Collaboration and ETDs
Institutional and International Strategies

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Abstract
Electronic thesis and dissertation projects offer many opportunities
for collaboration, both within the university and among universities.
Collaboration requires the development of shared goals and shared
meaning, an infusion of resources by each party, a respect for the
contribution of each community's skills and perspectives, and an
attention to process. Within the university, many parties are
required for a successful ETD collaboration, such as academic
administrators, faculty advisors, students, librarians, information
technologists, and others. The Networked Digital Library of Theses
and Dissertations (NDLTD) community also offers many opportu-
nities for collaboration as a whole or by regional or country sectors.
In addition, collaborations between NDLTD and other groups work-
ing on digital library initiatives in areas ranging from adoption of
standards to best practices for digital preservation would leverage
the content and expertise of the NDLTD members in valuable
ways.

Introduction
The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD)
offers many opportunities for collaboration both among its members and in the broader
digital library community. On the institutional level, most elec-
tronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) projects require col-
laboration among a variety of groups: academic adminis-
trators, faculty advisors, students, librarians, information
technologists, and others. ETD projects have growing in
many universities around the world, but they are still not
formally accepted in many institutions. While in earlier
years this might have been attributed to problems with or
concerns about digital technology, at this point in time,
social and organizational issues within institutions have
likely slowed progress in many institutions that have yet
to adopt an ETD policy. In some cases, the difficulties of
collaborating among campus units and groups could be
the cause for the hesitancy to adopt ETDs in a university.
Understanding better the difficulties of collaboration and
some factors that can lead to a successful collaborative
process may assist institutions in successfully developing
ETD programs. In addition, collaboration among NDLTD
institutions may benefit from a more in-depth under-
standing of collaboration.

Collaboration and the Digital
Environment
Frequently the term collaboration is used to denote any
individuals or groups who are working together on a
project or initiative. However, in the management litera-
ture of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first
century, researchers have attempted to define more
clearly the characteristics of successful collaboration as
compared to other types of working together. Often
they use the terms "collaboration" and "partnership" in-
terchangeably. Michael Schrage in his book Shared Minds,
believes that collaboration is a "different quality of inter-
action" from cooperation or other types of working to-
gether. Collaborations involve "... people who realize
that they can't do it all by themselves. They need insights,
comments, questions, and ideas from others. They ac-
cept and respect the fact that other perspectives can add
value to their own." Another author (Henderson, 1990)
describes features of relationships he describes as part-
nerships: a long-term commitment between partners, a
sense of mutual cooperation, shared risks and benefits,
and participatory decision making.

The range of skills required to develop content and
services in the digital environment have been the impe-
tus for collaborative projects in many areas. For example,
opportunities for collaboration in the digital environment
include:
• Development of digital course content
• Development of digital library resources, e.g. histori-
cal image collection: e-journals
• Delivery of services to users such as training of indi-
vidualized help
• Development of institutional policies on intellectual
property, security, and privacy

Often such projects and services benefit from the ex-
pertise of more than one professional group and from the
perspectives and resources of a variety of units on
 campus.

In conversation, the words "partnership" and "collabo-
ration" often are used to describe relationships that are
more appropriately described as "exchange" relations-
ships, such as the relationship between a buyer and seller
(Kanter, 1994). For example, the graduate school might
In addition to developing shared meaning, the parties involved in successful collaborations:

- Contribute resources to the initiative
- Develop shared vocabulary
- Acknowledge the contribution of each sector and each participant's skills
- Develop a clear working process
- Develop group as well as individual accountability (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993)

The digital information environment in general and ETD programs specifically offer many opportunities and incentives for collaboration; however, there are barriers to collaboration in any setting (Bernborn et. al., 1999). For institutions working on an ETD project, there is a common environment for all sectors, e.g. the university. The university offers individuals and departments with a broad range of expertise and skills. However, while individuals may work in the common environment of a university, their professional backgrounds and departmental affiliations may lead to a different sense of mission and different priorities. Also, while a range of skills may be critical to the success of an ETD project, different professional specialties often have different organizational values and procedural styles, which can inhibit collaboration. The collaborative group needs to develop mutual respect for the contributions of each unit (Kanter, 1994; Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). In the university environment, where the status of various groups compared to others may impede the ease of development of mutual respect, this is especially critical for successful collaboration. As Kiesler (1994) points out, collaborations across units can be particularly difficult. They "... rely more than other kinds of interaction on trust and a sense of common purpose. If collaboration is to be carried out across organizational, social, and/or geographical boundaries, those boundaries can impede the development of trust."

Collaboration is a means of leveraging resources of several campus units. One organization may contribute computer or network capabilities, another unit may contribute staff time, etc. However, there can be a real or perceived imbalance in what each unit contributes which can lead to distrust or a feeling that one group holds power over another.

Within universities, a number of groups will need to be involved in ETD collaborations, depending on the goals of the project. Sectors involved may include academic administrators to make policy and provide funding, faculty as both academic policymakers and student advisors, students who create the digital content, information technology specialists who develop a technological infrastructure for the program and assist with training, librarians who develop strategies for housing and maintaining ETDs, and committees with participation from a number of sectors that develop guidelines addressing such issues as access, restrictions on access, acceptable formats, and preservation. In the development of ETD projects, stu-
Collaboration and NDLTD

NDLTD is entering a new stage as an organization. What might we envision as the role of collaboration in its development? NDLTD is, in itself, a collaboration of individuals representing institutions who believe that scholarship will be enriched by the availability of theses and dissertations on the Internet. The members share a common goal, and I suggest that they develop some explicit strategies for carrying out collaborative projects. My organization, the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) is also a collaborative organization, founded by two computing and library organizations. Our members come from the higher education, national and state libraries, consortia, publishing, scholarly societies, and government. We have used a strategy for collaborative projects that has addressed such topics as new learning communities, university presses, assessment in the networked environment, and institution-wide information strategy development (see www.cni.org). I suggest that NDLTD may want to consider a similar strategy for at least some of its projects.

The strategy includes these stages:

- Initiate projects through a champion who works with the NDLTD leadership
- Establish the goal and outputs of the project as well as a timeline and criteria for participation
- Send out a call for participation via the network
- Establish a procedure for choosing participating institutions and select among respondents to the call
  - Have an initial face-to-face meeting for participants
  - Focus on developing shared goals
  - Develop a clear process and timeline for the project
- Complete the project work at participating institution’s sites
  - Establish communication channels
  - Establish project milestones
- Disseminate results
  - Conclude with in-person event of participants
  - Disseminate a product, such as a report or training materials
  - Hold regional workshops to disseminate information
  - Plan a session for the ETD conference

This process has been used successfully to develop consensus among participants about the nature of the project and the anticipated outcomes. It has provided opportunities for individuals representing various professional spheres to exchange ideas, contribute expertise, resolve misunderstandings about jargon, and clarify what resources each institution will contribute to the project.

While our CNI projects, which have involved primarily North American and European institutions, have benefited from face-to-face meetings at the beginning of a project and often at the end of a project, this might be particularly difficult in international NDLTD projects. It can be quite difficult even to arrange conference calls when participants include individuals from Europe, North America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. New network tools facilitate group interaction and may be employed to good benefit in NDLTD projects. Software for online communities can be useful tools for project communication and wikis have already been used for communication within NDLTD. If in-person meetings would be useful, the annual ETD conference could be a venue for these project meetings.

There are many potential areas for focused projects related to ETDs. Some were identified in the early years of NDLTD; others were identified through a strategic planning process a year ago. Some projects might be best achieved among NDLTD institutions in general or by country or region. In this category, developing additional training materials and developing more promotional materials would be well-suited for country or regional projects. In addition, a standards group within NDLTD works on identifying and promoting use of standards.

There are a number of potential areas of work that might best be addressed through collaborations between NDLTD and related communities. For example, NDLTD could more formally work with national libraries, library organizations, and standards groups on issues of digital preservation. NDLTD could work on metadata and metadata harvesting issues with such groups as the OAI Metadata Harvesting Initiative, libraries, and library organizations. We could work on promoting ETDs as a key component of institutional repositories with groups such as the Open Knowledge Initiative (OKI), the Fedora project, and others. We can continue to work on fund raising for graduate education and ETD projects with international agencies.

Students are often an underutilized group. They may provide leadership for ETD projects as they become aware of the benefits of sharing their work via the Internet. They may have wide-ranging contributions to make to ETD policies and procedures on campus as well as contributing content. Leading management expert Rosabeth Moss Kanter writes, “The problem with those who resist learning from the young is that they equate youth with inexperience, and that’s a mistake” (Kanter, 2001). In the digital environment she advocates “reverse mentoring” where more senior individuals in an institution learn from those with fresh new knowledge.
Conclusion

NDLTD has clearly articulated goals and values and this provides a rich context for collaborative work among institutional members. However, with differing SYSTEMs of higher education in member countries, different vocabularies among the groups of professionals involved in NDLTD (information professionals, faculty, academic administrators, librarians, students, and others), and different levels of resources available for ETD projects, the need for attention to the collaborative process is clear. By developing a working style that includes attention to communication, particularly the development of shared goals and shared vocabulary among partners, a respect for the contributions that each party brings to the project, and a clear understanding of the process the group will take to achieve its goal, I believe that many fruitful collaborations will yield benefits for all members of the NDLTD community.

Bibliography


