



## **Building Collaboration Between Library and Information Science Educators and Practitioners in Thailand : Transcending Barriers, Creating Opportunities**

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**Abstract:**

*Collaboration between library and information science educators and practitioners, specifically faculty and librarians, has been seen as a strategic activity in the management of library and information science education programs and library and information services. This paper reviews the needs for collaboration through collaborative partnership in offering library and information science educational programs and in providing library and information services as well as practices and barriers in these areas. Collaborative partnerships between LIS faculty and academic librarians in Thailand are discussed in light of the experience of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU). Strategies for successful collaboration in library and information science are proposed, looking forward on creating opportunities to build successful collaboration to further professional development and new ways of collaborative work for both LIS faculty and librarians.*

**Introduction**

Information and communication technologies especially internet and social media have revolutionized higher education environment as well as library and information science theory and practice. Collaboration, which can range from simple or informal to more formal approaches, has been highlighted as necessary, desirable, inevitable, and a key initiative and strategic management to cope with changes and challenges in the digital world. More and more

collaborative work has attracted the attention of academics worldwide including in the field of library and information science. It is through collaborative partnership that efficient and effective library and information education programs and library and information services can be realized successful. Collaboration between LIS faculty and practicing librarians results in building 21st century professional skills in the students as well as quality and meaningful professional education.

### **Needs for collaboration between LIS educators and practitioners**

Collaboration is one key term that has been emphasized in library and information science literature as well as other terms such as cooperation, networking, partnership. Collaboration is important to the advancement of Library and Information Science (LIS) as a science and a profession. It helps strengthen the ability to achieve the mutual goal of the LIS schools and academic libraries, and the capacity of faculty and librarians to increase the quality of teaching and learning, research, library and information services as well as cost advantages in sharing human resources. Collaboration of any kind brings a number of challenges (Aytac, 2010).

There is a long tradition of cooperation between libraries, and collaborative partnership between library and information science faculty as educators and librarians as practitioners. Faculty - librarians collaboration/ partnership has been discussed in the literature. It is an integral component for the success of the information science education programs and the management of library and information services. This is mainly to ensure high quality library and information science educational programs as well as user-centered, effective and efficient library and information services. In addition, professionalization of library and information science is developed through collaboration of educators and practitioners in the profession.

The needs for collaboration between faculty and librarians are due to changes in the higher education environment, paradigm shift in the library and information profession and the instructors' and librarians' changing roles.

*Changes in the higher education environment* The global digital revolution has led to an academic transformation, a new teaching/learning environment, online learning environment, quality assurance initiatives and enormous expectations for higher education to deliver programs and products that match societal needs. The twenty first century environment creates learning practices, human support and physical environments that support teaching and learning skills; support professional learning communities that enable educators to collaborate, share best practices and integrate skills into classroom practice; allow equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies and resources; and also support expanded community in learning, both face to face and online. The LIS faculty and practicing librarians can create such an environment by collaborating in the classroom and in the libraries.

*Paradigm shift in the library and information profession* The new information environment and fast changing world of information have implications on rapid transformation in library and information theory and practice and in the management of library and information science education and library and information services. The networked environment lends itself to cooperation and the sharing of ideas and solutions to problems common to libraries no matter where they are located. (Kesselman & Weintraub, 2004).

*Changing roles of faculty and librarians* Changing higher educational environment and paradigm shift in the library and information profession require drastic and rapid changes in the roles of faculty and librarians in recent decade. Teaching faculty in the twenty-first century has changed their roles to knowledge facilitators, mentors and coaches. Their new roles in the online and social media environment require different competencies and perspectives. Academic librarians' roles has become both dynamic and challenging, with librarians frequently involved in outreach and management and 'embedded' in the classroom, providing instruction in person or via an online management system.( Bennett & Simning, 2010; Tumbleson& Burke, 2010). Faculty and librarians are not the ones who work independently and in isolation, they become more collaborative in the new learning environment.

### **Collaborative partnership in offering library and information science education program**

The new information environment presents numerous educational responsibilities to academic librarians and it has given them opportunities to take a more central role in LIS education. Lillard and Wales (2003) recommended that academic librarians and LIS

educators must work together to seek creative approaches to strengthening LIS education. Fostering a closer collaboration between library educators and academic librarians through a variety of activities can help ensure that library education meets the need of the profession. As practicing librarians, they are in a better position to understand the needs of the profession in the technology rich environment. Their interaction with the students will be of great help to the young future library professionals.

This is in line with Al-Suqri (2010), who said that without collaboration with others in their profession, LIS departments are unlikely to be able to keep up with these developments and deliver international standards in teaching, research and information services. Education is the major role and central function of all academic libraries. Academic librarians become educators as well as information providers and teaching is the most obvious collaborative effort.

#### *Information literacy instruction*

Faculty-librarian collaboration in teaching information literacy is among the most effective collaborative partnership that has been widely discussed. Clearly, information literacy can not be taught in isolation; it requires connection to the teaching and learning occurring in the classrooms. Thus, collaboration became a key concept. (Donham & Green, 2004). Building relationships with faculty is the critical component in creating an environment that fosters collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians for information literacy instruction. (Black, Crest & Volland, 2001). Librarians have been seen as partners with faculty in integrating information literacy in higher education curriculum. The total integration of information literacy into the curriculum - where an information literacy activity is embedded into the student's course materials, delivered in the context of the subject they are studying, attracts marks, and is devised on the basis of collaboration between library staff and academic colleagues - is often mooted by practitioners as the most effective method for enabling students to develop their information literacy skills. (Parker, 2003).

#### *Curriculum planning and development*

In the past, curriculum development has always been the total responsibility of faculty, but in the new educational environment, LIS practitioners play important roles by actively involving in curriculum planning and development. They can take in to account of the existing library and information resources apart from acquiring the resources needed to

support the classroom teaching. Collaboration with the librarians is beneficial to LIS curriculum planning and development.

#### *Teaching/learning process*

Librarians become partners with faculty in achieving resource-based teaching/learning for students. They can take an active role in the teaching/learning process and perform various teaching roles in library and information science, e.g. as team teaching, adjunct teaching, guest faculty, instructing the students formally and informally, assisting faculty in their scholarly pursuit and teaching process, teaching practical courses apart from providing practical experience in the library environment. This is to ensure that students equip with all the necessary modern gadgets to keep track of the latest developments and advances in the areas of specialization.

#### **Collaborative partnership in providing library and information services**

Faculty- librarian collaborative partnership in higher education varies in complexity and scope. Literature shows that faculty input and participation in the selection of library materials are still an important component for collection development activities. Academic librarians should use faculty expertise, develop and maintain relationships with faculty as subject specialists. Librarians in academic settings rely on faculty input for building collections to meet current research needs, curricular content, and changing and emerging disciplines. (White, 2004).

Faculty are partners of librarians in the management of the academic library as committee members, consultants, experts, resource persons for formulating strategic planning, objectives and policies. They can also partner with librarians in promoting the library use among students and in the evaluation of the library effectiveness.

#### **Collaborative partnerships between LIS faculty and academic librarians in Thailand**

Thai librarianship plays important roles in the development of all aspects of the country, especially in education. It has been undergoing a complete change through information and technological revolution leading to educational and learning reform. Library and information science education in Thailand has become widespread since its inception at Chulalongkorn University in the year 1951. Library schools in Thailand can be categorized according to *degree level* being offered into: certificate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral

degree programs, according to *mode of teaching* being offered by conventional and open or distance teaching and learning, and according to *affiliation*, being offered by public and private universities.

Academic libraries especially university libraries play important roles in supporting the major missions of higher institutions. They support teaching, research, community services and cultural preservation. Academic libraries in Thailand are much more developed than other types of libraries in term of status, personnel, budget, services, cooperation, network and technology. The status of university librarians is almost equivalent to the teaching staff. Factor contributing to such development include substantial funds allocation from the government and their parent institutions, well trained professional librarians as well as the importance and clear roles of academic libraries and librarians.

Collaboration between faculty and librarians in the field of library and information science has long been strengthened. The strong link between theory and practice creates relevant, enduring and transferable outcomes. In the initial stage, faculty members of most library and information science institutions in Thailand also worked in the libraries and librarians were invited to be guest lecturers in the library courses and mentors in the practical program.

Librarians partner with faculty in curriculum development, teaching and learning, information literacy instruction, professional/practical experiences training and research. The practical courses and professional experience taught by librarians and work-based teaching /learning is a real strength. Faculty also partner with librarians in the management of the academic libraries, e.g. as a member of the library board, consultant, in collection development, especially in the selection process of specialized collection. In user services, faculty members play important roles in promoting library use. It was found that the information resources recommended by faculty were used more by students. As for action research, particularly in academic settings, faculty also collaborate with academic librarians in action research as advisor or co-researcher in order to improve the library programs and services.

The following Figure 1 shows LIS faculty and librarians' collaborative practices in Thailand in offering library and information science education programs and in providing library and information services.

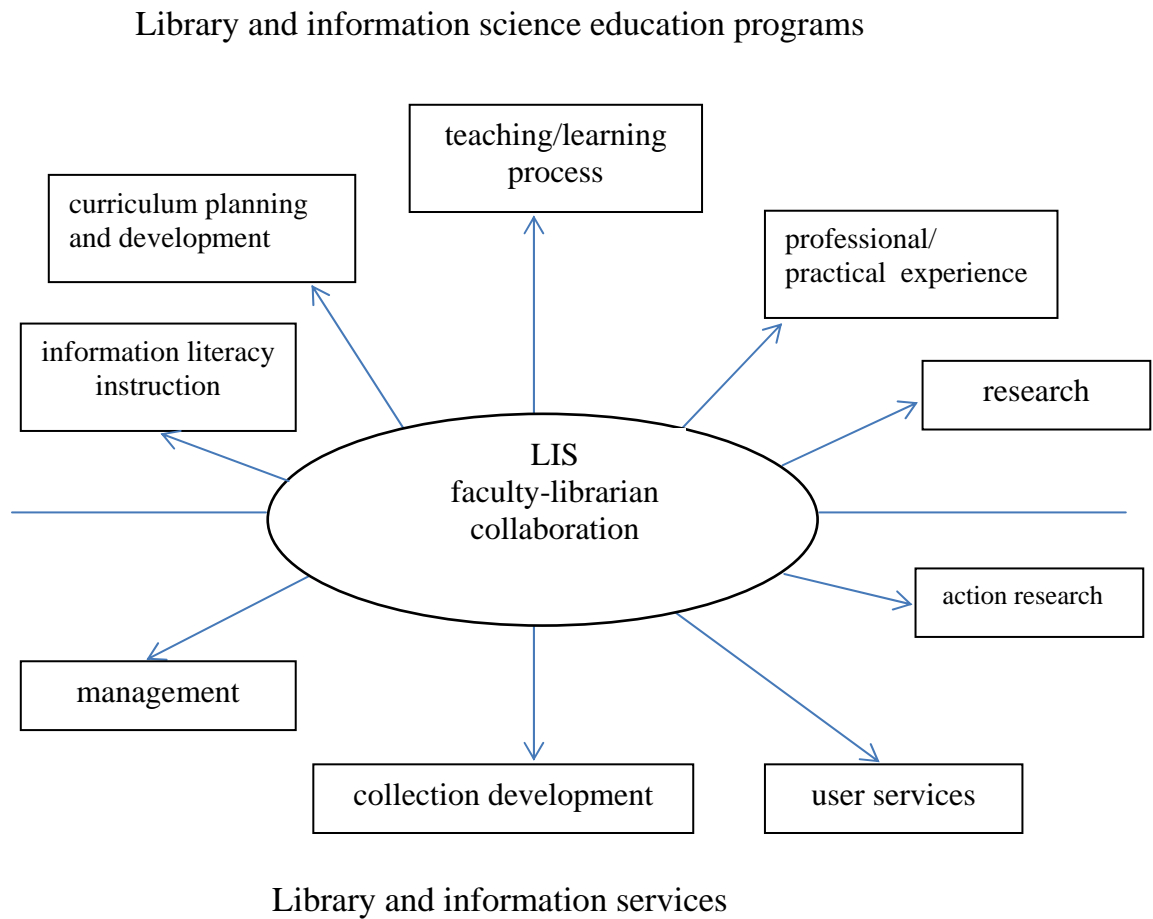


Figure 1 LIS faculty and librarians' collaborative practices

A model collaboration between teaching faculty, including library and information science faculty and librarians in managing Silpakorn university library at the Sanamchandra palace campus was developed by Klinthong (2006). It consisted of strategic level, managerial level and practical level management. High-level administrators set a policy for collaboration between faculty and librarians, the Central Library's Committee supports and follows up on the collaboration, the Central Library's director appoints liaison librarians, deans of each faculties encourage teaching faculty use library for their instruction and study, teaching

faculty employ the teaching methods to encourage the students to use library services for their study and research, and librarians improve their roles and knowledge and abilities in the areas of research, foreign language and information technology.

Additional results from the sample group of one hundred ninety two teaching faculty, chosen through stratified sampling, thirteen librarians, and six administrators of Silpakorn University, consisting of one vice dean and five deans chosen through purposive sampling, also showed additional results that both teaching faculty and librarians desired a high level of collaboration; the collaboration given by librarians was less than that desired by teaching faculty to a statistically significant degree (.05); and the collaboration given by instructors was less than that desired by librarians to a statistically significant degree (.05).

### ***Barriers***

Faculty–librarian collaboration face barriers that may effect collaboration between faculty and librarians in offering LIS program as well as the management of the collaboration that has impact on some aspects of collaboration. Major barriers leading to failures of collaborative effort implementation found as followings:

#### *The LIS educational environment*

The employment markets for LIS graduates have shifted from library settings to business and private settings so the curriculum changed its goals to business or private sectors and entrepreneurs in the new economy. The curriculum became multidisciplinary with more course works in subject fields especially computer and technology, business, management, communication arts and changed from graduate individuals with general knowledge and competencies to business-oriented, management-oriented, and technological–oriented approach. The need in the country, as in China indicated by Xiaoying (1997) that no longer for professional to work in libraries but rather for information professionals to work in the new economy. This is in accordance with Thailand, the follow-up studies of library and information science graduates in Thailand showed that more library and information science graduates were employed outside libraries.

In response to the changing focus, there tends to be a change in the curricula to match the needed knowledge and competencies of the new information environment and to meet the



new demands. Thus, the name of the revised curricula moved beyond library boundaries and librarians, from library, library and information science to information science, information studies or information management. The word “library” in the name of the program was found to be unattractive to the students, limit the scope of the subject area, the job market and the perception of people in the society. The shift in the west resulted into the term “schools” replacing the term LIS.

#### *Faculty and librarian culture*

The culture of faculty and librarians’ unwillingness to participate is one critical obstacle that prevents librarian to reach faculty, faculty- librarian collaboration and the creation of an environment that fosters and enhances collaboration. O’Conner and Philip (1996) concluded the reasons for the growing distance between educators and practitioners that many practitioners feel in many ways that LIS has abandoned them. There has been a gap between theory and practice in the LIS education.(Denis, 1987; Letarte, Turvey, Borneman & Adams, 2001), isolation from professional practice (Sutton, 1999), library educators and academic librarians operate in distinctly ‘separate worlds’, with little communication and interaction (Moran, 2001; O’Conner & Philip, 1996) .

Literature shows the solitary nature of the academic environment in the past, hardly go beyond the border of solitary scholarship. Faculty, in general, operate from a culture defined by narrow content focus, autonomy, time constraints, resistance to change (Hardesty, 1995), with negative attitudes, established perceptions of the library and attitude towards librarians. (Haynes,1996). However, this is gradually changing in the new educational environment where relations are being built on mutual trust and respect for each others’ expertise and territory, faculty is academics while librarians are professionals, with library and information science is their core area of education, practice and research.

#### *Administrative practices*

Major administrative practices that are barriers to LIS for successful collaboration include e.g., lack of formal policy at the university level, incompatible organizational structure, the complicated and bureaucratic procedures, inter-institutional communication, time consuming process. Lack of need to collaborate, lack of motivation, encouragement, self-esteem, and absence of real commitment of one or some partners are some key administrative practices.

## **Collaborative partnerships between LIS faculty and librarians in Thailand: A case of STOU**

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), the largest distance education university in Thailand, offers Certificate, Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degree programs. STOU is internationally recognized and has received numerous awards including the 1995 COL-ICDE Award of Excellence from the Commonwealth of Learning and the International Council for Distance Education, and 1992 Asian Management Award in Development Management as a leader of “*Management through Cooperation*” from the Asian Institute of Management. Collaborative partnership has been an integral part for the success of STOU.

Under the School of Liberal Arts, the Bachelor, Master and Doctoral Degree programs in information science programs are being offered through distance education mode.

Collaborative partnership between LIS faculty and librarians has been a long tradition.

*As for the information science programs*, STOU librarians play various roles in supporting STOU distance education systems and make contribution to the achievement of STOU’s goals and missions. Librarians work closely with faculty of the Information Science Program, School of Liberal Arts, and play important roles in supporting STOU distance education system .

- Librarians are partners in curriculum development, in the teaching/learning process. They develop collections, create new tools to enhance access to information available locally, nationally and internationally, and provide library and educational media services to support curriculum development and the teaching/learning process in achieving resource-based learning for students.
- Librarians are partners in teaching library/information skills to students who participate in an intensive residential workshop which is designed to be a culminating activity contributing to meeting the graduation requirements of prospective graduates. They also instruct library usage to graduate students and provide user education.
- Librarians are teachers and partners in teaching information science. They work collaboratively with faculty of the Information Science Program, School of Liberal Arts, as course team members in the production of course materials. They are also tutor-librarians, providing experiential learning practical skills to information science students.

- Librarians collaborate with faculty in building a learning environment that is conducive to learning, suiting adult learning and transforming STOU into a learning organization, a community of learners where everyone is a teacher and learners, value participation, cooperation, collaboration and teamwork at all levels.

As for the library and information services, faculty participate in collection development, especially information resource selection, promotion of library use especially the use of commercial databases by graduate students for study and research. Faculty also participate as advisors or consultants to action research projects of librarians.

### **Towards successful collaboration in library and information science**

To transcend barriers and creating opportunities towards successful collaboration in library and information science, the **3PC** strategies (3P : Policy, People, Process and 3C: Communication, Commitment, Credibility), are proposed by the author for consideration as follows:

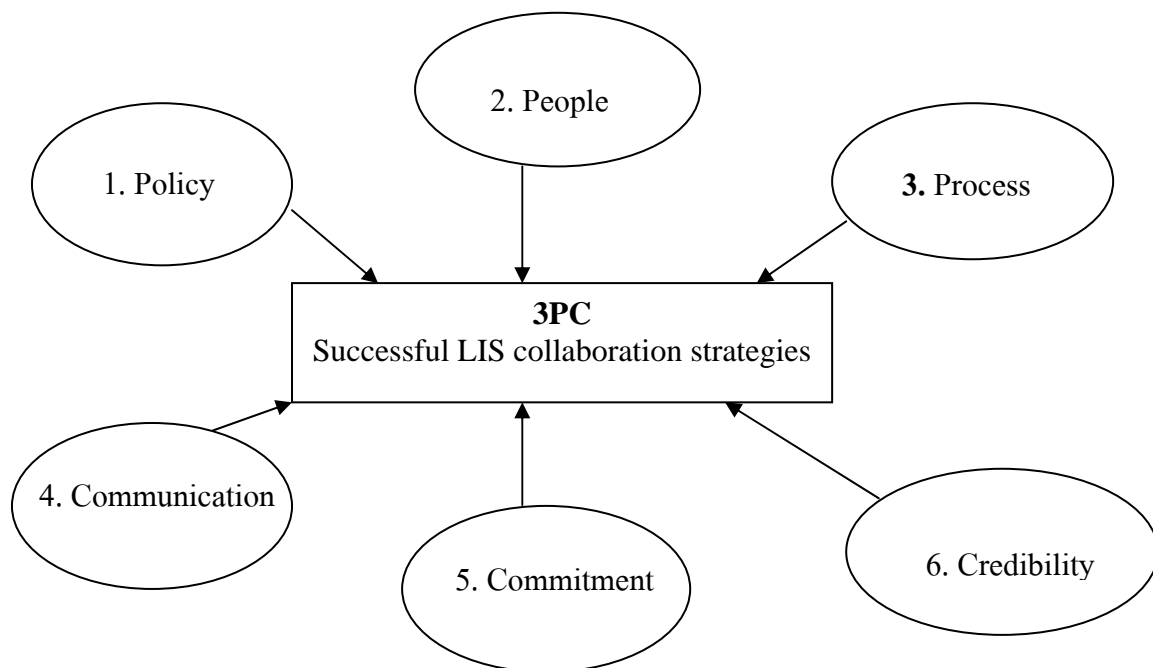


Figure 2 **3PC** successful LIS collaboration strategies

*1. Policy* A university policy is needed to facilitate partnerships and formalizing faculty and librarians in the new educational environment especially the teaching/learning process, the development of students' information literacy skills . This includes clear, concrete and attainable

objectives and goals, and formal involvement of librarians in different processes/activities of the education system including curriculum development, course production, academic seminars, intensive seminars, independent study, and professional experience training of faculty members, as well as motivation and incentives.

2. *People* Participants should have certain attributes of collaborators, such as friendliness, collegiality, and having positive attitudes and thoughts toward collaboration. In addition, they must be flexible, compromise, open in terms of honest and willing to share, share vision, share thinking, share planning, share creation of something new and change, change one's style of working. Before any collaborative activities happened, establishing personal relationship as well as trust building among the individual involved should be taken. This leads to mutual respect, understanding and mutual goals.

3. *Process* The style and method of working styles should be clarified and take account of organizational culture. A structure for collaborative effort/partnership should be flat, flexible and with somebody taking coordinating responsible.

4. *Communication* Collaboration is enhanced by knowledge sharing and clear message. Faculty and librarians have the opportunities to foster better understanding and share each knowledge and expertise with one another through open and frequent communication, through informal and formal communication, through traditional media or channels or online communication, through established informal relationships and communication links .

5. *Commitment* All parties involved are willing to join a collaborative venture and make a real commitment to facilitate, to collaborate, and to share resources, power, talent, responsibility and problem-solving. When we cooperate, we have to move from comfortable places, listen to others, make promises, and adjust our goals. (Miller & Pellen, 2002).

6. *Credibility* Credibility is a core component to start cooperation and to sustain it. Librarians should enhance the credibility of their educative roles as collaborators and they should be viewed as equal partners, trusted partners, as teachers/lecturers, practitioner-researchers, and active professionals.

## **Looking forward.....Creating opportunities to build successful LIS collaboration through professional development and new ways of collaborative work**

As universities are in the midst of technological revolution and competition, faculty and academic librarians are all at the crossroads and struggle to rethink about their new roles to accommodate new higher educational environment and the continuously evolving library and information profession. Professional development and new ways of work are highlighted.

*1. Professional development* Professional development for librarians and faculty become a necessity. In addition to personal traits, e.g. positive attitudes, positive relationships, mutual respect, librarians should prepare themselves for collaborative work in interpersonal and social skills training and learn about teaching techniques both traditional and online environment to enable them to work with the faculty in the new educational environment. The teaching role of librarians as educators is a topic of interest of academic librarianship for a long time. Doskatch (2003) reviewed the literature and convinced that the metamorphosis from librarian to educator and learning facilitator will not occur unless librarians are provided with opportunities to develop teaching competencies and pedagogical understandings. Technology, particularly the internet and social network play significant role in collaborative effort, as a means to create borderless community, scholarly communication, and a means for professional development in the social media environment.

Research is needed in library and information science, for the creation of new knowledge, the growth of library and information science as a profession and a discipline, and for better management, decision making and problem solving in the workplace. It is one key component and one key role of faculty as researcher and academic librarians as practitioner - researchers. There is a continuing need for more and better research in the field of library and information science. However, many LIS practitioners are not heavily involved in research.(Powell, Baker & Mika, 2002). As research helps develop the theory and practice in library and information science, hence, both faculty and librarians should develop their research competencies.

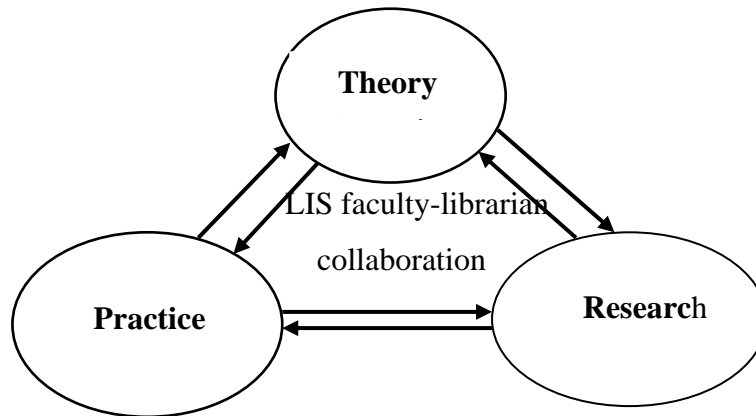


Figure 3 Research as a component of LIS faculty – librarian collaboration

## 2. *New ways of collaboratively work*

The emerging of collaborative online communities challenges traditional work of faculty and librarians, to change one's style and method of working. Librarians should move beyond the traditional images and roles which prevent them to seek new opportunities for expression of professional expertise in collaboration with faculty and to enable librarians to assume more central roles especially in the teaching and learning process. Librarians should create various strategies to reach faculty including formal and informal communication, campus involvement, attending/conducting meetings, seminars, conferences workshops and joint workshops on specific topics to expose faculty to new areas. Liaison librarians and outreach librarians play the proactive roles.

In addition, technological advances especially social media should be used to improve communication between librarians and teaching faculty, as well as looking for the possibility of exploit e-learning systems and other channels in promoting collaboration. Librarians should commit to their work and willing to devote grater effort to positioning libraries at the heart of the learning process with their facilitation and involvement in new activities and environment, e.g. scholarly communication, e-research,

The information and communication technology positively affect the nature of scholarly communication and the changing face of higher education in library and information science. LIS faculty should explore new ways of collaborative work with librarians to expand the effectiveness of their programs through various strategies including developing

discipline-related tutorials, research guides, instructional modules, consulting with librarians when developing assignments, inviting librarians to participate in classroom and online discussion, including professional activities.

### **Summary**

Technology presents immense opportunities for the promotion of collaborative environment in higher education. Published articles of collaboration between faculty as educators or academics and librarians as practitioners are increasing, even though not many specific to LIS faculty and librarians. LIS faculty – librarian collaboration should be strengthened and expand to pave the way to successful library and information science programs and library and information services in the new educational environment. Much more attention should be focused on major shifts in LIS and specifically LIS education, the curriculum, name, objectives and interdisciplinary nature of the content as well as the information market in the new economy which are challenging faculty and librarians whether LIS education and educators will go beyond libraries and librarians to other information institutions and practitioners and whether librarians will be visible. To survive, both parties should struggle and cope with changes through professional development so that they can adapt to their new roles and with new ways of collaborative work through faculty –librarian collaborative effort. As library is the foundation of information practice and theory, still librarians have much more educational roles to play and to expand both as information providers, as educators and as practitioner- researchers in preparing the information professionals for the new economy.

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