marked. Increased input and participation within and across units had the added advantage of making the players feel invested in the outcome of the reorganization. Involved staff seemed less apt to feel their positions threatened by concepts such as "reduction of duplication", and "elimination of overlap" -- which are clearly cogent elements in any argument for greater integration. Just by talking with their computing colleagues librarians seemed to me to become more aware of, and sensitive to, the different meaning of terms in each respective field. Librarians who initially took

umbrage at the box "tape librarian" on the computing systems organization chart, came to understand why their colleagues balked at our claim that the library is the "chief academic information center" engaged in "information resources management." It is fascinating to me, and instructive, I think, that after several discussions about the fact that the old terms "computing," "library," and "audio-visual" were too limiting, we ended up with "computing services," "computing systems," "library" and "media services" on our organization chart, largely because the newer and more appealing "information services", "information systems," and "information resources" might confuse our users. After all, they had succeeded in confusing our staffs.

Ultimately, though, the element of the planning process that has most successfully engendered a healthy respect for each others' complementary skills and strengths has been the establishment of project teams in the matrix management mode. Representatives from the two computing centers had served on the library's NOTIS implementation committee in the past, but, incredibly, administrative and academic computing personnel had not collaborated on projects. Now they, the systems librarians, and a media specialist are brainstorming with campus planning to plan a campus-wide information network. The initial projects have expanded to a half dozen, with the unexpected dividends many. Catalogers met with media personnel to plan for the inclusion of video holdings on our OPAC and in the process Media Services promoted the library's costly but little used "Video Encyclopedia of the 20th Century"

through the video production classes they run. A librarian working with a computing services staff member to develop a program to generate circulation statistics by LC classification on NOTIS was able to present them with the costly software used for putting Paradox on the LAN that she received gratis at its training session. Librarians and computing systems personnel are working with a vendor to design and test our new ID card with a digitized barcode replacing our current paper strips. Stealing an idea from an ALA Atlanta poster session, the library has asked computing services to join us in sponsoring an INFO-EXPO, as well as several sessions in bringing the INTERNET to faculty at their departmental and school meetings. Most gratifying of all -- because it has resulted in an immediate and much appreciated improvement of service to students, a librarian is now teaching -- and writing the front-ends and documentation for -- the seminars run by computing services on accessing data on the COMPUSTAT, CRSP, and CITIBASE tapes, which the library has agreed to purchase from our materials budget. In short, even without having yet completed and approved a collective vision statement for the new division, library and computing colleagues have been persuaded to break through barriers to exploit each other's expertise and skills to improve information and computing services. The key may be that there is no longer the sense that in calling for help across units one is asking for a favor.

Today's library is expected to support traditional needs as well as new kinds of research involving simulation, modeling,

visualization; to instruct in the use of print and online sources as well as in communications and personal information management software; to manage local as well as access distant and increasingly complex catalogs and databases; and to provide individuals at a distance with the ability to query and order materials from them directly. Often the expectation is that we will do all this with the same or even reduced resources as we have in the past. Clearly, this is a time for partnerships with technical professionals faced with similar demands, branded with the same "bottomless pit" label, saddled with the same expectations of being able to do more (and value-added!) with less. Together we need to orchestrate the concerted pitch that we can increasingly meet expectations, but that it will cost.

To counteract the continued emphasis in the literature on the irreconcilable cultures, today's effective library administrator might want to test her powers of persuasion in two directions. When the librarians she manages are quick to note yet another instance of computing's failure to meet promises, understand the end-user's needs, or appreciate the complexities of the bibliographic record, she might remind them that there used to be talk of separate "cultures" in our own profession, as exemplified by public services and technical services librarians. Today, technological advances have forced a cross-over, with catalogers serving at reference desks and as OPAC consultants, and reference librarians becoming conversant with the intricacies of the MARC record. As a result, catalogers have a more immediate grasp of the retrieval habits of

the end user, and reference librarians are more aware of cataloging protocols. Another salient point is the competition that has existed on some campuses between administrative and academic computing. Rather than "cultures," might not the issue be the pull between vested interests?

It may take less persuasion to make computing personnel appreciate the advantages of closer identification with the library than one might think. Certainly, closer association with librarians won't have a positive effect upon their salaries. While librarians in many instances have faculty status, computer personnel may view this as more of a coup than the reality would warrant. On the other hand, librarians, though we sometimes don't seem to realize it, are well respected for their bibliographic and retrieval skills and ability to write comprehensible documentation. In fact, on our campus, the librarians teach credit courses in information research which are being considered for a minor concentration in the redesigned computer and information systems major.

To our computing colleagues with a short history indeed, librarians have an enviable history of managing increasingly complex units and may be perceived as being taken more seriously on campus. Librarians are generally recognized as being far more conversant with the informational content that is to be transported on the electronic superhighway of the INTERNET. We know how to retrieve, evaluate and apply the "stuff" after we have pushed the buttons. Librarians, with their history of cooperative resource sharing

have, with computing's help, created integrated library systems which in many cases -- such as City University's CUNY+ -- is the sole successful cooperative automation project within a university system. Hawkins draws computing specialists' attention to the example of interlibrary loan and suggests that the library model of centrally funded services offered free to users might be the model that computing centers follow.⁷

Dollars may be a factor, too. Our colleagues' sense that libraries are better funded is illusory, given our chronic underfunding. I have discovered though, that the sheer size of our operations may make our allocation for materials, equipment, and temporary workers seem comparatively large to computing staffs. When powerful faculty interests protest the necessary diversion of funds from teaching to IT, the computing specialists, for this reason, may recognize librarians as allies in making computing as central as the library to the mission of the college.

A quarter of a century ago, the information options included print, audio-visual, microforms, and processing done on remote mainframes. In today's microcomputer environment, the options include e-mail, text editing, spreadsheets, databases, graphics, desktop publishing, word processing, AI, expert systems, multimedia, online catalogs, integrated online systems, videodiscs, laser printing, bibliographic searching, and a variety of software applications. Clearly, the possibilities are greater but it will take more money, more consistency in planning, a more unified

approach. The sum of it is that we need each other. Libraries and computing centers must create and nurture partnerships to meet the challenges ahead.

Notes

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- 2 James Penrod, Michael Dolence and Judith Douglas, The Chief Information Officer in Higher Education, CAUSE Professional Paper Series #4, 1990, p.2.
- 3 Brian Hawkins, "Administrative and Organizational Issues in Campus Computing," in New Directions for Higher Education: Making Computers Work for Administrators, no.62 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988, p.20.
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- 5 Telephone Conversation with Ellen Watson, Library Director, Bradley University, August 2, 1991.
- 6 Carole Barone, "Planning and Changing the Role of the CIO in Higher Education," Information Management Review 5(1), 1989, p. 23-31.
- 7 Catherine A. Quinlan, "Libraries and Computing Centers," in The Evolution of Library Automation: Management Issues and Future Perspectives. Ed. Gary M. Pitkin. Westport, Meckler, 1991, p.104.
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- 10 Richard M. Dougherty, "Libraries and Computing Centers: a Blueprint for Collaboration," College and Research Libraries 48:289 (July 1987), p. 296.