

The Benefits of Cooperation

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Today's world of continuous competition in business, sports, grades, etc. has set the tone for many initiatives. Competition is good and is an integral part of our society, business, and advancement; but often competition hampers or destroys our ability and desire to cooperate. It is hard for people to stop, consider others, and come together for the benefit of all. In today's world most individuals, companies, and institutions are looking out for their own interests and rightfully so. However, we should always investigate the possibility of attaining our goals in a more timely and economical manner. Often this comes through cooperation and partnerships. The state of Louisiana has been fortunate to have experienced an enormous amount of cooperation among academic libraries, but it needs to be nurtured, enhanced, and expanded.

The LOUIS Office was created in 1992 and currently consists of a staff of eight who support LOUIS services for all Louisiana academic libraries. LOUIS services include library management automation, electronic resources licensing, interlibrary loan automation, digital library automation, and authentication of users. LOUIS makes these services available to all 39 public and private academic libraries in Louisiana. Louisiana is the only state that has automated all of its publically-funded academic libraries using the same software on a single server, thereby saving millions of dollars each year. From the beginning of LOUIS, academic libraries and their information technology staffs were ready and willing to relinquish ownership of hardware and software to the LOUIS Office. In return, the LOUIS Office has always tried to be more interested in serving our customers rather than worrying about who gets credit. LOUIS could not have accomplished what it has over the last 17 years without partners and cooperation from others.

Two important partners are the Louisiana Academic Library Information Network Consortium (LALINC) and the Louisiana Board of Regents. Each Louisiana academic library director is a member of LALINC. This organization sets an example for the entire state by conducting its business in a manner that provides services to patrons rather than advancing the agenda of individual institutions. Committees from this organization have played an integral part in identifying the resources and services needed by Louisiana academic libraries. Their recommendations are sent to LOUIS for implementation. The members of LALINC have contributed over \$15,000,000 in membership fees to the LOUIS budget since 1995. In October 2008 LALINC voted unanimously to increase their membership fees to retain and expand LOUIS services.

The Louisiana Board of Regents had the confidence and foresight to invest the necessary “seed money” to fund the initial LOUIS initiative in 1992. Since the inception of LOUIS the Louisiana Board of Regents has supplied LOUIS with over \$41,000,000 for its budget. LOUIS services could not have been developed without this critical investment by the Louisiana Board of Regents.

The following actions stand as examples of organizations and individuals willing to give of their own resources with no hidden agenda:

- The Louisiana Board of Regents went to bat for Louisiana academic libraries by providing financial support
- LALINC has identified the needs for Louisiana academic libraries
- LOUIS has implemented solutions for academic libraries

It took these partnerships to provide services at the most reasonable cost. LOUIS has provided Louisiana academic libraries with more access to information resources and services while

saving over \$135,000,000 had each library tried to fund the same services as individual libraries. Not only could each library not afford to fund all of the LOUIS initiatives separately but they could not have delivered the breath of services in such a timely and economical manner.

Through this process, we have built trust and enjoyed many successes. All public academic libraries have been automated; all academic library patrons now have access to a substantial inventory of electronic resources; interlibrary loan operations have been automated; and a digital library environment is available to all LOUIS member libraries. Thanks to the generosity of the State Library of Louisiana, who is another partner, all public and academic libraries have access to a statewide delivery service. A complete list of LOUIS services can be found at <http://www.louislibraries.org>.

In addition to the products and services which have been deployed, relationships have developed and flourished. For fifteen years the LOUIS System Administrators (one representative from each library) have been meeting twice a year to share information and experiences. For the last ten years, the annual LOUIS Users Conference has been another venue for academic librarians to gather to meet colleagues and develop relationships.

Louisiana academic libraries and librarians have benefited greatly from the partnership between the Louisiana Board of Regents, LALINC, and LOUIS. However, more can be accomplished with additional cooperation. Our individual goals should include spending time with colleagues from other institutions and developing relationships with those colleagues. We need to avoid the temptation of working in isolation. As technology develops more rapidly, our relationships will become a more important factor in our success. Our relationships, not technology, will help steer us in the right direction, help us avoid pitfalls, and save us an enormous amount of time and frustration while allowing us to serve our patrons more efficiently.