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**Web-based Information Science Education (WISE):
An inter-institutional collaboration to promote quality e-Learning**

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Abstract

Developing inter-institutional collaborative agreements for online education offers the potential benefit of increasing participants' access to resources and decreasing costs to institutions. Designing and sustaining models of cooperation to cross institutional boundaries is inherently complex and requires significant commitment. This paper explores the rationale for developing consortia and describes opportunities and challenges that arise in establishing and maintaining agreements to promote quality online education in library and information science (LIS) with peer institutions. Insights are shared based on 'lessons learned' in establishing the Web-based Information Science Education (WISE) consortium. Emphasis is placed on the three key elements of the WISE model of collaboration -- metrics for quality online education, faculty development in online pedagogy, and course share.

Introduction

This paper presents an overview of the initial development of the Web-based Information Science Education (WISE) consortium. The first section describes the rationale for forming a collaborative model to support online education in library and information science (LIS). The second section focuses on the development of the WISE pilot. In the third section, sustaining

and scaling collaboration are discussed. Following this, the three major elements of the model -- quality metrics, faculty development, and course share are explored. Finally, details of the current status of the collaboration and issues for the future are shared.

WISE Rationale

Over the past ten years, online education has moved beyond the initial ‘no significant difference’ paradigm. Instructors in well-developed distance education programs are finding that online education or education that blends online and classroom activities has advantages over traditional methods of delivery. The benefits of well-designed online education include: delivery of courses anytime and anywhere, an increased level of student-to-faculty and student-to-student interaction, greater access to faculty with specialized expertise, and participation by diverse and often otherwise isolated learners. Online education “enables new connections with the wider world – with students, information, resources, and colleagues at a distance”. (Montague & Smith, p. 216) The intent of WISE is to increase the scope and quality of these sorts of connections.

LIS schools offer graduate professional education for those interested in working as librarians and information professionals in a variety of settings. Concerned with organizing information and making it accessible for users in many contexts, LIS is inherently interdisciplinary. During recent decades, information-based tasks have become increasingly reliant on computer technology. Thus, LIS schools have integrated technological competencies into their programs. Indeed, it may be argued that few other professions have curricular goals so closely tied to network technology. As Jones (1996) explains, “The integration of the Internet into our daily lives affects no single profession as completely as that of the librarian.”

With only 55 accredited LIS schools in the United States and Canada, faculty and staff are challenged to reach-out to those who are unable to relocate to pursue studies on-campus. LIS educators have been active in promoting distance education opportunities in many forms for decades (Barron, 2003). According to the 2003 Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) Statistical Report, 88% of schools offer courses via distance education (including online, video-conferencing, and off-site delivery). Since 1993, technology has enabled online education to emerge as a viable means of extending traditionally campus-bound learning opportunities to LIS students. As with other disciplines, approaches to online education are heavily influenced by institutional factors – with each school developing its own distinct model and using a variety of course management systems. However, regardless of specific institutional circumstances, LIS educators’ vast experience with outreach and extensive knowledge of network technology and user-centered services translate into unique potential for leadership in online education.



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Jones, D. (1996). Critical thinking *untangling the Web*. world.
<http://www.library.ucsb.edu/untangle/jones.html>

Each year, ALISE hosts an annual conference where faculty come together to engage in dialogue about research and current practice. One of the special interest groups (SIG) of ALISE is distance education (DE). Here, during a meeting of the DE SIG at the 2003 ALISE Annual Conference in Philadelphia, PA, the idea for the WISE consortium was born. After listening to a presentation about research in online education at a peer school, a member of the audience, intrigued by the potential of working together to enhance current practice and overcome known limitations (such as lack of quality control across programs, LIS faculty concerns about needing more professional development opportunities, and difficulties in offering highly specialized courses because of undersubscription) proposed the creation of an alliance to tackle challenging issues through collaboration.

Preliminary Development

In March, 2003, faculty, administrators and technology staff representatives from LIS schools at Syracuse University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and University of Washington came together for two days of discussion about forming a online education consortium. The first component of the project focused on creating a pilot course share model. After considering several possible options and much dialogue, it was agreed that the most effective model for course share would involve host schools faced with excess capacity (in the form of virtual seats) offering predetermined numbers of seats per course to other schools involved in the consortium –paralleling a seat-sale in airline industry terms.

A plan to share information about courses (in the form of recent or draft syllabi) and numbers of available seats was implemented. Once this became available, other schools in the consortium could decide if the course would be of interest to students without duplicating their own offerings (usually by review of a curriculum committee). Selected consortial courses would be offered during regular enrollment periods to students as pre-approved transfer credit. When students sought and were given a place in a host school's class, they would register at their home institution and then receive access and training through the host. They would be expected to follow the host's academic calendar and course model (including

attendance in synchronous sessions and/or residencies if required). Since registration took place at the home school, any changes in enrollment as well as final grade submission would be linked to the procedures set by that institution (not with the host). The home institution would also provide access to library resources.

During the initial phase of pilot consortium development, challenges related to a variety of issues emerged including: the need for coordination between schools; learning about each others' cultures and expectations; student integration in new course management systems; and accommodating for different academic calendars. As schools gained trust and experience, new practices developed and the initial obstacles dissipated.

Between January, 2004 and May, 2005, 24 students participated in 10 courses through the WISE consortium pilot. Course offerings spanned the full range available in LIS, including Advanced Cataloging and Classification, Digital Library Design, Government Information, Information Industry Strategies, and Storytelling. Feedback about students' interest in taking courses via WISE was collected as part of the pilot. Participants were clearly excited about this opportunity. As one student explained,

Offering this consortial pilot program in online education tells me that [my institution] is interested in continuing to add value to our educational experiences. It shows a willingness to explore new ways to connect and learn. My hope is that these kinds of connections will continue in the future and I look forward to learning from them.

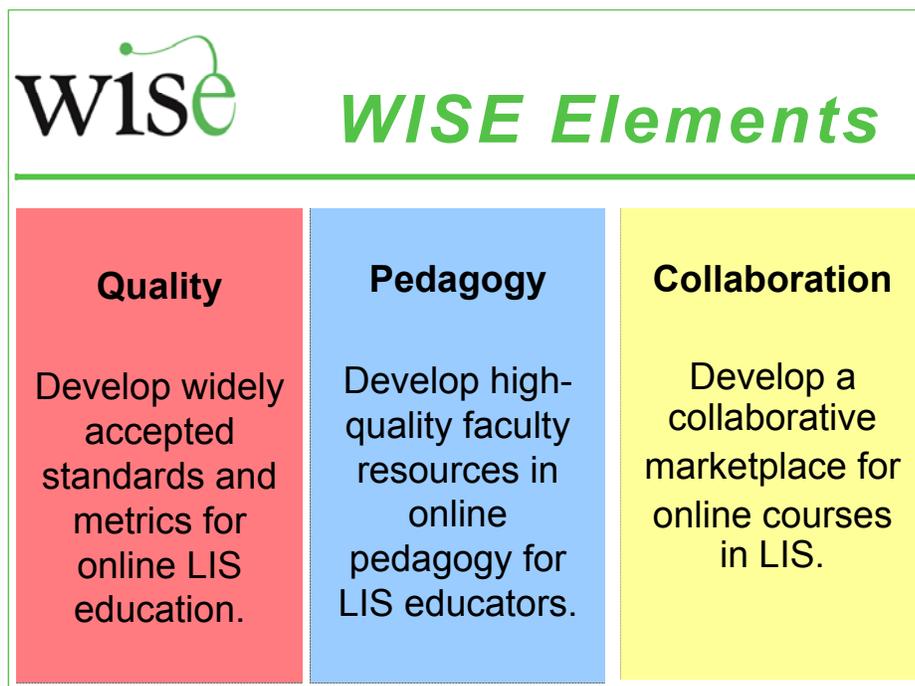
Upon completion, online course evaluations were distributed and the results were overwhelmingly positive. Students indicated that participating in consortial courses was a unique and enriching experience. As one student noted, "I appreciate the opportunity to take classes with differing formats and academic view points."

Sustainability and Scaling

Organizers of the WISE pilot knew the initiative was achieving its original goals, but in order to make more of an impact across schools and the profession, it would be necessary to increase the scope and scale. In considering next steps, those involved decided to develop a grant proposal to expand the depth and breadth of WISE focusing on three elements -- quality metrics, faculty development and the course share infrastructure.

- Educators involved in the WISE pilot were committed to promoting quality online education. Quality metrics would be developed as a working document, a set of guidelines describing what online education in LIS should consider, incorporate, and achieve. Drawing on general information related to quality online education (such as Sloan-C *Quality Framework* and ADEC *Guiding Principles*), this resource would be available online to all LIS educators for consultation.
- Resources to support faculty design and deliver online education would be created. Faculty development opportunities would be offered to LIS faculty both in face-to-face (f2f) mode (during conferences) and via online workshops.
- The course share infrastructure would be extended by inviting a larger set of schools with quality online education offerings (in accordance with the quality metrics) to sign a formal memorandum of agreement (MoU) and participate by offering courses to students in other WISE schools (provider) and/or selecting courses from WISE to offer to their students

(consumer). As with the pilot, tuition would remain at the home school. However, as the balance of courses traded would likely vary by semester, schools would agree upon a fixed dollar amount to be paid per credit hour to compensate for imbalances.



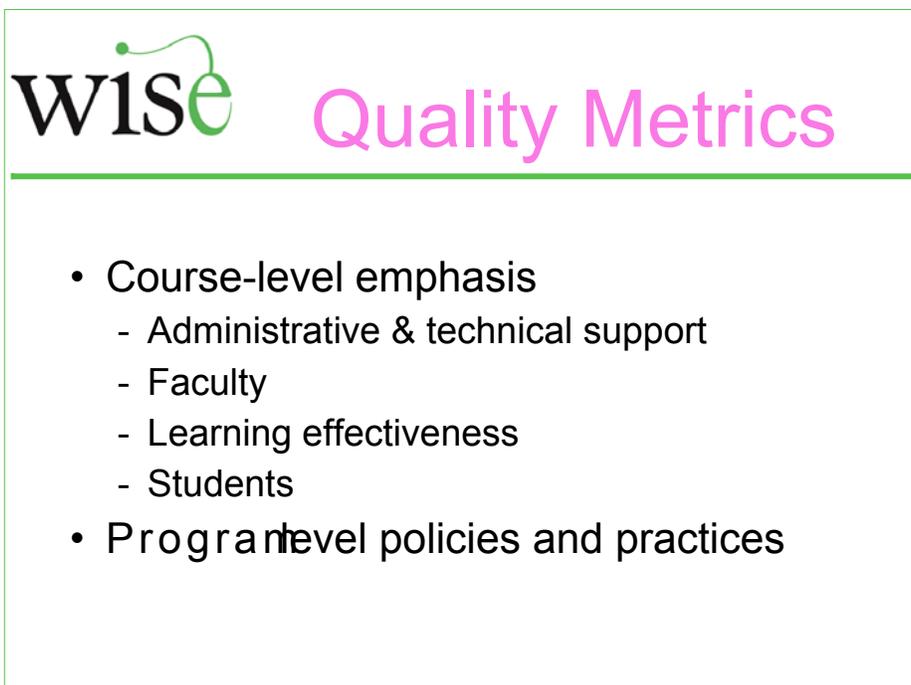
Working through the development of a grant proposal enabled the original WISE group to carefully consider the various facets of the project and articulate potential outcomes of the model. In August, 2004, when notice that the Institute of Museum and Library Services would fund the project, the grant team was thrilled to begin the expansion. For co-principal investigators, Bruce R. Kingma (Syracuse) and Linda C. Smith (Illinois), this involved hiring staff to begin the expansion -- initiating the development of quality metrics; designing and offering formal opportunities for faculty development; creating a website and a database to organize the course share; and inviting 10 new schools (all interested in quality education, but each with unique areas of expertise, such as children's literature, medical librarianship, and information management) to consider participating in WISE.

WISE Quality Metrics

The first version of WISE Quality Metrics was developed during the fall of 2004. Schools participating (or planning to participate) in WISE contributed to the creation of the quality principles and metrics by provided suggestions and feedback via e-mail as the document emerged. Since WISE includes course share, the emphasis of the document is course-level quality (rather than program or subject area, etc.) The document includes several key areas:

1. Administrative and technical support is based on the premise that support is adequate (i.e. - timely, practical, convenient, and secure) to enable students to achieve learning objectives.
2. The faculty section emphasizes the need for online faculty to have knowledge and experience (of content) comparable to other campus faculty as well as ample

- opportunities to access resources and services (e.g. - technology support, mentoring, and educational opportunities, etc.) specific to online education.
3. Learning effectiveness calls for online courses to have academic rigor similar to other modes in terms of objectives, outcomes, content, engagement, evaluation, etc. In addition, those responsible for course design and delivery need to carefully consider specific strengths and limitations of the online environment in order to maximize the potential for learning.
 4. Student satisfaction, related to learning and access to services and support (i.e. – library resources, receiving responses to questions, etc.), is comparable to that of campus courses.
 5. Program-level quality is presented in the final section. Schools must establish policies and practices (e.g. – mission statement, business plan, technical infrastructure, accreditation, etc.) to support quality educational opportunities for students.



The graphic features the WISE logo in green and black, followed by the text 'Quality Metrics' in pink. A horizontal green line separates the header from the content below.

- **Course-level emphasis**
 - Administrative & technical support
 - Faculty
 - Learning effectiveness
 - Students
- **Program level policies and practices**

Pedagogy

In fall, 2004, Pat Lawton, an experienced (online) LIS instructor, joined WISE as “Coordinator of Instructional Design”. Lawton is responsible for planning, developing, and delivering educational opportunities and resources for LIS faculty. She works with a committed group of instructional technology staff at UIUC and Syracuse to offer face-to-face workshops in conjunction with major LIS education conferences as well as online modules. Resources, such as exemplary syllabi and a bibliography are also under development.



Pedagogy

- Resource for faculty development
- Online and f2f sessions including:
 - Design
 - Asynchronous group work
 - Synchronous sessions
 - Creating community
 - E-lectures
 - Evaluation
- Dialogue leads to more dialogue

WISE offered the first f2f faculty development session in conjunction with the 2005 ALISE Annual Conference in Boston. Over 60 participants from 21 institutions attended a half-day workshop focusing on designing and developing online courses, effective practice, and building community. Data from the workshop evaluations paralleled earlier student feedback in terms of enthusiasm and appreciation of the initiative. Comments from the evaluation forms included “great mix of theory and practice” and “I have 3 pages of notes to explore.” As well, the need for more faculty development opportunities was strongly reinforced as sixteen topics for future sessions (including time management, synchronous sessions, and building learning objects) were suggested.

A second full-day workshop is planned for June 27, 2005, to coincide with the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in Chicago. Sessions include a keynote address, panel discussion with faculty and students, subject-specific pedagogy working groups, and a presentation on part-time faculty development.

WISE online modules will also debut in June using Moodle technology. The first topic is a general introduction to online education. Subsequent modules will promote deeper analysis and discussion in several specific areas including: asynchronous group work, effective practice in synchronous mode, creating community, and e-lectures.

WISE faculty development has benefited from Lawton’s extensive experience as well as continual input from LIS faculty as to areas of need/interest. It’s worthwhile noting the enthusiasm shared by faculty. Those from WISE-affiliated institutions and others have consistently expressed keen interest in accessing opportunities to engage in dialogue about quality pedagogy (in online environments and generally) and to share knowledge and experience with colleagues across institutional boundaries.

Course Share

The logo for WISE Course Share features the word "WISE" in a green, stylized font with a small green leaf-like shape above the 'E'. To its right, the words "Course Share" are written in a larger, yellow, sans-serif font. A horizontal green line is positioned below the text.

WISE Course Share

- Schools decide how and when to be involved
- Schools determine which courses to offer to the consortium
 - Estimate virtual seats available
- Schools determine which WISE courses to offer to their students
 - And determine which students can take courses
 - Students register at home-school for special topics course (as pre-approved transfer credit)

With only three institutions involved during the WISE pilot, staff at individual schools were responsible for coordinating course share logistics. With expansion, this responsibility was shifted to the “WISE Coordinator” Melissa Frakes. Frakes is charged with overseeing administrative aspects of the initiative, including: planning course share with institutions, monitoring student interest and enrollment, and facilitating communication among all involved. She is supported by a team of staff and graduate assistants at Syracuse, including Kathryn A. Allen (one of the WISE pilot administrators), in working to build infrastructure and tools to promote educational opportunities via WISE.

As of June 1, 2005, thirteen LIS schools in three countries have joined WISE. Basic information about these programs is presented in table 1. Course sharing across this number of schools will enable students to access many learning opportunities (spanning the spectrum of the interdisciplinary LIS curriculum), which simply would not be attainable if one were limited to a single program. Courses featured in upcoming offerings include: Applied Economics for Information Managers, Fantasy and Speculative Fiction, Information Inquiry for K-12 Teachers, and Introduction to Archives Management. Thus far, 31 students from eight WISE institutions have requested virtual seats for fall semester. Compared to the pilot (averaging seven virtual seat requests per semester), this represents considerable growth in course share participation (and there is still ample time for additions before the semester begins).

Table 1: Attributes of WISE Schools

Name of Parent Institution	Location	Public or Private	Primary Course Management System (CMS)
Indiana University	U. S. A.	Public	OnCourse
Rutgers University	U. S. A. (New Jersey)	Public	eCollege
Simmons College	U. S. A. (Massachusetts)	Private	WebCT
Syracuse University	U. S. A. (New York)	Private	WebCT
University of British Columbia	Canada	Public	WebCT
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	U. S. A.	Public	Custom/In-house
University of Maryland	U. S. A.	Public	WebCT
University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill	U. S. A.	Public	Blackboard
University of Pittsburgh	U. S. A. (Pennsylvania)	Public	Blackboard
University of Texas at Austin	U. S. A.	Public	Blackboard
University of Western Ontario	Canada	Public	WebCT
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee	U. S. A.	Public	Desire2Learn
Victoria University of Wellington	New Zealand	Public	Blackboard

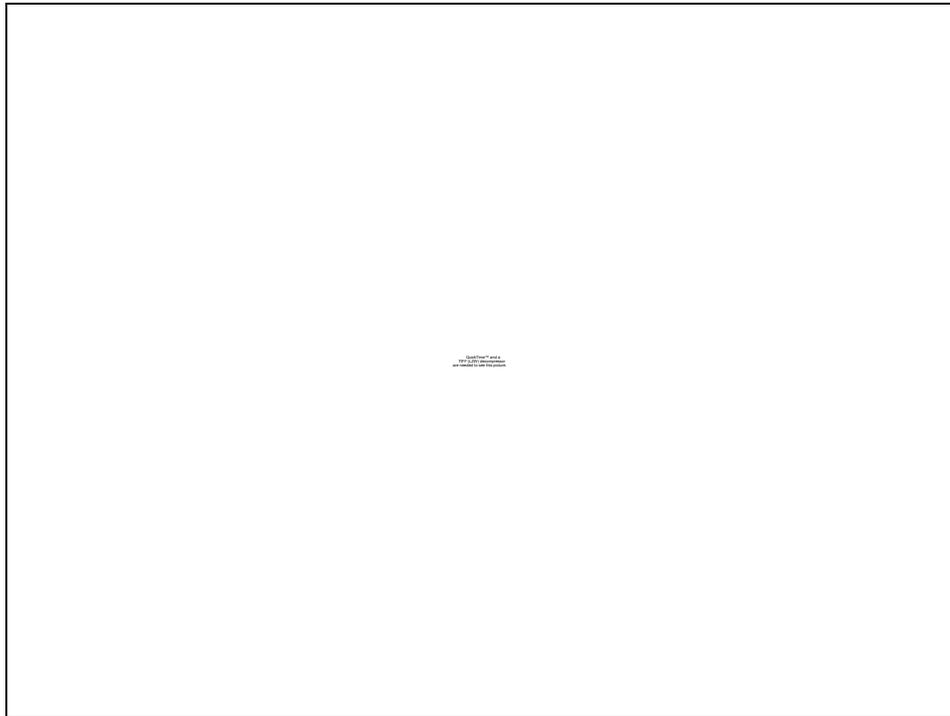
WISE Assessment

Involvement in online education affords new opportunities for educators to reflect on and reconsider issues related to quality pedagogy in all modes. With the emphasis on quality education at the core of the WISE initiative, evaluation is an important feature of its development. The author of this paper is charged with coordinating WISE assessment utilizing a multifaceted approach. Features include:

- an outcomes-based project plan;
- online course evaluations for students in each WISE class offering;
- workshop and online module evaluations for faculty development participants;
- external project evaluation conducted by Sloan Consortium consultants.

To date, evaluation data has been overwhelmingly positive. Considering the proactive approach to development used by the project team (encouraging LIS faculty and students from all schools to provide input for WISE priorities and activities) in conjunction with the dedication and expertise of WISE staff, this is not surprising.

WISE Future



In just over two years, participants from distinct institutions have come to know their virtual neighbors as colleagues. Although starting-up (e.g. - establishing trust, understanding each others' administrative models and technological requirements, etc.) required significant effort and commitment, this initial hurdle is behind us. The benefits of WISE, including increased access to quality courses for LIS students and better-prepared faculty are far-reaching. Future challenges related to sustainability and cost-recovery strategies are still ahead. We are confident that WISE will endure and prosper in enhancing connections and building capacity of those involved with LIS education for many years to come. In addition, we are intrigued by the potential for WISE to serve as a model for online education collaboration in other contexts. Visit us at www.wiseeducation.org!

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