

Regional Cooperation in Higher Education  
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# **The Five College Consortium of Western Massachusetts**

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# Overview

- Membership and characteristics
- A brief history
- Current scope of the Consortium
- Ways we have developed shared endeavors
- Process for developing the list of initiatives we are exploring
- Governance issues/ideas
- Lessons learned

# Membership and characteristics

Four independent private liberal arts colleges (three founded in the 1800s, one founded in 1965), each primarily devoted to undergraduate education; total of 8000 students and 750 faculty members (85% permanent).

One public university campus (of five in the University of Massachusetts system), leading in research and graduate education. UMass Amherst has 23,000 undergraduates, 5,000 graduate students and 2000 faculty members (60% permanent).

# Membership and characteristics

The five participating institutions lie within a neighborhood of 10 km radius.

The five institutions are predominantly residential campuses (for students).

Though the region is relatively rural, campus subsidies support a robust regional transit system (buses) that serves employees and students seeking courses and other activities at the partner campuses – longest trips are about 30 minutes.

# Steps in our Brief 180-Year History

Amherst College helped in founding the three other colleges and the university.

Libraries share collections, catalog, HILC.

Student cross-registration since 1930s.

Academic calendars are aligned.

Five College buses shift to Regional Transit.

Mail/Messenger/Interlibrary loan service continues.

1960's brought central staff and Incorporation.

# Current Scope of the Consortium

## 5-way sharing

High speed fiber optic network and its management, free student cross registration; free transportation, faculty exchanges, less commonly taught foreign languages, merged list of course offerings, merged directories, HR training programs, merged library catalog and shared catalog manager, library print depository with integrated collection of items

(and 100 other partner schools including 4 other consortia), joint admission recruitment activities, joint faculty positions, outreach to K-12 schools, coordinated community service, museum coordination (including 3 independent museums), emergency planning and preparedness, e.g. health, disaster.

# Current Scope of the Consortium

## **3-way and 4-way sharing through the consortium**

risk management and compliance management

recycling management

energy management

## **Joint activities not through the consortium**

public safety, student health services,

rental properties, career services recruiter,

bulk mail services, grant accounting clerk,

environmental health and safety management.

# Current Scope of the Consortium

- **Value of shared operations: \$40-50 million**  
(on the largest piece, 5800 student cross registrations, no money changes hands, though the initial vision was for compensatory payments for cross-registration imbalances).
- **Central operating budget: ~\$3.5 million**  
(includes central staff, transportation, library catalog system and management, fiber network, depository; excludes joint faculty appointments).
- **Grants average ~\$2 million per year.**
- **Endowment funds now total ~\$10 million.**

# Current Scope of the Consortium

- How are expenses shared?

On fifths (equal shares), ninths (1-2-2-2-2), or elevenths (1-2-2-2-4 for library expenses) when all campuses are participating. Other formulas apply when only some campuses participate.

- No formal “consortium dues”; no requirement that all five campuses must participate or must participate equally; many in-kind contributions from the campuses.

# Current Scope of the Consortium

35 employees; 35 shared faculty members

2 departments; 1 major; 13 certificates

3 Centers (Women Studies Research;

Less Commonly Taught Languages; East Asia)

Arabic Language Program

5800 student free cross-registrations/yr.

100 faculty exchanges/yr.

35+ administrative peer groups

50+ academic collaborative groups

# New Strategic Plan – December 2010

provides a guiding vision through 2020

## Among the Key Features:

### Commitments:

Seamlessness, Thoughtful Convergence

### Resolve:

No major investment w/o consultation

### New Programs:

Sustainability; Articulated BA/MA options

Endorse collective regional engagement

# Ways we've developed collaborations

- Develop a habit of consultations and sharing; it takes time to develop trust and to find the right time for collaborations – it rarely helps to force a particular collaboration by deciding in advance that a particular thing must be done.
- Share opportunities for expansion for things that single campuses could not do alone
  - Risk management, recycling, energy management, compliance management

## Ways we've developed collaborations (2)

- Share expertise/staff when there are departures or reduced needs for prior services
  - Public safety; Russian, Physics
  - (new: library ordering/cataloging)
- Use collaborations to take opportunities to improve services through staff reallocations
  - Physics staffing vs. variety of curricular offerings; career services recruiter-relations director who can market a higher number of potential employees
  - (new: library support for electronic resources)

# Ways we've developed collaborations (3)

- Consolidate/collaborate to downsize – decide to downsize, then collaborate to ameliorate
  - Public safety; Russian; Physics
- Take advantage of excess capacity in high-end facilities/services of larger partners
  - Bulk Mail; upscale printing; student health services; IT network management; library service management
  - (new: ADA academic support technologies; ADA needs assessments; Data storage)

# Ways we've developed collaborations (4)

- Share consultants and coordinate timing of consultants rather than each paying separately. Have all consultants look at one-college and multi-college opportunities.
- Sometimes share an employee of the consortium; sometimes pay shares for a shared employee based at one campus

## Ways we've developed collaborations (5)

- Seize every opportunity for all campuses to explore options and plan for possible future collaborations whenever any one campus is contemplating a major investment/upgrade
- Share development and support costs through in-kind contributions (excess capacity in classes, excess capacity in full-time faculty members, buildings for centers, HR services for shared appointees).

# Ways we've developed collaborations (6)

- Stay in touch with what other consortia are doing, look for opportunities for multi-consortium projects
  - Procurement, health management, co-insurance, library electronic resource management

# How we developed our current list of collaborative projects to explore

- Made a list of possibilities
- Assessed: savings/cost; transitional costs; service change; heartbreak; identity
- Developed a strategy to set priorities
  - “low heartbreak” – do the easy ones to develop good habits.
  - “high savings” may help ameliorate heartbreak.
  - “high service improvements” may help ameliorate cost, heartbreak or loss of identity/independence.

# Our current list of projects to explore

Human Resource services, fleet, payroll,  
accounts payable, accounts receivable, facilities,  
construction project management, printing,  
(bulk) mailing, one-card, library electronic resources,  
expanded print resource depository, IT help desk,  
federated identity authentication, IT data center,  
virtual computer laboratory server, procurement,  
library resource discovery tools, legal services,  
multicultural advising, ADA academic support,  
health improvement, health insurance management,  
pension adviser

# Governance: Issues/Ideas

- Engagement of the chief officers is key.
- Management may be by presidents, deans, or business officers; or by all three.
- Regular meetings build trust, provide updates, and allow to plan as well as catch opportunities.
- Projects need clear leadership; encourage and validate peer group management; some projects may require cross-functional teams
- No model is perfect, for most consortia the governance model has changed over time, as it has for ours; periodically evaluate and reset.

# Lessons Learned (1)

- Don't rigidly limit definitions of "what counts as collaboration in the consortium." Not everyone has to participate for it to be consortial (don't allow vetoes).
- Don't force any campus to give up too much.
- Seize opportunities – be sure there are structures in place to anticipate opportunities.
- Cost sharing is simplified (according to formula, not always adjusted for use).
- Respect self interest; suspect apparent altruism

## Lessons Learned (2)

- Even if the idea is right, sometimes the time isn't right, but keep talking, revisit occasionally.
- Top-down push/value/acknowledgement is needed; but strategies and implementation steps are best developed at the expert level.
- Geography was once a defining feature of academic consortia – proximity being essential to meetings and discussions. Now high speed internet for data transfer and interactive videoconferencing expand the possibilities for partnerships.

# Resources

- Five Colleges, Inc. [www.fivecolleges.edu](http://www.fivecolleges.edu)  
on-line: annual reports, strategic plan, “Cultures of Cooperation”
- Association for Consortium Leadership
  - Web site [www.national-acl.com](http://www.national-acl.com)
  - *Higher Education Consortia* magazine
  - “A Guide for Consortia” “ACL Assessment Guide”
  - ACL National Conference (Fall each year – October 2011 – Claremont, CA)
  - ACL Institute for Consortium Leaders –
    - June 2011 – Claremont, CA; June 2011 – Amherst, MA