



iSchool Partnerships and Practices – information and proposal form

Please fill in the information below and upload the proposal form (in PDF format) at the secure submission website for consideration for presentation at the *iSchool Partnerships and Practices* track at the 2019 iConference in College Park, Maryland, USA. Please keep to the advised length or the proposal will not be considered for review.

Please consider also the key review criteria for selection:

- Transferability to other institutions
- Grade of innovation
- Pedagogical dimension
- Degree of knowledge transfer

Questions about the *iSchool Partnerships and Practices* track should be directed to the chairs of the track:

iSchool Best Practices Chairs

- [Elke Greifeneder](#), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- [Sean McGann](#), University of Washington
- [Timothy Summers](#), University of Maryland, College Park

For general questions about the iConference, please contact iConference Coordinator [Clark Heideger](#).

<p>Name(s) of Author(s): Lilia Pavlovsky, PhD</p>
<p>Title of submission: Relevance in Learning: connecting research and practice through participatory course design</p>
<p>Area (please check the applicable area description with an x): Curriculum XXX Teaching XXX</p>

Student experience XXX

Research

Administrative management

Other (please enter the applicable keyword):

Submission abstract (max 150 words):

“Relevance in Learning” is a curriculum development initiative adopted into practice in 2015 for the Master of Information (MI) Program at Rutgers University. It is an approach that engages participation of faculty, practitioners, students, alumni and instructional designers in an effort to balance theoretical, applied, pedagogical and pragmatic components of course design. This presentation will discuss project conceptualization, implementation and application. This initiative brings faculty and practitioners together to discuss content and learning objectives in a way that balances theory and practice. The overarching goal is to facilitate a stronger connection between the knowledge and skills students learn in an academic context in a way that will have greater relevance to the professional worlds they choose to enter.

Submission description (max 2,350 words):

Relevance in Learning is a curriculum development initiative adopted into practice in 2015 for the Master of Information (MI) Program at Rutgers University. At that time, the MI program structure changed to a concentration-based focus that offers students opportunities to gain expertise while at the same time offering flexibility for them to engage in courses that were outside their selected areas of focus. During the process of curriculum revision and restructuring it became apparent that some subject areas required a stronger connection to practice than were evident in the course syllabi and teaching practices. We also learned from student assessments of the program that some courses lagged in current content and relevance to advances in the workplace. It was clear that we needed to address issues and the Relevance in Learning initiative was launched.

Once a particular curricular area/course was targeted for revision (e.g. Information Literacy; School Librarianship; Database design) stakeholders were identified. Stakeholders included faculty, specialized practitioners, advanced students, alumni, and instructional designers, all of whom collectively bring content and pedagogical expertise to the development table. A lead content/syllabus developer is identified and the role of that person is to create and teach the actual course. Sometimes this person is a fulltime faculty member, sometimes a practitioner. If a practitioner is selected to be the course developer then they are paired with a fulltime faculty member who is accountable for the process to the curriculum committee and faculty. Instructional designers are also invited to the discussions as their role in assisting with syllabus design, pedagogy and online design is important to the evolution of a course. Students who participate in this process gain insights to not only course development but to the connection of theoretical principles to practical application of those principles.

In terms of participation in course design, all stakeholders are expected to provide input into crafting course objectives, goals, applications, and theoretical underpinnings, assessments and content. After the meeting, the same group is asked to provide input pertaining to content, key topic, readings, etc. throughout the development stages. This continues until the syllabus is reviewed and accepted by the Curriculum committee. The group is kept informed of the decisions. When a course is finally approved and goes “live” the head content developer is asked to teach it at least 2 times in order to work out any pedagogical or content related issues, should they arise. The logic here is that this person

has the best knowledge to curate and teach a course that they created with input from the group. Because of the participatory nature of this design process other members could potentially be invited to teach based on their qualifications, content knowledge and experience in the development of the course.

Students who participate in this process when asked to reflect on their experience with the initiative, write about the transformative benefits they experience because they are exposed to the thoughts and values of leaders in their area of academic and professional interest. They gain an understanding of the complexity that underpins curriculum development and course design — something that they don't typically experience. Selected students are expected to communicate course development status to various student groups and to collect and communicate input from other.

Practitioners come away from this experience with a deeper understanding of curriculum and course development and soon realize that although the act of "developing a class" sounds straightforward, in reality it can be a balance of complex values and goals. Practitioners, as well as faculty, are selected not because they agree with one another but because they have different points of view. Divergent perspectives bring a greater depth to course design.

When the product is eventually constructed, there are parts that members will agree upon, and perhaps parts that they might argue about. But on the whole, all the members of our initiatives felt that the syllabus and course was much stronger and perhaps represented the reality of not only academic controversies, but those that appear in the practice oriented literatures as well.