Introduction

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UX Needs Better Collaboration

User experience (UX) is a team sport; no one expert or discipline can do UX alone. UX work requires collaboration because of its sweeping scope and interdisciplinary approach. If you follow one classic definition of UX from the Nielsen Norman Group that "'User experience' encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products" (Norman & Nielsen, n.d.), then UX involves a huge range of experiences and knowledge from many academic disciplines, industries, experts, government agencies, community organizations, and users themselves. User experience work demands a more sustained effort at collaboration—a process through which individuals work together to accomplish a shared goal, and in doing so "they create something (e.g., knowledge, expertise, ideals) that did not exist individually" (Robinson & Dusenbery, 2020, p. 210). Organizations want collaboration because it works toward a shared vision of creating powerful and sustainable results. The shared vision of UX is products, services, and experiences that actually help people, that actually meet their needs, that actually make their lives better. UX cannot fulfill its promise or function without collaboration. Notably, the ability to collaborate and work in teams is frequently cited as one of the most important UX skills (Rosala & Krause, 2020; Rose, Putnam, & McDonald, 2020). While collaboration takes time, energy, compromise, and commitment to a shared vision, people can achieve more through collaboration than they can alone.

Collaboration can take many forms. In industry, UX collaboration might involve several specialists in a company—programmers, software engineers, UX and interaction designers, researchers, graphic designers, information architects, product managers, technical communicators, marketing personnel, quality assurance experts, and others—coming together to ensure that products truly meet user needs. In academia, collaboration might involve faculty from multiple departments and colleges joining forces to create programs that help students prepare for the interdisciplinary nature of UX work. In communities and governments, collaboration might involve representatives of organizations working directly with members of the public to ensure that programs and services truly help people.

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But these idealistic, hypothetical collaboration scenarios may not play out in reality. Many issues may prevent UX professionals from working together and sharing knowledge. Within universities and companies, experts might remain siloed in their own disciplines. Scholars in academia and practitioners in industry may not share their insights and best practices with one another. On a deeper level, people may not even agree on what UX means. As Kou and colleagues (2018) write, "Due to the emergent and evolutionary nature of this new inter- and transdisciplinary space, ideas and opinions in the UX field are contested, often lacking even a consensus over the definition of UX" (p. 2069). Differing definitions, vocabularies, incentives, priorities, organizational structures, and time commitments can drive apart people who should be working together.

We Echo Longstanding Calls for Collaboration

We are not the first to call for better UX collaboration. Twenty years ago, Richard Anderson and colleagues (2005) argued for collaboration among UX professionals:

> WHO OWNS USER EXPERIENCE (UX)? This is the wrong question to ask. We don't believe that any single group can own UX.
>
> What's the alternative? In our view, a useful focus is collaboration, not ownership. The best successes come from collaboration. Whatever type of product, service, or document you are creating, whether it's a Web site, an application program, an MP3 player, or a financial form, user experience encompasses so many diverse aspects of your product that "ownership" just isn't a useful perspective. (p. 40)

That same year, Keith Instone (2005) argued for user experience as an umbrella topic that unites various professionals. With the goal of creating meetings where anyone "interested in standing on this common ground was welcome" (p. 1087), Instone identified many different professional organizations related to UX, including the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and its SIGGRAPH special interest group, Society for Technical Communication (STC), the International Institute for Information Design (IIID), IEEE Computer Society, Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES), American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), and The Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA). Jonathan Follett (2008) calls this proliferation of UX groups "Alphabet Soup" and suggested that there might be an overabundance of organizations: "All of these organizations compete with each other—whether directly or indirectly—for the attention, volunteer time, and resources UX professionals have to offer. If you're actively involved in the UX community, it's easy to feel pulled in

too many directions at once" (para. 5). At the same conference where Instone presented (CHI 2005), Whitney Quesenbery and colleagues (2005) discussed their vision for UXnet, a networking organization intended to "provide a 'home' for the big picture or strategic discussions that, by their very nature, require cross-disciplinary communications" (p. 1098).

Unfortunately, UXnet disbanded in 2010. Many of the disparate societies identified by Instone and Follett still operate, are still interested in UX, and are still largely siloed in their independent disciplines. UX does have one overarching disciplinary association, the User Experience Professionals Association ("About UXPA"), founded in 1991, which had nearly 2,400 members and 59 local chapters and serves over 60 countries as of 2024. The organization publishes both The Journal of Usability Studies and User Experience Magazine, and UXPA is the most prominent interdisciplinary UX organization bringing diverse professionals together under the umbrella of UX. However, data from Yavuz Inal and colleagues (2020) suggests that most UX professionals are not members of any professional communities, so even the wide reach of the UXPA might not incorporate the full range of UX professionals.

Different Approaches and Language Make Working Together Difficult

As a collection coming out of technical and professional communication (TPC) and attempting to engage UX practitioners in several fields, we note that TPC has a long tradition of engaging with usability and user experience. Summarizing several decades of research and disciplinary work, Paul Thompson Hunter (2023) writes that "TPC can be considered a keystone discipline for contemporary UX research and design" (p. 2). Like UX, TPC heavily prioritizes users, including their needs, emotions, abilities, and contexts. According to Ginny Redish (2010), "Technical communicators are by training and necessity user-centered. Their focus is always the audience, the people who will use whatever they are creating. Their goal is to make even complex interactions understandable and usable" (p. 91). Many of the skills between TPC and UX overlap as well (Redish, 2010). In their analysis of 502 UX job postings, Claire Lauer and Eva Brumberger (2016) argue that TPC and user experience share many core competencies and that technical communication could "in fact, play a central role in UX" (p. 248). TPC and UX make for natural allies.

Despite promising overlap between TPC and UX, Emma Rose and Joanna Schreiber (2021) warn that "these connections may be waning" (p. 345). As evidence, they cite research by Erin Friess and Ryan K. Boettger (2021) finding that UX was a primary topic in only 30 of 672 articles published in flagship technical communication journals between 1996–2017. Similarly, Felicia Chong (2016) found that technical communication textbooks give "meager attention" (p.

12) to usability. In fact, Geoffrey Sauer (2018) concludes that, when it comes to the relationship between usability/UX and TPC, "the discipline has some work to do before we can consider them integral to our theory, our practice, and our scholarly production/assessment" (p. 370). For Rose and Heather Turner (2023), part of the problem is that TPC has not moved from a limited notion of usability to a holistic notion of user experience. They write,

> it feels like other fields and industry have progressed beyond and more fully embraced a broader notion of UX. We believe now more than ever that this is an opportunity for the field of TPC to carve out its unique approach to UX, one rooted in social justice, rhetorical in nature, and highlights reflection as a key practice. (p. 10)

Challenges to UX collaboration in TPC also create widespread issues across the many disciplines and industries engaged in UX. Disparate vocabularies, approaches, methods, and communication styles often keep user experience professionals siloed and separated (Hassenzahl, 2018, Vermeeren et. al., 2010). Collaborations require participants taking on what Robert R. Johnson (1998) calls "the burden of comprehension," which involves "the responsibility of understanding the ideologies, contexts, values, and histories of those disciplines from which we borrow before we begin using their methods and research findings" (p. 75). The multiple disciplines and perspectives of UX make this burden of comprehension especially difficult. In a call for radical interdisciplinarity within UX, Peter Wright and colleagues (2006) argue for a "liberal arts" approach that engages many types of design experts in dialogue. However, they acknowledge that such dialogue is not without its challenges:

> A fundamental problem is having sufficient knowledge of another's language, practice, perspective and ways of looking to begin to engage empathetically in dialogue. A tendency in this situation is to reduce the other's perspective to one's own. That is to do a kind of translation process which can undermine the uniqueness of that perspective (p. 9).

Lachner et. al. (2016) argue that existing UX approaches "rarely cope with the required degree of interdisciplinarity to reflect the different angles of e.g., engineering, design, marketing, or psychology" (p. 2). In the introduction to a special issue on collaboration published by *User Experience Magazine*, Mindy Maxwell (2013) plainly states that "Working across disciplines requires understanding others." (para. 7)

In academia, the sheer number of fields involved in UX adds extra challenges to collaboration. Research by Laura Luther and colleagues (2020) found that the top five fields for UX research were psychology, computer science, business economics, engineering, and information science/library science, leading them to describe the UX research field as "complex and scattered" (p. 1). Still, the researchers

find a strong interdisciplinary bent to UX, as many journals publishing UX research span two or more disciplines. Joy Robinson and colleagues (2017) offer similar findings. Among the top fields producing UX research are computer and information science, engineering, health, performing arts, library and information science, psychology, and education. However, the greatest number of publications were interdisciplinary, though most of these studies came out of fields related to HCI. Even with this interdisciplinary bent, it is clear that the vast and disparate fields conducting UX research make it difficult for researchers to cross disciplinary bounds. While it is possible for faculty in, say, engineering, art, and psychology to collaborate on a research project (and certainly some do), this type of work requires extra effort and initiative. These scholars employ different concepts and vocabulary, use different research sources and citation methods, and labor under different promotion and tenure guidelines. They also use different research methods. For instance, research in user experience design, healthcare, market research, and social media strategy uses "inconsistent and unsystematic" methods to create personas (Guan et al., 2021, p. 4446), and these differences emerge based on the methods and goals of the different fields.

UX professionals in industry face similar challenges to collaboration due to confusing, sometimes competing, job titles, responsibilities, and professional identities. The field still "lack[s] clear boundaries and [has] yet to develop into a profession with a specified, coherent body of knowledge" (Kou & Gray, 2018, p. 322). The state of UX is in flux. Some companies have just realized they need to incorporate UX, but don't understand what it means or how UX would integrate into their operations (Kou & Gray, 2018). Other companies have had people performing UX tasks for years without recognizing that work in their job titles or descriptions; findings from a 2019 Nielsen Norman survey on the UX profession found that some companies "didn't have carved-out UX roles; instead, people working in design, engineering, or product became responsible for UX" (Rosala & Krause, 2020, p. 15). Still other companies may hire for positions that put UX in the title but involve little meaningful UX work. For instance, Michael Thompson (2018) analyzed 287 customer experience (CX) job ads and found 46 percent were CX jobs in name only, while another 20 percent just added a few CX activities to more traditional job roles. Thompson argues that successful companies need clear job descriptions, partially because consistently "defined roles help teams collaborate" (p. 74). People struggle to work together when they do not have a clear understanding of their own or their colleagues' functions in the workplace and when they lack the responsibility to perform the functions their job titles suggest.

The collaboration problems created by unclear job titles are exacerbated by a proliferation of job titles related to UX. The profusion of UX in various companies and fields over the past decade has resulted in the differentiation of roles inside the field. These roles and their titles are slowly gaining traction in the industry even as companies struggle to define, promote, and integrate UX as a whole. UX duties and responsibilities have been differentiated into distinct areas

including UX designer, UX researcher, UX developer/engineer, UX writer, UX architect, or UX generalist, and so on. Many companies use different titles for similar jobs, which can lead to confusion about what people do. For instance, the 2018 UXPA salary survey (2018) allowed respondents to choose from 18 different job titles, and eight job titles received at least 18 percent of respondents indicating that the titles described their roles. While 56 percent of participants indicated "User Researcher" as their title, several also indicated that their titles are User Experience Architect/Engineer, Interaction Designer, Interface Designer, Usability Practitioner, Information Architect, Graphic/Visual Designer, or Manager. A Nielsen Norman survey (Rosala & Krause, 2020) found that while UX Designer and UX Researcher were the most common job titles, participants gave 134 unique titles for jobs, with many people holding more than one title. A similar problem plagues TPC, where job postings exhibit "enormous variety in position titles" (Lauer & Brumberger, 2016, p. 224).

In 2021, we released a short, IRB-approved survey for local UX professionals that asked respondents about their titles, their UX roles, the time they spent performing UX duties (as opposed to other duties), and the skills they needed to perform them. The survey results (n=115) found that professionals identified predominantly as generalists, researchers, designers, developers, and tech writers. Even though most participants spent the majority of their time on UX activities, no one in the study had official UX titles. Instead, participants held as many as 10 different titles including Software Engineer, Web Software Developer, Website Designer, Cyber Systems Engineer, Human Factors Engineer, Multimedia Designer, and System Software Analyst, which is not uncommon (Rosala & Krause, 2020). Additionally, most study participants (30%) revealed they functioned as a UX Generalist, indicating they wear multiple hats in performing their work. The next most popular roles were UX Designer (22%) and UX Researcher (18%). Overall, UX professionals spent 65 percent of their time working on UX activities while generalists quite a bit more (76%) and researchers spent somewhat less (only 53%).

The alignment or creation of new titles in a company is complex—a process that is carefully weighed and considered. Modern working environments demand job titles that reflect emerging work trends; for example, new fields such as artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) have newly created titles such as AI Application Engineer or ML Engineer. New job titles are created due to shifting needs of the company, efforts to remain competitive, and/or a need to be "more descriptive in order to accurately reflect new positions and functions" (Hayward, 2019, p. 2). Titles and position descriptions should also clarify not only different UX roles and responsibilities in an organization, but also issues of promotion and advancement by elaborating the various responsibilities of junior and senior positions, or delineating the responsibilities of UX managers. Companies struggle with where to place "technical experts," and these struggles make it harder for UX professionals to collaborate with one another as well as others inside and beyond their companies. As such, clearer UX job titles would provide

professionals with more accurate information about the work done in these roles, provide clarity around work responsibilities, expectations, and necessary skills, and indicate pathways for improved collaborative experiences.

Beyond navigating unclear and inconsistent job titles and responsibilities, employees and companies also struggle to unify a mishmash of frameworks and methodologies that emerged from UX's varied theoretical roots. For example, one thread of UX features human-factors engineering (HFE), most often associated with hardware, devices, or systems in relationship to humans, typically related to human safety. The human-computer interaction (HCI) field focuses on human engagement with computers and the interface between human and machine. Yet, clearly HFE, HCI, and UX share similar concerns: the interface of a product and its ultimate and sustained impact on the human user. All these fields utilize some, if not all, of the same methods, and often borrow from the same sets of analytical research-based processes, such as surveys, interviews, and observations. Professionals from each of these fields might work at the same companies in the same teams or even share the same projects. Their work, that is the work of all of these human specialists, decidedly depends on the users they examine and the environments where users work.

For example, given the same project—improve the Sikorsky X2 helicopter cockpit interface—an HFE specialist might ensure that the locations of the various switches and indicators are compliant with specifications and meet all safety requirements such that humans can comfortably, effectively, and safely operate them. The HCI researcher might use eye tracking of pilots to understand where best to place important indicators and switches. The UX professional might seek to simplify overly complex workflows in the cockpit and better integrate the entire environment: switches, indicators, and screens to improve the pilot's overall experience. Unfortunately, these opportunity slices in the overall problem space often result in specialists working independently of one another even though the range of expertise for these professionals might overlap. These artificially created silos result in problems not just for the users who ultimately benefit (or don't) from holistic solutions, but also for the stakeholders, who finance and support these projects. Without working together within similar fields, projects often take longer, solutions are less complete, and processes are out of sync.

UX is already an uncomfortable fit into modern production processes. Project managers and other professionals who deliver work products typically function on a product life cycle cadence, which includes periods designated to complete the work and then milestones designated for releases of the completed work. Designers, engineers, programmers, writers and other professionals' work, for example, often fits seamlessly into this cadence. However, UX, with its holistic, user-centered process and deliverables, cannot always have a 1–1 flow with production (Lárusdóttir et al., 2012). Consider this scenario for the update of legacy web application interfaces. Production might require front- and backend development programmers complete 15 features by a specific milestone date. System engineers

would ensure that planned hardware upgrades and security protocols will be in place to support the new software and integrate with existing network infrastructure. Technical writers work with the programmers to develop the appropriate documentation, ideally during but sometimes after the product development (and many technical writers have advocated for greater involvement in more tasks throughout product development processes due to their own abilities to facilitate communication and represent user perspectives, as Robinson (1994), Hillary Hart and James Conklin (2006), Aijaz Fatima (2018) report). However, UX work done well covers the entire lifecycle of product development instead of fitting neatly into one phase. UX professionals rely on user research to inform any work product or UX deliverables. At minimum, this requirement adds one extra step to the UX professional's to-do list before any deliverables or products can be completed. However, user testing might uncover that the entire 15 planned features are not desired by the users, potentially derailing the entire plan of work. Obviously, the team might view UX professionals and the voice of the users like the famed sword of Damocles—constantly hanging precariously over the production schedule. The challenges of incorporating UX and user perspectives into development products with already strained timelines and budgets may help explain why many companies still neglect and downplay UX (Ardito et al., 2014; Kuusinen, 2015).

We Can Make Collaboration Better

Despite concerns and challenges about how well various UX scholars and practitioners can work together, great research exists about how to conduct collaborative work in UX. Educators have determined how to involve users in the classroom (Scammell et al., 2015). Scholars like Peter Beresford and Fran Branfield (2006) and Hannu Torvinen and Pauliina Ulkuniemi (2016) describe how users can collaborate with governmental and public organizations to develop better services and policies. Emphasis on community in user experience helps researchers develop participatory projects that explore issues like the usability of health insurance information for immigrants (Rose et. al., 2017) or crowdsourcing systems that curate indigenous knowledge (Alfaridzi & Yulianti, 2020; Cabrero et al., 2016). Educators have determined how to involve users in the physical and online classroom (Mtebe, 2020; Scammell et al., 2015;) and prepare designers for teamwork (Kiernan et al., 2017). Case studies show how collaboration occurs in industries like video gaming (McAllister & White, 2015), commerce (Heximer et. al., 2002), virtual reality (Hrimech et al., 2011; Kohler et. al., 2011) and healthcare (Bate & Robert, 2007). Research has begun to examine the user experience involved in collaborations between humans and AI (Pohlt et al., 2018). Several scholars describe how collaborations with users can improve information access, translation quality, and social justice (Gonzáles & Turner, 2017; Rose et. al., 2017; Suojanen et al., 2014; Walls, 2016). Research also discusses how organizations partner with specific types of users, such as mental health service users (Campbell-Hall et. al,

2010; Trivedi & Wykes, 2002), and how researchers work successfully (Acharya, 2018; Poudyal, 2020) or unsuccessfully (Cabrero et. al., 2016) with underserved communities. And of course, UX scholarship often focuses on how designers and users can collaborate in product development (Akinola et al., 2019; Frison et al., 2019; Lachner et al., 2018; Pallot et al., 2010; Patchen et al., 2020). Others call for historically marginalized populations to not just participate in but take the lead on design projects (Peters et al., 2018).

Industry experts have also written about their work in collaboration. Designers tested collaboration personas that help creators design products and experiences for teams by providing "empirically derived descriptions of hypothetical groups of people with specific qualities, goals, and needs realized through collaborations with each other" (Matthews et al., 2012, p. 1997). Google employees (Kayacik et al., 2019) described how UX and machine learning research scientists collaborated to create a machine learning interface and offered tips on how to foster better cross-functional partnerships. Similarly, Fabien Girardin and Neal Lathia argue "that designers and data scientists must immerse themselves in the other's approaches to build a common rhythm" (2017, p. 5). To accomplish this task, they suggest participants from both disciplines work together to develop a vision, assess assumptions, ensure both sides of the team are asking the same questions, and clarify success metrics.

Many product development models have also suggested how collaborative frameworks can best integrate UX (Kuusinen, 2014). For example, Agile management framework supports three different models for collaboration with UX teams:

1. integrate more fully into production by determining product features only after users have been involved (Continuous delivery UX),
2. work on faster, smaller, shorter research cycles fitting into the existing production timeline (LeanUX), and
3. operate slightly ahead of production to ensure research is done prior to production needing the information (Dual Track Agile).

While it can be easily argued that each Agile model has different affordances and applicability, based on work context, business maturity model, and other factors, the theme that runs through each of the models is tight collaboration with UX. Thus, the Agile management framework supports collaboration with UX professionals working in small teams among engineers, programmers, writers, managers, and other specialists, and UX research and outreach to users is scaffolded under this framework. However, in companies housing entire departments of UXers, or employing multiple teams/projects with many UX professionals, a different approach may be required. Therefore, to leverage the value of UX—often equated to return on investment (ROI)—scaling UX appropriately is a necessity.

One recent model of scaled UX is called DesignOperations or DesignOps. The DesignOPs framework is designed to support UX professionals across a

company, enabling them to maintain and deliver both quality and consistency by sharing resources, leveraging knowledge, and most importantly, collaborating with each other. DesignOps works by addressing the synergies between three core areas (Kaplan, 2019),

1. How teams collaborate and work together to organize and align around shared responsibilities, establish effective measures for collaboration, and enable employee development.
2. How teams work to use processes to achieve consistent design quality, establish repositories for knowledge sharing and efficiencies, and effectively prioritize projects.
3. How teams create impact including measure design work, share and reward team success, and enable others—even those outside of the team—to learn and use design and research activities.

DesignOps traction has been slow even with the rapid growth in UX over the last few years (Nielsen, 2017). A survey (n=557) by NN/g reported that only 22 percent of respondents used DesignOps focused activities (Kaplan, 2020). When asked about collaboration activities, only 18 percent of respondents reported having activities focused on team collaboration. Given that the UX field is expected to grow from 1.5 million professionals to 100 million in the next 30+ years (Nielsen, 2017), collaboration at scale will be critical to our success moving forward.

While UX has some time to grow into embracing the concept of DesignOps and collaboration at scale, the time is now to embrace the importance of collaboration. Collaboration is not only one of the key intersections between TPC and UX (Redish & Barnum, 2011). "Collaboration" is not just the buzzword of today, but likely an overarching concept that will define our times. The last few decades have provided us with a host of unprecedented technology tools that have enabled us to communicate like never before. But through this communication, we have been connecting, we have been sharing, we have been collaborating? It is through collaboration we learn and grow. We began this piece by making the bold statement that no one expert can do UX alone. But, perhaps we should say instead, no one UX expert can learn alone. After all, the human experience is a collaborative one: to UX is human.

Good and Frustrating Collaborations Inspired this Collection

We first decided to put this collection together based on our own experiences working in TPC, building academic UX programs, teaching students, talking with members of our local UX community, and in Joy's case, straddling the academy/industry divide; after working as an assistant professor of English at The University of Alabama in Huntsville, she took a position as a UX project manager

for a large company. Creating UX programs brought on, at least for us, unparalleled challenges and opportunities. Contributing to UX programs in the English department (where technical writing is housed) involves working with colleagues from multiple fields such as psychology, communication arts, art, business, computer science, and elsewhere to give our programs breadth while emphasizing the humanistic core of UX. Modern UX students need a host of skills and abilities: user research, prototyping, project management, graphic design, coding, software skills, statistical knowledge, web design, report writing, presentation skills, and countless others. Our colleagues from many disciplines are enthusiastic about UX and have taught and championed UX from various approaches for years. However, we sometimes found that institutional and bureaucratic hurdles thwarted our attempts at interdisciplinary program development. Everyone wants to work well together, but course prerequisites, major and minor requirements, faculty teaching schedules, scarcity of new faculty lines, course rotations, competition for students and resources, differing department and college priorities, and other institutional factors sometimes make collaboration difficult.

Our technical communication and UX partners in local industry told similar stories. Many worked on small UX teams that struggled for budgets, resources, and recognition. They wanted to work more closely with the engineers, developers, and designers at their companies, but found themselves having to define and evangelize UX to get involved in the early aspects of product development, where they could truly advocate for and implement user-centered design. Like academics, these professionals had lists of "dream projects" that they did not have time, resources, or mental energy to tackle. Other professionals told stories about companies that were enthusiastic about UX but did not know how to define or implement it. Some companies did UX without realizing it. The ambiguity of UX presented both problems and opportunities for these professionals.

Amidst these frustrations, we also saw the wonderful outcomes of partnerships that stretched boundaries. Our classes produced terrific projects for clients. Students got great jobs and internships. Guest speakers and workshops brought diverse knowledge and perspectives. Our program received insightful feedback from UX professionals on how to develop sophisticated, relevant curriculum. We conducted a research project with friends from industry to collect data on personas that we could all use. We heard inspiring stories about UX teams improving products and their users' lives.

The 18 pieces in this collection offer similar accounts of both the frustrations and joys of collaboration. Some of these pieces offer theoretical or empirical approaches to collaboration to help us reconceive it. Others offer narratives on collaboration; some are success stories, some are cautionary tales, and some involve both the ups and downs of people working together. These pieces identify productive sites for collaboration, including the classroom, community organizations, corporate projects, and the streaming platform Twitch. Not surprisingly, many of the best collaborations come from interacting directly with

users, and several of the contributors describe these kinds of partnerships, such as an in-depth case study on the VA's approach to the Vets.gov website redesign and a student project that involved interviewing users to create empathy maps that improve accessibility. To model collaboration, we wanted to bring in authors from beyond technical communication. We also wanted to print collaboratively authored pieces, especially those that involve partners reflecting and dialoguing on their collaborative experiences. And to capture a wider variety of stories from a wider variety of authors, we solicited three types of peer-reviewed submissions for this collection. We wanted traditional academic chapters that offer perspectives on research, theory, and praxis. But we also wanted shorter case studies pieces that used about 2,500 words to describe a specific collaborative experience or project that does not require the detail of a full academic chapter. Furthermore, we requested lessons learned pieces that offer specific, actionable insights on how to improve collaboration.

Our contributors bring a wide range of perspectives to collaboration, but central themes emerge throughout their work. Good collaborations take time and sustained energy, often more energy than busy people can muster. Technology can both facilitate and hamper collaboration, so it must be used strategically. Varying institutional structures, missions, and incentives present challenges to working together, so partners must ensure that they really understand (and appreciate) the people they work with. Even successful partnerships involve frustration, and success often looks different than participants initially envisioned it. For collaborations to work, all partners must buy in and experience benefits. And ultimately, collaborations are an essential part of UX.

We hope that this collection contributes to ongoing calls for better UX collaboration. Starting with the basics of why we collaborate helps to remind us of why we are here; to build relationships with our users. We conceived of this text not just for UX or technical writing professionals but for all the stakeholders and future collaborators across the spectrum of UX in academia, industry, communities, government, and user groups. Taken together, these chapters represent efforts to connect professionals both within and beyond TPC as they explore the field of UX. We see these conversations not as the final word on collaboration but as continued moves in an ongoing discussion. We need more of these conversations if TPC is going to fully embrace UX and if UX is going to fully embrace collaboration.

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