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"Consortia are important players in the library collaborative process." There is unlikely to be resistance to such a statement from most corners of our profession, yet what moves people (librarians and others) to positions with consortia—and what they do when they arrive there—remains a somewhat unexamined path. *Collaborative Librarianship*'s Joe Kraus recently discussed with Tim Cherubini, LYRASIS' Director for East Region Programs, his personal experiences in positions with academic libraries as well as consortia and his movement between the two related but distinct environments.

This interview constitutes the latest in a series of conversations with members of *Collaborative Librarianship*'s Advisory Board.

CL: Tell us a little about your career path.

Cherubini: I earned an MLS along with a Master's degree in Musicology from Indiana University. My first professional positions at Ohio State University and Duke University specialized in music librarianship and research and were wonderful training grounds in collaboration. I give high marks to the music librarian community as effective collaborators among themselves, within the library profession, and with the scholarly community. One of my interests when moving from a music specialization to more general collections roles at Emory University was to explore reaches of collaboration in a multi-discipline setting. This coincided with the time period in which electronic resources and all of the issues surrounding them emerged and rocked the collection manage-

ment world and which to a large extent led me to my work with SOLINET and then LYRASIS.

I should mention a couple of other positions as well. Early in my career I held for about three years a position with the non-profit American Social Health Association (ASHA). Looking back, that position was invaluable in bringing to me an understanding of the financial and business sides of mission-driven organizations. I had my first exposure to advocacy, fund raising, pursuit of grants, serving a broad and diverse community, and strategic planning at ASHA. More recently, just prior to SOLINET's merger with PALINET to form LYRASIS, I returned to work in the academic library setting, this time at Williams College. That time was invaluable in that it allowed me to experience in a practical way many of the changes that had taken place in our profession—technologically and otherwise—since my last opportunity to work on a campus.

CL: I know you have been at SOLINET and LYRASIS over the last eight years.   What led you to work at these consortial organizations?

Cherubini: At the time I joined SOLINET I had been working in libraries for close to 15 years and had observed and even enjoyed the benefits of consortial settings and relationships. I wondered what I might be able to bring to that setting if I were working in the center of a consortial organization. I was seeking to challenge and extend myself professionally but I also was—and remain—

interested in exploring how we as a profession can challenge and extend the concept of working across institutions for mutual benefit and for the advancement of issues important to librarianship.

CL: LYRASIS notes that it "continues its mission of supporting libraries and information professionals by offering creative solutions and increased savings opportunities through collaboration, consulting, digital and preservation services, professional development, and group purchases." What do you find to be the most rewarding part of your work?

Cherubini: I've had a number of roles with SOLINET and now LYRASIS and each has allowed me to interact with the membership in different ways, and that interaction is extremely rewarding. All of my roles have had one thing in common—the requirement to maintain close contact with member institutions. Listening to librarians about their interests, needs, challenges, successes, pressures, and opportunities, taking that information and considering it alongside what I'm hearing from other institutions, from others in the profession, and from those with whom our profession interacts (e.g. faculty, library patrons, information providers, technologists, etc.), and formulating with my LYRASIS colleagues and LYRASIS members those positions, responses and approaches to the most promising and/or necessary areas for us to address have always been central to my work in consortia.

These "promising and necessary areas" vary over time and sometimes the topics that emerge are on the surface a bit unexpected. For example, I've been saying recently that I never anticipated being so involved at this stage in the topic of retention of print resources. For so many years consortia rightfully have been spending so much time trying to help libraries incorporate electronic information and it seemed print was really taking a back seat. When you stop and think, though, now is a very good time to be thinking about print. There are increasing pressures on use of library space, and this leads

to real concerns about divesting of print resources in a non-coordinated fashion. We have a better sense of the viability of e-information, and while not perfect, it is far enough along that some libraries can consider reducing print holdings. Consortia can help in this. Many libraries are addressing such a reduction now as more and more librarians become confident in the viability of electronic journals and the notion that many institutions can rely on fewer print versions as back up, for example. Libraries are able to do this because there is great leadership stemming from a number of consortia.

CL: Have you had any experience working in public libraries?

Cherubini: I have never worked in a public library, but in part because LYRASIS is so broad based I have had quite a few opportunities to work with public librarians. There is a lot of variety in the way public libraries operate. For example, there are differences in who they answer to and how they are funded. State libraries operate differently as well. Such factors influence the "sweet spots" for collaboration, but the sweet spots are there.

CL: How have you learned more about how public libraries operate?

Cherubini: I have had many interactions with public librarians. I mainly try to listen to what is going on and to key in on the important matters. I ask them questions about how they operate. It was a challenge early on, but I continue to learn about the public library world. I have learned that collaboration operates on a different set of factors. Some public libraries may not be able to collaborate based on various parameters such as geographic jurisdictions. Just like academic libraries, public libraries have various restrictions that explain why they can't collaborate on one thing, but they can on another.

CL: You mentioned some topics like print retention have a higher profile recently than you expected. Are there topics that haven't had the traction you expected?

Cherubini: There are a few topics that seem to come up over and over again for which we've not necessarily gotten good traction. One is collaborative relationships between public and academic libraries. Another is the K-12-public library relationship relative to electronic resources especially. This one in many states has its roots in the funding patterns. I'm curious and intrigued with the notion of libraries extending collaboration to other types of libraries and to other entities on and off of their campuses.

For many years ebooks didn't have the traction many expected, but with the e-readers' popularity now it appears ebooks are here to stay, and there is host of issues around them that could be addressed collaboratively for mutual benefit. Things are going to be quite interesting with ebooks. Recent decisions by Harper Collins on access to their titles presents an opportunity for libraries to respond collectively. The nature of an effective collective response is out there for discussion as we speak.

There are certain topics that perhaps have plateaued in some libraries and they are contemplating where to go next. Scholarly communication issues on non-research library campuses may be one, though continued kudos to SPARC for its leadership in this area. Locally digitized collections is another such topic. I've been asked to speak recently at a couple of events on the topic of deriving value from local collections over time—considering them as tools for outreach, advocacy, etc. On these and probably other topics, many libraries already have done the groundwork, but they are not sure what to do next. Clearly, facilitating information sharing, idea generation, and considering appropriate joint or collective action are roles for consortia.

CL: What is the most challenging aspect of your work?

Cherubini: Time, or perhaps I should say timing, is a great challenge. Libraries are most often parts of larger entities that move at their own pace, and local considerations,

whether budgetary, political, cultural or otherwise, have a great impact on what individuals working within those entities are able to achieve. In general, I find that many in our profession and in those professions that we touch are interested to explore collaborations but often the collaborations that have the most to offer are complex to develop let alone implement. Many organizations strive to include qualities like agility and responsiveness in their list of desirable operational characteristics. These are indeed valuable traits, but we also have to recognize that it is in our best interest in some circumstances to take time to fully consider the possibilities, and even in certain cases to alter what might be the optimum timing and approach in a local setting in order to allow for broader collaboration and, in the end, provide even greater benefit. When promoting cross-institutional cooperation, timing of an initiative or activity in the local sense is not something that I in my role can directly impact or control. The role often is more one of being an "influencer," and influencing is an art and skill unto itself.

CL: Have you worked on any projects involving deep collaboration that you would like to discuss?

Cherubini: I've been working with a group of about 100 to 150 libraries that has been purchasing ebooks for about ten years now. Even through a time period in which many libraries were not pursuing ebooks, it has maintained a steady purchasing rate and has quite large collections. LYRASIS is now opening the tenth round of shared ebook collections focusing on this core group. The question we ask this group is always "Where do we go with this next?" The core group made up of small to medium-sized academic libraries has been successful in its aims, but since the market has changed a lot, and there are options that weren't possible previously, this group has much to consider.

Elsewhere, on the electronic resources front, I was involved for quite a few years in a national aggregation for LexisNexis' Academic product. I wasn't present for the initial for-

mulation of the aggregation, unfortunately. It was quite creative for its time, and it has been highly interesting to watch how the initial concept has grown and changed over the years. It is still a highly effective example of multi-consortial collaboration. Speaking of which, I encourage collections librarians to watch and work with their consortia on an inter-consortial licensing initiative that is emerging, largely through the work of LY-RASIS' Tom Sanville, to optimize the collective work of libraries on licensing mechanisms and agreements.

CL: Are there any collaborative projects that you would like to work on in the future?

Cherubini: Collaboration between libraries will continue to be important and I'm interested in continuing with content-focused projects. But I'm also interested in projects that explore cross-institutional collaboration at extremely practical levels—sharing of staff to perform common functions, for example—as well as collaborations among different types of libraries. There are some very interesting things happening in various states, for example, that involve a broad array of library types.

I would say, though, that I'm most inquisitive at this moment in collaborations that involve librarians and others closely associated with them, particularly in academic settings. By this I mean teaching faculty, campus IT operations, boards, even—and maybe especially—patrons. Some librarians voice a high degree of concern about remaining viable and valued on their campuses. Engaging in collaboration at all levels, externally and internally, can help.

CL: What advice would you give to new librarians who want to work in consortia or in a capacity that involves collaboration?

Cherubini: Be open, be available, listen, and take the time to build relationships. People are more apt to successfully collaborate with other people with whom they have some level of relationship. This could be challenging for our profession in the near future.

Many veteran members of our profession, including some who are models of how to collaborate, are near or at retirement and others with similar skills will need to emerge if we are to continue success. It seems to be getting harder to rely on in-person modes of networking and relationship building—tales of drastically cut travel budgets abound now in our profession—but fortunately our toolkit for building relationships includes additional ways to connect with others. Just don't over- or under-estimate what these tools can yield, and don't ignore the need for relationships in the first place.

CL: Can you tell me more about this toolkit?

Cherubini: I am not talking about a specific item, like a piece of software. The "toolkit" includes the resources and the ability of a person to meet with others, either through technological means or face-to-face. It is a lot easier to collaborate with people you know. With social networking software, it will be interesting to see how that creates the next generation of collaborators. Will social networking software foster strong enough bonds? I don't know. Malcom Gladwell recently wrote in the *New Yorker* his view that many social networks foster weak bonds. However, the concept of "bond" and what can be achieved by it may alter as well. I like the idea of personal learning networks in social networking, and video modes of communication are allowing some of the advantages of face-to-face interactions. I enjoy talking to someone where I can see their facial expression. This really helps me to understand the nuance of what they are saying.

CL: When you think about the future of libraries and consortia, how important is the aspect of collaborative work?

Cherubini: Very important, I would say. Individual libraries are continually challenged at the local level for resources—people, financial, time. Collaboration has the potential to productively address all of these challenges. We need to keep it up.