

Summary Status Report

KUT/SU Research Collaboration

Syracuse University (SU) and The Korea Society (TKS) began discussions in late spring 2001 with Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) UN Mission representatives, which led in March 2002 to establishment of bilateral research collaborations with Kim Chaek University of Technology (KUT), Pyongyang in the general area of integrated information technology.

To date there have been eight research exchanges, five by KUT researchers to SU (March and December 2002, April 2003, March 2004, and November 2005); two by SU researchers to KUT (June 2002 and June 2004); and a joint meeting in Beijing (August 2005). The length of these exchanges has ranged from one to five weeks. By mutual agreement KUT and SU have worked to maintain substantial consistency in the composition of their delegations over time and, as a consequence, each exchange has extended results of previous ones.

The current research focuses on adapting open-source software to develop a back-end library management system for the new KUT digitallibrary. All software being developed will conform to interna-



Kim Chaek University of Technology, 2002

tional standards for library metadata. To support the ongoing development of the KUT library and to facilitate the sharing of digital library metadata and content it is hoped that, subject to the regulations of the DPRK and the US, it will be possible to implement twin computer labs. These labs, one at SU and one at KUT, would be used to support collaborative work at a distance and would also provide a common working environment for visiting researchers. During November 2005 research meetings in Syracuse, the SU and KUT Chancellors jointly signed a licensing application which was then submitted to the US Department of Commerce. If approved, this will permit controlled export of technical equipment required for the twin labs.

The governance of the research collaboration is vested in a Joint Coordinating Group (JCG) composed of project directors from KUT and SU, the Vice Chancellors of SU and KUT, the Executive Director of The Korea Society and a member of the DPRK's Flood Damage and Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC). The JCG is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the relationship as well as identifying near-term project milestones. Its role is described in a written agreement developed by the researchers and signed by the Vice Chancellors of SU and KUT.

Outcomes thus far include twin lab designs, software specifications, joint work on proving computer program correctness, presentations in English of research results by KUT and SU participants, and an

academic paper written jointly by representatives of KUT, SU, the DPRK Mission, and TKS.

The KUT digital library will serve as a concrete example of robust IT-driven public infrastructure within the DPRK. As such, it can support internally directed efforts to strengthen the civilian sector within the DPRK. Moreover, as the DPRK increasingly interacts with the larger world, it will be critical that it have trusted and successful experience working with US agencies and organizations as it develops those engagements.



Signing Ceremony, Syracuse, 2005

Sustainable trust requires familiarity with both the person and the context within which that person must act. Digital libraries depend upon adherence to international standards and their development encourages working out protocols for cooperation and thus provides a powerful domain in which to build long-term trust.

The eight research exchanges have involved the same core group of KUT and SU participants. KUT's willingness to commit the time of these key human resources provides strong evidence of their eagerness to collaborate with US institutions.

Regional Scholars and Leaders Seminar

In 2005, the research collaboration spawned the Regional Scholars and Leaders Seminar (RSLs) initiative designed to develop future leaders who share a commitment to information sharing, collaboration across boundaries, and, most of all, the establishment and maintenance of resilient modes of trusted regional communication.

Administrative leadership of RSLs is shared between TKS and SU. This collaboration between an NGO and a research university has worked extremely well and has permitted each organization to leverage its unique strengths to bring the RSLs notion to reality.

So far, Huazhong University of Science and Technology (Wuhan, PRC), Kim Chaek University of Science and Technology (Pyongyang, DPRK), Pohang University of Science and Technology (Pohang, ROK), The Korea Society (USA), and Syracuse University RSLs, Beijing, 2005 (Syracuse, USA) are



RSLs, Beijing, 2005

collaborating under the RSLs framework. The initial theme of RSLs focuses on how concrete standards-based integrated information



KUT Library Construction, 2004

technology can foster regional cooperation.

From July 31, 2005 to August 20, 2005 RSLs hosted a program on technical English for DPRK researchers from KUT and members of the DPRK Foreign Ministry in Beijing, China. The content of these sessions was the direct result of discussions between members of the FDRC and representatives of SU and TKS.

A daylong meeting of RSLs partner institutions was held in conjunction with the English language sessions. The occasion of the RSLs Technical English training provided a rare and extremely valuable opportunity for informal inter-

actions among the DPRK participants and representatives of RSLs partner institutions.

To further encourage trust building, RSLs hosted a number of social and cultural events. These included opening and closing banquets, a dinner with the RSLs Partners Group, a dinner party hosted by Ambassador Donald P. Gregg at a North Korean restaurant in Beijing, a visit to the Forbidden City, a bus tour of Beijing and a shopping tour.

Beyond the central focus of the research, the collaboration, as a valuable side-effect, has provided each set of participants a window on events in the two societies. This has proven to be especially helpful in providing culturally anchored interpretations of current issues.

In November 2005, the KUT and SU Chancellors together with the TKS Chairman signed a document pledging to continue to work together within RSLs.

Lessons Learned

Institutional commitment: The willingness of the leadership of KUT, SU, TKS and the DPRK Mission in New York to visibly commit both themselves and key resources of their organizations to the collaboration helped greatly to provide a 'safe' environment in which the scholarly work could move forward.

Face-to-face is critical: Early in-person discussions between SU, TKS, and DPRK Mission people provided a context in which priorities and constraints could be discussed in an increasingly open manner.

Trusted communications: Over time, moving as slowly as necessary enabled the two teams to increasingly trust the communications between them. This made it possible to negotiate difficult issues with generally good humor and to ask clarifying questions as issues arose rather than waiting until questions became problems.

Unanticipated benefits flow: All participants have been pleased to see how, in the context of trusted communications, unanticipated benefits,



KUT, 2004

such as the RSLs initiative, flow to all parties. As the frequency of exchanges mounts, the DPRK has turned to TKS/SU for initiatives unrelated to the primary focus of our collaboration. For example, TKS/SU arranged in NYC and Syracuse an advanced cardiology training opportunity for a delegation of surgeons from Red Cross Hospital, Pyongyang in November, 2005. Potential collaborations in other areas of education and in exchange of digital images through the Digital Library and Gallery facilities are under review.

Informal communications are very important: Often the unplanned discussions are as significant as the formal planned ones. Informal meals have provided a congenial and productive environment for such conversations.

Put it in writing: Even with the best of intentions and good will it is possible for misunderstandings to arise. Slogging through the development of jointly acceptable written documents is almost always helpful in this regard.

Be in it for the long haul and be prepared for bumps: It soon became apparent to both SU and the KUT researchers that if this relationship were going to work everyone had to be committed to the long haul. This is especially true with regard to the building of the twin labs.

Share information appropriately: The DPRK and the US have different philosophies and practices regarding the sharing of information. It has been important to simultaneously respect those differences and, at the same time, be honest brokers of information.

Don't over commit: A sense of trust often flows from a history of reliable interactions. In this regard meeting deadlines, clearly identifying risk factors, and establishing clear project milestones have all helped keep the collaboration moving forward.

Consistency of participation matters: The collaboration has benefited greatly from the willingness of KUT and SU to permit the continuous participation of key people.

Importance of shared governance: In sustained collaborations questions of priorities, future directions, and resource development are bound to arise. It is therefore very useful to have a shared governance structure in place to systematically, legitimately, and proactively deal with those issues.

Of course these lessons or heuristics are individually less significant than is their overall effect. The goal is to generate and sustain an environment of trusted communication supportive of open and empathetic communications.

Project Support

Support for the KUT/SU research collaboration has been provided by The Korea Society, The Henry Luce Foundation, The Ford Foundation, and other private sources through The Korea Society and Syracuse University. The Henry Luce Foundation has also provided financial support for the RSLs initiative. In addition, RSLs partner institutions have been responsible for identifying funding to cover their participation. The RSLs Technical English Program was made possible, in part, through a grant from the Beautiful Foundation. For additional information about this project, contact Professor Stuart Thorson (thorson@syr.edu), Dr. Thomas Harblin, Vice President for Global Development (tharblin@syr.edu), or Mr. Frederick F. Carriere, Vice President & Executive Director of The Korea Society (fred.ny@koreasociety.org).