



## **SCHOLAR INITIATIVE – FULL TRANSCRIPT**

### **PRACTICAL ISSUES IN COLLABORATION 2012 OSEP PD CONFERENCE – WASHINGTON, DC**

Mark Horney: Okay, so what I thought I'd do is start talking about on the front side of this page there's a thing at the top that says some issues. And so I'm going to try to talk in a practical vein about what kinds of things do you go do. One of the first things you need to do if you're looking for collaborators is to figure out what it is that you want to collaborate about. You know, as James was just saying you have to be clear what you want from somebody; if you're going to go talk to somebody and start asking them questions, you need to know what it is that you're going to ask them about. Now one thing that we do to try to clarify that, whenever we set off to write a new grant and we need to seek collaborators, early on in the process we write what we call a prospectus. It's drawn from the notion you know that you get with financial, you know, institutions send you a thing about what they're investing in and so forth, and it's called a prospectus. So whenever you call someone up or email them and say wouldn't help, wouldn't you like to collaborate with us on this project, the conversation is going to end one way; it's going to end with please send me more information about what you plan to do. And so you need to be able to respond to that. And what we do is write this prospectus so that we have something to send them, immediately. And so by writing a prospectus you get clear, you can be clear in your mind what it is that you're asking for. Now notice the project that we end up writing often bears no relation to what we wrote in the prospectus, but the prospectus is the thing that gets you started in how to do that. So in finding collaborators there's really no magic to that. It's a lot of hard work. You have to figure out who to write to, who to ask, who to call, and you do that by doing things like coming to conferences like this, going around and finding oh, here's someone who knows about online learning, so I want to do something about that I'm going to go talk to him and either he'll help me or he'll have his graduate students help me or he'll know 12 other people that he wants you to go ask instead of asking him, and so forth. And so you have to be alert to those people. So you're reading all of these papers, you need to keep up with the literature and read all of the papers and then you start contacting all of those authors, I read your paper about this and I found this part really interesting and I would like to ask you a question. Now in these emails you send out or telephone calls that you make they're sort of two levels of message; there's a top message that was what you actually wrote which was I like what you wrote and I have a question I'd like to ask you, but there's this subtext, you know, wouldn't you really like to have a conversation with me and wouldn't you really like to collaborate with me? So you're doing that. Now we're in the

process of doing that in our center right now in that we are interested in a variety of questions around what we call supported text and digital books, particularly in mathematics and right now our current grant is focused on students with learning disabilities or vision impairments. So we go read all the papers that we can find. So if we're going to have a student read a math book all the questions about readability come into play, how do you measure the readability of a math book and match that up with the reading ability, the mathematical reading ability of a student? Because we know those from all their other reading stuff those two things have to match up, at least within the zone of proximal development. So how do you do that? Well, I've managed to find a small group of papers that talk about that and I need to be in contact with all of those authors. So we have a formal process in our center for collecting this bibliographic information, analyzing it, tagging it, doing those sorts of things and then we find contact information on all of those authors and we write to them. And it's sort of a boiler plate message, but it goes out. Now to support that, the prospectus part of this, is we have a place on our website where we have you know a page entitled how do you measure the readability of a mathematical text? And we have a little two page overview that sort of outlines some of the issues, particularly issues that we're interested in and then it has this bibliography. So the message we send out is we have your paper in our bibliography, we thought it was interesting because and we have a sentence there about why we thought that paper was interesting, we want to know if you've written any more papers in this area and do you know of anybody else who's written papers in this area? Oh, by the way we have a bibliography, could you take a look at that and tell us which of those papers you think are the most useful? So you can see there's a variety of requests here that we send out to those people and whenever they send us an answer back our reply to them always has more questions in it, because you're promoting a conversation back and forth and some of these conversations will grow up into being a collaboration with them. Yes?

Celia Rosenquist: Can I interrupt you?

MH: Yes.

CR: Mark, while you're talking in terms of reaching out to potentially people that you would want to collaborate, in your initial contact with them it seems rather formal. Are there circumstances, both Jamie and Mark, where there would be more of an informal kind of communication that would start a collaboration or recommendations that it starts formal then...

James Basham: I think I was going to add to what Mark was saying because obviously, you know, and we kind of do that same thing, I mean, I think being mission driven and always having that prospectus is critical to what we do. And we all sit down and internally whether even across, like within the online center, for instance, internally we sit across with KU but then we also bring CAST and Edustein (ph.) and say okay what are we trying to do here, what's our mission? And we do that same sort of thing. But most recently I think there's two

different, using social media appropriately is critical for kind of starting these collaborations. For instance, over the last eight months I've received a number of requests either in Linked In or on Twitter to meet on various things or just through DMs and direct message on Twitter or on Linked In. In fact, recently on Friday I received a message from a company here that works, Global, this is terrible, I'm not going to know it, I think it's called Global Learning, World Learning. I received a message that they said we work with USAID on global initiatives to educate global workforce initiatives, etc., and we want to make sure we're providing appropriate and accessible services to students and all individuals and so we're really interested in doing Universal Design for Learning and applying that in everything we do, and so this came through Linked In, someone that had been introduced to someone, you know, this network kind of effect, would you be up for a phone call? So I emailed the person back Monday morning actually while I was sitting at the airport as I was ready to fly out, and she said well, I'm based in Washington, D.C. and I'd love to have a phone call with you and I said well, I'm going to be in Washington, D.C. for the next couple of days. And so what happened was yesterday we actually met. I went over to their headquarters and we actually had a conversation around just informally about what they do and what I do. And I think this is one of those informal occasions, and that's happened a number of times like over the last six to eight months. But the notion of that is that you know my Twitter account I use only for professional purposes; I only use it to post professional things. My Linked In account obviously a Linked In account is that same sort of thing where you're really kind of focused on this professional life. But those types of informal sort of connections are critical to kind of starting conversations, because there's like one company in particular that I've been working with recently that same sort of conversation started off that same way. I hosted a review that I had done of a system that they had developed and on Twitter I said hey, everyone come take a look at this system and talked about the accessibility of the system. And the CEO then direct messaged, DM'd me back and said hey, you know, thanks for posting that, etc., etc., we should have a conversation, I'm based out of Silicon Valley or whatever. Again I was going out there the next week or so to work with another company and we just happened to sit down and we were able to have a conversation and that has kind of now spun into another network connection for one, but the ability to drive that into some of the research we're doing because it then opens doors to industry folks. And so if we're doing research on, for instance, online learning, much of online learning right now in the K-12 sector is driven by what industry is putting out there. And so being able to knock on someone's door, be able to pick up the phone and call a CEO or being able to call someone in SIIA, the Software and Information Industry Association, is critical to gaining access so that we can actually do research on some of the products that are out there and in the hands of teachers as well as being you know that kids are using, so that's how it kind of starts, an informal sort of process.

MH: The nature of that first contact depends a great deal on what you already know about the person you're trying to contact and what kind of relationship, if any, you already have with them and also whether you have somebody in common, so quite often you're contacting

somebody that's been recommended to you and so you can draw upon that recommendation; Glenda Hills suggested that I call you to talk to you about this and those kind of things. So managing that network, whatever the tools are that you have, you have to put some time and effort into that. Now part of that that takes off on what James just said is once you start this relationship you have to find the right communication channel with them. There are some people who live on email. I'm one of those people. I sit and have email running all day. On the other hand I don't Twitter; I'm never going to get his Twitter message. I figure there has to be one person in the universe who doesn't use Twitter and I volunteered for that. There are some people who would prefer to be called on the telephone. There are some people that you really have to go sit down and talk with because they just don't like mediated communications of any sort. And you have to figure out what that best communication channel is, because you have to meld yourself to how, the way in which they want to talk. And, of course, you have ways that you prefer to talk. And so there's part of the collaboration is working out what that communication channel is.