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## *What Collaboration Means to Us*

# What Collaboration Means to Us: Trust, Laughter, & Scholarly Productivity

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### **Abstract**

This essay examines how collaboration is key to a successful scholarly partnership over an extended period. We firmly believe successful collaboration only works by trusting your colleague. Part of the balancing act of working on major projects and publications is deciding who will take the lead or take on the majority of the work, while the other person takes on a more supportive role. We share three successful ongoing projects (our information literacy assessment program, onboarding program, and inventory of the book collection with Agile methodologies) that could not have been completed without each other's knowledge and skills.

Keywords: library collaboration; scholarly output; institutional research; academic library; emotional support

### **Introduction to Our Collaboration**

We started collaborating on projects at Goldey-Beacom College in 2015. Russell, currently the Director of the college's Library, Learning Center, & Archives, has a background in library management, collections, and scholarly communication. Monica, currently the Director of Institutional Research & Training, has a background in educational technology and instructional design. We both also hold the rank of assistant professor. In this essay, we highlight some of the projects we have worked on over the last several years. Each of us provided unique experiences and backgrounds (both of us came from larger research institutions) to guide projects at our

small private college to successful completion. We believe that our collaborations have not only improved our respective departments and contributions to the college community as a whole, but that these collaborations have led to more scholarly output together than we each would have achieved independently. Furthermore, as friends, we continue to push each other intellectually and emotionally to think outside the box and find solutions when typical barriers such as time, technology, and limited budgets have the potential to derail goals.



## Onboarding for Academic Library Employees (The Project)

### *Russell*

I (Russell) onboarded new employees (student workers, library assistants, and librarians) very traditionally for many years. As part of the onboarding experience for each new employee, I ensured that IT had their computer station set up, walked them around campus to meet people in each department, and asked them to read and review a binder full of training instructions for software, procedures, and policies. I found this to be an inefficient method to train a new employee since it was difficult to determine what they understood after reviewing the binder's contents, i.e. there was no formal assessment process.

Furthermore, the process of editing the contents of the binder was not streamlined. The files were saved to my computer's hard drive (this was before we had access to Office 365). To share documents with multiple staff members for review, I emailed the documents to each staff member, who in turn made recommended edits, and finally emailed the edited documents back to me. At times there were multiple versions of the same file with various edits, which meant I had to combine all the changes into one new document. It was all a tedious process.

Knowing Monica had training in instructional design, I reached out to her to find out how we could update our training, gather analytics about what content was reviewed, and establish a formal assessment program for the competencies on which the new employees needed to be trained.

### *Monica*

I (Monica) worked with Russell to outline his goals for the new onboarding process. Our initial conversations focused mainly on what competencies he wanted his employees to know and

be able to demonstrate they understood, and what would be an effective measure (or measures) of understanding. For example, if employees needed to demonstrate that they understood how to catalog a new book, what exactly did this *mean*? Did it mean that the employee needed to be able to do this consistently and if so, how would that be measured? Did it mean that the employee should be able to document his or her processes as a quiz question response without assistance? We also discussed what mastery meant. Was it sufficient to score an 80% or higher, for example, on quiz questions related to administrative tasks? Or was a 100% required? Could employees take the quiz more than once or did they have one chance to demonstrate mastery? Would employees be expected to take the training again? If so, at what intervals and would this be prompted by library administration or as needed?

We've created three different iterations of the onboarding training together at this point, with each new iteration updating the content, deleting irrelevant training modules that supported outdated or obsolete services, and improving the platform where we host the training to improve both the new employees' experiences and to gather better analytics. *Version 1* consisted of PowerPoint training modules (narrated and assessed using the no longer available plugin of Office Mix) that were hosted on a password protected LibGuide. *Version 2* moved the training modules to Knovio, a "flip the classroom" style tool that I had acquired for the faculty to use as an EdTech tool in their classrooms, and our most recent iteration, *Version 3*, has migrated the onboarding training to Teachable, an LMS platform, that provides us with our best analytics and user experience to date.

## Onboarding for Academic Library Employees (Publications)

In addition to using the data collected from the various versions of the Library Onboarding



Training Program to make management decisions in the library, improve new employees' onboarding experiences, improve performance management practices in the library, and share results of using online training with staff with other departments across the college, we published our experiences in our first book chapter in an edited collection together.<sup>1</sup>

### Survey Design, Software Use, and Survey Tool Management (Projects)

#### *Monica*

I (Monica) brought Qualtrics to our college shortly after becoming the Director of Institutional Research & Training in 2016. It was the college's first formal survey tool and though I had experience using it while working at Penn State, there were definitely more features and advanced capabilities than I was initially familiar with. Russell was also interested in learning Qualtrics, so as a result of our past research collaborations, we naturally began learning the tool together.

In addition to building college surveys with Qualtrics, we found we could use it to create many forms together in an easier fashion than with other tools due to the single sign on (SSO) option (no more constantly asking form submitters to provide their first name, last name, and college e-mail address!) than with other form tools that were currently in use around campus.

Together, we built a variety of forms, including:

- **Library Customer Service form** (used by staff and student workers to track customer service interactions.<sup>2</sup>)
- **Academic Honesty form** (filled out by students before proctored quizzes and tests)
- **Proctor Feedback form** (filled out by students after proctoring sessions)

My experiences with survey research were also helpful in designing and redesigning surveys deployed by the library, such as their annual survey of library services to faculty and various ad-hoc surveys such as one about the faculty's sense of students' expected use of the library and a survey about perceptions of eTextbook use.

Due to his demonstrated knowledge and skills with Qualtrics, Russell quickly became a co-administrator of Qualtrics with me. As it's a rather complicated tool to effectively use and manage its users and associated permissions, this has been instrumentally helpful to my office and has streamlined processes in the library, archives, and learning center.

#### *Russell*

Prior to adopting Qualtrics, the library staff recorded customer service interactions with tick marks on a paper calendar and transferred the totals to an Excel worksheet. Qualtrics enables the library and the tutoring center to effectively streamline the deployment of surveys and forms, and improved our processes related to data analysis and report production/dissemination. In addition to the forms Monica described earlier, we also use Qualtrics to regularly survey the entire student body and faculty about library and tutoring services, programs, and collections. SSO affords population distinction which enables us to gauge perceptions of services and tools used by each population. We can then, in turn, make modifications to these offerings based on this feedback at a more granular level than if we only knew that "students" didn't use a specific service, as opposed to knowing that commuter students in the doctoral program or undergraduate athletes tend to not use a specific service. The library's services, collections, and programs continue to change positively because we frequently solicit feedback with Qualtrics forms and surveys to identify user needs.

### **Survey Design, Software Use, and Survey Tool Management (Publications)**

We've co-authored columns – entitled *posIT* – for the *Journal of Library Administration* (JLA) on topics related to the unique ways we are using technology in the library, such as non-library ways to use tools typically known as “library tools” and how we leverage Qualtrics to gather customer service data.<sup>3</sup>

### **Information Literacy Assessment Program (the Project)**

Our collaboration regarding the Information Literacy Assessment (ILA) program was probably our most extensive collaborative undertaking to date, and was the result of a true cross-departmental collaboration:

- Russell (Library, Archives, & Learning Center) – Subject Matter Expert
- Monica (Institutional Research & Training) – Instructional Design
- Faculty Member – Academic Representative

This collaboration resulted in evolving an initial Google Forms quiz (taken by international graduate students in 2015) to a comprehensive online information literacy assessment training program with a pre-test, post-test, and individual module quizzes tied to student achievement (all first-year students and incoming graduate students in 2018 - ongoing).

### **Information Literacy Assessment Program (Publications)**

In addition to sharing data collected from the ILA and experiences gained from collaborating over multiple years on the same project in a variety of internal assessment reports and white papers, we've published our efforts related to the ILA together as well. This project was the impetus for our first published article together.<sup>4</sup> In addition to publishing together about the

ILA, when others had interest and time, such as faculty members involved with the ILA and other academic librarians, we published with them, too.<sup>5</sup>

### **Book Inventory with Agile Methodologies (The Project)**

#### *Russell*

For the first time in years, I (Russell) decided to conduct an inventory of the library's entire book holdings. The library had undergone many changes since the last book inventory project and the composition of staff was very different. When we last performed a complete inventory, I supervised a total of seven staff members. Currently, I supervise approximately twenty-five people. The last time the entire collection was inventoried, one person completed the project with the following lock-step Waterfall elements of Agile Project Management:

1. The entire project was planned out.
2. The library assistant scanned books' barcodes using a handheld wireless scanner, a laptop, and a cart.
3. The library assistant started at the first stack (A) and proceeded until the last stack.

This took a year to complete. Yes, an entire year.

#### *Monica*

As of this writing, the current book inventory project is underway and is being conducted by ten student workers. I (Monica) suggested students use their cell phones and an app to scan the books because it enabled more students to scan at one time (we only had one mobile barcode scanner) and it would be less tedious than pushing a cart around with laptop and a scanner attached. We gave students the option to use the scanner if they preferred or didn't have a phone to use, but no one took us up on it.

Each student was assigned two stacks of books to scan with the team goal to finish the entire inventory in two weeks or less, but we have challenged them to complete it in one week.

This time around we are utilizing Scrum elements of Agile Project Management with individuals fulfilling the following roles:

- The student workers make up the *Scrum Team*,
- A full-time employee holds the role of *Project Owner*,
- We serve as the *Scrum Masters*.

The Scrum Team communicates their daily progress by way of a “daily scrum post” in the “Inventory” Slack channel (which I brought to the Library as a tool to streamline internal communications) with an attachment to the post of the CSV file of items scanned during their daily shift.

### **Book Inventory with Agile Methodologies (Publications)**

As with our other projects, we plan to present and produce several publications. Therefore, we are mindful to gather quantitative and qualitative data in a way that will make internal reporting of results easier, but also can be used later in a variety of data visualizations for publications and presentations.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Michalak and Monica D. Rysavy. “Online Onboarding: Library Workplace Training in a Trilingual Interactive Online Asynchronous Environment.” In *Digital Workplace Learning: Bridging Formal and Informal Learning with Digital Technologies*, ed. Dirk Ifthenfaler. Cham: Springer, (2018): 291-306.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Michalak and Monica Rysavy. “Assessing Library Customer Interactions and Staff

### **Conclusion**

We firmly believe that for collaborations such as ours to continue for an extended time, the individuals collaborating must trust each other. Early on, successful projects together helped build a foundation of trust, and from there, a friendship was established. Part of the balancing act of working on major projects and publications is deciding who will take the lead or take on the majority of the work, while the other person takes on a more supportive role. Because we trust one another and are committed to publishing together for a long time, we don’t worry about counting how many first author roles one person has compared to the other (which we both have observed causing disagreements with our peers). While we tend to go back and forth with the first author position, sometimes one person will have two first author positions in a row due to the topic or publishing timelines. Furthermore, while we commonly agree on our next project, one person’s priority may take precedence over the other person’s goals. Finally, laughter has made meeting deadlines much more manageable. Find someone to collaborate with that your same sense of humor. It makes work more fun.

Satisfaction.” *Journal of Library Administration* 59 no. 3 (2019): 314-324.

<sup>3</sup> Monica Rysavy and Russell Michalak. “Leveraging Library Technology: Non-library Uses of Library Technology.” *Journal of Library Administration* 59 no. 1 (2019): 59-73; Russell Michalak and Monica D. Rysavy. “Assessing Library Cus-

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<sup>4</sup> Russell Michalak and Monica D. T. Rysavy. "Information Literacy in 2015: International Graduate Business Students' Perceptions of Information Literacy Skills Compared to Test-Assessed Skills." *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship* 21, no. 2 (2016): 152-174.

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<sup>5</sup> Russell Michalak, Monica D. Rysavy, and Alison Wessel. "Students' Perceptions of Their Information Literacy Skills: The Confidence Gap

Between Male and Female International Graduate Students." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 43 no. 2 (2017): 100-104; Monica D. Rysavy, Russell Michalak, and Kevin Hunt. "Information Literacy Education for First-Year Composition Students: A Case Study of Three Deployment Modes." In *Learner Experience and Usability in Online Education*. IGI Global: 85-121; Russell Michalak, Monica Rysavy, Kevin Hunt, Bernice Smith, and Joel Worden. "Faculty Perceptions of Plagiarism: Insight for Librarians' Information Literacy Programs." *College & Research Libraries* 79 no. 6 (2018): 746-767.