Converging and Diverging Scholarly Paths: Success through Collaboration

Karen LaBat and Elizabeth (Missy) Bye

University of Minnesota

Over 30 years of working together our scholarly paths have converged and diverged. We believe that our success as collaborative scholars is based on our early history working together on research projects and sharing teaching experiences. We met when Missy was a PhD student at the University of Minnesota (UMN) and Karen was on faculty at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). Marilyn DeLong had secured a 3M grant to use artificial intelligence to custom-fit apparel patterns. She formed a research team including Karen and Missy with 3M computer experts. Through working on the project we found a common interest in design and technology. Our discovery that joining forces can be very rewarding is exemplified by our first journal article (with DeLong) titled, "Powerful Partners." Our second article, on the use of photography to develop patterns to fit the human body, was the beginning of our exploration of technology and design.

After completing her PhD Missy joined the MCAD faculty where we worked with colleagues to shape an approach to teaching apparel design that we now call "integrative studios." Our paths diverged as Missy moved to Florida and Karen joined the UMN faculty. A few years later, Missy joined the UMN faculty and our real collaborations on research and teaching began. In the early years at UMN we worked on the campus-wide Design Consortium, expanding apparel design boundaries, working with faculty from Engineering, Architecture, Computer Science, and Medical Product Design. The Design Consortium formed the basis for the current UMN College of Design. We merged interests in solving problems in apparel sizing and fit and worked on other projects including pesticide protective clothing and sun protective programming for grade school children. Our work on fit and sizing accelerated when we were awarded a National Science Foundation Grant to establish the *Human Dimensioning© Lab* (HDL) to acquire a body scanner, motion capture equipment, and production facilities. We received the 2007 Lectra Innovation Award for the HDL work. In 2011 we formed the *Wearable Product Design Center* with 4 lab/studios dedicated to many facets of apparel design research. We continue to work with other faculty to further develop "integrative studios." We applied our enthusiasm for teaching to creating the first UMN "Design Camp" for high school students and were recognized as *Design Institute Fellows* for that outreach teaching program.

Our divergent scholarly paths strengthen our work together. Missy's diverging path is creative design and design scholarship exemplified with publication of the book, *Fashion Design*. Karen's diverging path is design of products for health and well-being, presented in the book, *Human Body: A wearable product designer's guide*. Our converging interests continue as we work on a funded project with 3M, develop a new program in Product Design, and host "futuring" sessions with ITAA members.

We offer our suggestions for successful collaboration: share an interest in solving a problem, respect your collaborator's opinions and ways of working, advocate for your point-of-view while being willing to compromise, trust the integrity of your collaborator, and have a sense of humor.