> Peer to Peer
> *using a discussion group to introduce staff*
> *and faculty to emerging technologies*
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> History

The Emerging Technologies Discussion Group (ETDG) at the University of Maryland Libraries is a gathering place for Libraries staff to exchange ideas about new technologies and to promote discussion about their impact on workflows and enhanced services for users. ETDG was established in early 2011 with the goal of offering monthly meetups to facilitate technology demonstrations and discussion. The open discussion format has been a successful arena for staff to share technical aspects of their work with peers.

> Format

Discussion group models work well for introducing new technologies and topics by employing a constructivist approach to learning wherein the learners are actively engaged in exploring how new tecnologies might be applied to complex and varied needs across departments and divisions. This approach of collaborative constructivist technology instruction has been found to be productive in doctoral humanities settings (Ensslin & Slocombe, 2012).

- **This collaborative model fosters a democratic setting.**
  - Staff and faculty learn from one another about complicated technologies.
  - Anxiety is decreased by placing peers, not authoritative instructors, in the driver's seat.
- **Tool demonstrations become low-stress and open-ended.**
  - New and potentially daunting technologies are presented by familiar faces rather than a vendor or instructional consultant.
  - Promotes a community-based approach to knowledge sharing.

At the UMD Libraries, we have implemented the following elements to support an open, constructivist approach:
- Encourage staff & faculty to propose entertaining topics to ensure sessions are representative of staff & faculty interests and needs.
- Announcements and invitations are sent to staff & faculty as well as iSchool listservs, welcoming both current and future practitioners.
- Remote viewers can particpate via webcast.
- Encourage questions and discussion during the session to promote an investigatory, informal environment.

> Topics

Topics can be chosen in a variety of ways. Co-chairs may identify topics & lead the discussion, or may invite other library faculty and staff to present on a particular topic. Discussion group members are also free to propose their own topics, either from a standing list of emerging technologies or from their own day-to-day work. When a specific technology does not emerge as a topic, the ETDG co-chairs may identify a particular theme and host an open forum. ETDG sessions have typically taken the form of technical demonstrations, open discussions, or instructional sessions.

Topics we've done

- Interplanetary File System (Demo)
- GIS platforms (Demo)
- Collections as Data (Discussion)
- Electronic collections (Discussion)
- Tech in Performing Arts Libraries (Motion Capture, music encoding, etc.) (Discussion)
- Web Scraping (Demo)

Other topics

- LaTex Made Easy (Instruction)
- Assessment Tool Evaluation (Demo/Discussion)
- Creative Commons Licenses (Instruction/Discussion)
- Learning JavaScript (Discussion)
- SPARQL (Instruction)

> Tips & Considerations

- **Administrative tasks**

  Be sure to give yourself ample time to arrange for topics, speakers, coordination, invites, & c.

- **Group leaders need to identify topics or presenters in advance**

  Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to determine your topic or to invite guest presenters. If a topic is only partially familiar, give yourself enough of a head start that you can learn enough to lead a discussion. If you're inviting a guest, make sure they are comfortable with the session structure and have time to discuss questions or concerns with you.

- **Sufficient notification time**

  When sending out invitations, be sure to give ample lead time for attendees to plan their attendance. Two weeks is sufficient, and a day-before reminder is always appreciated.

- **Tech considerations**

  Will participants be following along with their own computers? Should they have a prior familiarity with certain tools? Will they need to install anything on their computers? Will they be able to do so if they are using a work computer? Are there any differences for Mac and PC users?

- **Web Platforms**

  If using web platforms to demo tools or lead instruction, make sure that they are working before starting your demonstration. This may seem like a common sense issue, but third-party, web-hosted platforms can change their interfaces and policies with little or no notification.

- **Webcast technology testing**

  If you broadcast your session, make sure you are familiar with the webcast tool. Familiarize yourself with the tool and test the hardware (i.e. webcam, microphone). Be sure to have a backup person to manage webcast if you are unavailable.

References
Ensslin, A., & Slocombe, W. (2012). Training humanities doctoral students in collaborative and digital multimedia. Arts and Humanities in Higher Education: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice, 11(1–2), 140–156.