



**Optimizing the Consortial Advantage by 2020:
A Strategic Plan for Five Colleges, Incorporated,
2010-2020**

*~ DRAFT FOR COMMUNITY REVIEW AND COMMENT ~
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Introduction

Four Colleges, Incorporated, was founded in 1965 to formalize library collaboration and student course cross-registration among Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Earlier, in 1958, four faculty members of the four colleges were commissioned to write *The New College Plan*, which ultimately led to the founding of the continually experimenting Hampshire College, which admitted its first students in 1970. With the creation of Hampshire College, the consortium became Five Colleges, Incorporated, in 1969.

From its inception, the consortium has posed the following provocative questions about collaboration in higher education, both for its members and for the national conversation: Working together, how can we collectively improve our ability to meet the intellectual and pedagogical needs of students and faculty members? Where are the most productive points of curricular intersection and innovation? How can strategic cost-sharing strengthen educational excellence?

Today, the consortium is recognized as one of the oldest and strongest consortia in higher education, serving 35,000 students and 2,500 faculty members, and supporting two joint departments and a joint major, thirteen interdisciplinary certificate programs, and nearly 6,000 course cross-registrations each year.

The value proposition of the consortium is clear: Through collaboration and cooperation, there are greater academic and intellectual opportunities for students and faculty members than could be offered at any single campus, greater efficiency in operations and administration, and greater opportunities for innovation. We should take advantage of these opportunities while remaining mindful and respectful of the differences of each campus.

As higher education's business model—rising tuition, growing need for financial aid, reliance on less certain public financing, investment earnings and philanthropy—comes under increasing pressure, the advantages of collaboration are ever more apparent. Five Colleges, Incorporated, has a leadership role to play in demonstrating a model for higher education that is both pedagogically and financially sustainable.

In undertaking this comprehensive strategic-planning process—the first in a decade—we charged the members of our campus communities to look beyond the immediate moment, beyond many of our own personal relationships with the five colleges today, so that we might envision a consortium for those yet to come—students and faculty members for whom agile movement – real and virtual – among disciplines, social contexts and institutions will be not merely an attraction but a reality.

The opportunities presented by new and emerging technologies suggest that the geographic proximity that originally defined the consortium need not delimit its scope today. Individually and collectively, our institutions are engaging worldwide audiences, pursuing national and international collaborations, and educating students for multicultural understanding and global leadership. At the same time, we are partners with schools and organizations in our immediate communities. We must strengthen those connections and expand our reach to other communities in our region, particularly the urban centers—vital environments for partnerships in education and service.

Underlying every aspect of this plan are three core ideals:

- **Seamlessness:** maximal opportunity and minimal barriers to collaboration, where pursued.
- **Thoughtful convergence:** synergistic program development, resource sharing and cost-containment, where appropriate.
- **Scope:** a consortium of local impact, regional influence, national importance and global reach.

The strategic directions proposed for consideration in this draft plan represent the collective wisdom of hundreds of faculty members, students, staff members, trustees, and administrators, whose insights were gathered in focus groups, retreats and online forums over the course of more than a year. The goals, as further refined, will be realized over time through working groups, relevant administrative bodies and, in some cases, the engagement of external specialists. A number of matters identified in the course of the planning process as requiring urgent attention already have improvements under development or being put into practice.

To succeed – to optimize the consortial advantage – we must raise awareness of the potential for collaboration across our organizations, recognizing compelling incentives for collaborative decision making and investment. Doing so will result in a powerful consortium of distinct institutions that will, by its scope and accomplishments, attract even greater visibility and regard.

—Board of Directors, Five Colleges Incorporated

Principal Categories for Strategic Initiatives

I. Enhance Academic Excellence

A commitment to academic excellence underlies all that we do. Our collective endeavors rest on the assumption that supporting a remarkable range of academic offerings cost-effectively is the promise we make to students and faculty members.

The central distinction of our consortium—the alliance of liberal arts colleges with a research university—presents numerous opportunities. As a consortium, we offer much larger intellectual and pedagogical communities, even in subfields, than any single campus could offer. Building on the lessons and successes of existing initiatives in Five College departments (astronomy and dance), interdisciplinary certificate programs, majors, joint faculty appointments, centers (Five College Women’s Studies Research Center Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, and Five College Center for East Asian Studies), lecture series, and faculty seminars, we are eager to actively pursue other opportunities for academic collaboration and cooperation. Our opportunities for the future include supporting interdisciplinary collaborations in emerging fields; coordinated support for specialized programs developed on only one or two campuses; greater integration and coordination of upper-level curricula in selected disciplines consistent with disciplinary needs and resource limitations on each campus; and the sharing of library and academic support services. Through thoughtful, cooperative planning, we can achieve even greater academic preeminence while reducing unneeded duplication of effort.

In developing new institutional models and academic programs, we are informed by a tradition of innovation perhaps best exemplified in the founding of Hampshire College by the preceding four partners. Established as a continually experimenting institution, Hampshire’s innovative institutional and educational philosophy, as well as innovations on each of our campuses, can continue to inspire, as we explore new alignments of disciplines, new interdepartmental and multidepartmental models, and new pedagogies. Individually and collectively, we have innovated and will continue to do so, leading to more sustainable programs and stronger institutions. Central to our success is our commitment to learning from other institutions and consortia and rigorously reviewing our own initiatives, adopting or adapting best practices tested elsewhere and phasing out less-effective programs when appropriate.

Possible opportunities include developing articulations between undergraduate and graduate programs and building stronger connections among allied programs.

A particularly strong opportunity exists for the development of preeminent offerings in sustainability studies. Our region is notably rich in resources—human, programmatic and entrepreneurial—for study and research in sustainability across multiple disciplines in such areas as environmental science; environmental studies; climate change; green design; agriculture and soil science; renewable energy; green computing; environmental ethics; environmental social justice; public policy; and environmental impact on international relations, peace and world security. Through coordination and collaboration, the consortium has the potential to develop signature sustainability programs spanning the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Strategic Directions

- Foster intellectual communities through focused Five College academic projects, institutes, and symposia, as well as coordinated exhibitions, lectures, and support for extended-term visitors and residencies. Build community among cohorts of faculty and students in areas of shared interest.
- Actively consider and explore five-year masters' and other post-baccalaureate degree and certificate programs, drawing on courses and resources at one or several of the institutions, to create uniquely attractive opportunities for specialization or preprofessional preparation. Such programs might be imagined as primarily serving students currently enrolled at one of the five institutions or new students attracted to a course of study not available elsewhere. Each campus will approve its own involvement in these programs.
- Expand incentives and opportunities for faculty members to teach on other campuses, particularly when the sharing of faculty expertise can enhance and enrich the course offerings at a particular campus as well as reduce the need for students to travel to another campus to find those offerings.
- Explore consortial approaches to a range of academic-support functions, such as learning-disability assessment, disability services, and alternative course materials; grant and fellowship application; and facilitation of study abroad/study away programs, community-based learning, service learning and internships.
- Continue to explore the integration of information operations and services, implementing additional collaborative strategies for improved services at a reduced cost, including increasing and streamlining access for students and faculty members at each campus to the physical and electronic library collections at the other campuses.
- Develop a collaborative approach to faculty development; multi-institution teaching and publication workshops; and active support and dissemination of collaborative teaching demonstration projects, especially those employing instructional technology.
- Coordinate reviews of departments and programs across institutions, charging those departments and programs to include a report on current and potential complementary and parallel programs at the consortium partner schools, and charging visiting review teams to include resources across the five institutions in their investigations and deliberations, and to assess the most appropriate articulation. Work together in planning strategic investments and adjustments following these reviews, where appropriate.

- Create more shared access to and use of each institution's specialized intellectual resources and research sites, such as the Folger Shakespeare Library, field stations, research sites, study-abroad sites and research institutes.
- Coordinate the development of shared and complementary courses and academic programs that address issues of environmental studies, climate change and its social impact, and the sustainable interaction of people and our planet.
- Expand our traditional notion of the academic calendar to intensify opportunities for shared endeavors in short courses, research, internships, and other academic projects in January, May and the summer months.

II. Strengthen Five College Effectiveness, Community and Identity

The Five College consortium, while viewed positively in principle, is unevenly experienced, valued, and articulated, even within the Five College community itself. It is most obviously manifested in course cross-registration, and yet transportation, registration and enrollment present barriers. To create true intellectual and cultural community for students and faculty members, we must improve the basic infrastructure that makes taking courses at other campuses possible: we must maintain reasonably aligned academic calendars, dramatically shorten travel times between campuses by supporting alternative transit options, integrate online catalogs, enable seamless course registration, and clarify and make transparent each campus's acceptance of credits from other institutions for both graduation and major credit.

From that base, we can expand to such areas as common cocurricular programming, collaborative academic institutes, additional Five College certificate programs, and consortial resources for emeriti and retirees.

To maximize the advantage of the Five College system in recruiting students, faculty members and staff members, it will be important to align these activities under a common—and reenergized—identity, one that complements the individual identities of each of the institutions while promoting the value proposition of the consortium.

Strategic Directions

- Commit to a transit study, with the goal of significantly reducing travel times; a fully aligned, all-institution course catalog and class schedule, including a complete articulation of course equivalencies and prerequisites and/or a common numbering system; and significant improvements to processes for online course requests, preregistration and registration.
- Recognizing that academic opportunities and the ability to earn credentials are important motivations for students' engagement with other campuses, review the existing set of Five College Certificate Programs (and new ones in development) to make them more visible, transparent and clearly linked through advising to majors, minors and concentrations. Similarly, consider whether Five Colleges could offer courses/certificates in preprofessional/applied areas not traditionally offered in the context of liberal arts education (e.g., finance, accounting, journalism, nursing, arts management, public health and public policy) to engage students with multiple campuses and provide them with useful complements to a liberal arts degree, whether for degree credit or not.

- Develop one or more multicampus events to showcase students' academic/intellectual accomplishments, such as a senior research symposium or thesis competition, with meaningful prizes awarded in each of the academic divisions. Similarly, review existing discipline-specific events (e.g., Chinese speech contest, geology symposium, physics symposium, theater portfolio review, poetry fest and anthropology student symposium) to see whether potential exists to align them with a larger event. Develop programs to bring together cohorts of majors from the five colleges.
- Encourage cocurricular projects or groups that bring together large groups of students from different institutions for common purposes, such as the successful Five College Opera Project. Enhance the number of Five College celebrations and festivals. Consider also the expansion of Five College intramural and club sports activities.
- Commission an image analysis to bring greater visibility and recognition to the consortium. Based on recommendations, develop an integrated plan to better communicate the value of the consortium and its distinctive programming.
- Capitalize on the broad reach of Five College Radio (WFCR) and WNNZ to reinforce the intellectual and cultural value of the five colleges. Establish dedicated segments or programs featuring content from our campuses, and increase the involvement of Five College community members in shaping the stations' programming.
- Dedicate space on each institution's website for Five College news and events.

III. Align Administrative Investments; Share Services

Shared-service approaches to some administrative and support functions enhance value, improve service, reduce costs, and free each institution to focus on its primary mission: education and the creation of knowledge. Our experiences in a number of areas—libraries, risk management, energy management, recycling, student health, a fiber-optic network, and public safety—underscore the significant potential for improved services and cost savings in administrative collaboration. As we identify possible areas for shared approaches that enhance services and/or reduce costs, each institution must determine its level of participation, and the timing of that participation to match its local needs, its commitments with regard to protecting jobs of current employees, and its resources.

As we seek to reduce the environmental impact of our operations and stabilize or reduce our energy costs, we are presented with multiple opportunities to act collectively, invest jointly in alternative energy sourcing and attract grant funding for sustainability initiatives. Our multi-institution approach to recycling and energy management provides a useful basis on which to build further and more ambitious collaboration. Our expanded and collaborative efforts will also offer students opportunities for rewarding internships. With strategic vision and collaborative planning, we have the opportunity to position the Five College consortium as a leader in resource stewardship.

Joint procurement, collaborative purchasing and alignment of major investments also offer significant opportunities to reduce costs and grow our collaboration strategically. This is particularly true in regard to the purchase or upgrade of major administrative and academic technology systems, which represent significant financial and labor investments to which institutions are typically committed for more than a decade. Other opportunities to explore include coordinated efforts in health benefits and wellness services.

Key to success in this area is recognizing that no single approach will fit all situations. In some cases, collaboration will make sense among two, three or four institutional partners; in other situations, we might elect a commercial solution or the designation of a single campus as the service provider for all five entities. Alternatively, as in the case of the fiber-optic network and the library depository, Five Colleges could produce its own “products,” with the potential to market services to those outside the consortium. We have established effective models of incremental introduction of cooperation, often starting with bilateral arrangements that other institutions join later. We consider bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation to be as valuable as five-way sharing of administration and services. By working consortially in the design and evaluation of such initiatives, we will maximize the opportunities for partner schools to join successful pilot programs later.

Strategic Directions

- Inventory Five College information technology resources, identifying opportunities for collaboration, cooperation or merger in some areas.
- Commit to a full exploration of possible multicampus approaches before any individual campus makes a significant investment in academic and/or administrative technology systems, including course management, enterprise research planning/business intelligence, unified card access, on-line catalog and on-line registration. Review these areas of potential major investment, and anticipate the investment needs of our institutions to ensure that we have considered possibilities of cooperation before urgent need compels one institution to make individual decisions without that perspective.
- Negotiate shared licensing of software and electronic resources—and concomitant pricing—to serve all institutions whenever possible.
- Building on the successful experience of joint bidding for auditing services, move toward additional joint bidding and procurement, where appropriate.
- Continue to streamline administrative and business functions through collaboration, as we have for library storage. Stay well informed about the innovations and project results at other consortia. Areas in which other consortia and organizations collaborate include financial transaction processing, technology support, data warehousing, fleet management, plant management, unified card access, project bidding and construction management.
- Find ways to work together to reduce emissions and address our collective carbon footprint. These might include exploring joint purchasing of energy from alternative sources or generating more of our own; supporting more efficient management of transportation and fleet resources; purchasing more food locally, for freshness and reduced transportation impacts; diverting more of our solid waste to composting or reuse; sharing building capacity throughout the consortium for swing space during renovations and student housing overflows; and seeking to balance the effect of our transit-related carbon emissions (particularly those generated by domestic and international air travel) by investing in alternative energy enterprises.

IV. Make Optimal Use of Information Technologies

The diversity of our institutions—four distinctive liberal arts colleges in partnership with a research university—presents a powerful opportunity to develop and model the optimal role of information technologies in each of these settings and in linking these settings. With a commitment to shared innovation and investment, we can enhance the residential college campus experience—including its emphasis on close student-faculty relationships and a small student-faculty ratio—via appropriate technologies. At the same time, technology can support individualized learning in the context of a larger-scale teaching environment, providing access to course content in a way that allows faculty-student face-to-face interactions to focus on higher-order cognitive processes and such educational elements as analysis, discussion and teamwork.

Technology also enables us to envision a consortium unconstrained by geographic proximity. Five Colleges' high-speed fiber-optic network, completed in 2007, offers virtually unlimited bandwidth for educational and research purposes, facilitating national and global connectivity for videoconferencing, high-performance computing, and shared access to Internet-based software and resources. As we connect ever more effectively among the member schools in our consortium, we should look to extend our connections to appropriate educational institutions and resources throughout the nation and the world.

Strategic Directions

- Engage an external information technology consultant to review the internal inventory of resources and opportunities for collaboration, and to explore more broadly the opportunities to strengthen our educational practices based on best practices elsewhere and national and international trends in information technology with the goal of enhancing both academic collaboration and cooperation (including faculty exchange and student course cross-registration) as well as administrative cooperation, coordination and effectiveness. Gain assistance in assessing the opportunities, benefits and costs of moving toward either more compatible or more common technology systems, particularly in the areas of course management/learning management systems, registration/preregistration, course catalog and course schedule information, single sign-on access to any of our campus data networks and card access systems.
- Through sufficiently compatible administrative enterprise systems and more active sharing of data, develop an integrated course catalog, integrated faculty and staff directories, and a more integrated schedule of classes. These solutions should appear seamlessly integrated and navigable to students and faculty members even if separate systems are retained.

- Explore the potential of cloud computing and communally accessible educational (and administrative) software, content and data services to collectively serve the information technology needs of our campuses.
- Consider ways to expand access to easy-to-use high-quality and compatible videoconferencing on all of our campuses, allowing faculty members to choose appropriate ways to use these facilities for instruction, shared speakers, and outreach and in-reach both to students and faculty members abroad and to new national and global audiences.
- When reviews and planning identify ideal opportunities for shared systems, develop migration strategies to guide new purchases, and develop revised work processes as existing systems come up for replacement. Similarly, develop a collective component to vendor/system review and selection at each institution that fosters and facilitates later buy-in for other institutions.

V. Extend Local and Regional Engagement and Partnerships

Collectively, Five Colleges constitutes a major employer and purchaser, a significant revenue generator, a longtime supporter of local transit and public radio, and a nationally recognized source of intellectual capital. Inspired by a commitment to regional well-being, the consortium has the potential—and responsibility—to leverage that collective capacity in service of the economic, political and community-building issues of western New England as well as those of our local communities.

We value the educational and research partnerships made possible by the strong nexus of our campuses with our home communities of Amherst, Northampton, and South Hadley; with the cities of Springfield and Holyoke; with the institutions of the Hartford-Springfield Economic Partnership or Knowledge Corridor; and with the many communities we adjoin and intersect with in Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden counties. Through thoughtfully designed educational and service collaborations, Five Colleges can offer significant analytical and research assets as well as technological resources to the important educational, development and policy decisions affecting the future of this region.

Strategic Directions

- Strengthen our efforts in educational partnerships, support of public schools, community-based learning, and community service in our local communities, especially Amherst, Northampton, South Hadley, and Hadley.
- Strengthen the Five College presence in Springfield and Holyoke, including program coordination and on-site locations that would provide ready access to the human, cultural and intellectual resources of the five colleges and serve as bases for campus representatives to engage the community (e.g., schools and community-service organizations). Initial programming at these sites might focus on community-based learning and employment recruiting. The Greater Springfield–University of Massachusetts Amherst Partnership and the Holyoke Campus Community Compact and Holyoke Bound programs offer examples on which we can build.
- Build or strengthen appropriate relationships with other regional communities, large and small.
- Build or strengthen appropriate relationships with other regional higher education partners, including the eight colleges of greater Springfield, and those of Greenfield, Holyoke, and Hartford, embracing all those, as appropriate, in the aptly named Knowledge Corridor.

- Whether through a new position or a redirection of existing campus positions, develop a consortial approach to community and government relations (local, state and federal) to engage more robustly with key economic development initiatives and to leverage funding opportunities. Areas of focus could include regional transit planning; emerging developments in local/regional rail; K-12 school support; cultural tourism; environmental sustainability; job creation; technology infrastructure development; and the Holyoke high-tech renaissance, including the High-Performance Computing Center.
- In support of both our regional economy and sustainable business practices, ensure the inclusion of local vendors, whenever feasible, when procuring goods and services.

Foundational Commitments

In developing this strategic plan, the Five College directors affirmed the following foundational commitments as essential to ensuring academic excellence and strength:

- Individually and collectively, we are committed to **excellence** in teaching, research, and scholarly and creative work. Collaboration enables us to support a remarkable range of disciplines and programs within the consortium, in some cases through selective specialization on a single campus.
- **Sharing** the cost and delivery of nonacademic functions, whether among some members or all, enables each institution to invest more fully in its primary educational mission.
- The **variety** of our institutions—a research university with an honors college and four liberal arts colleges, two of which are women’s colleges and one of which has been an experimenting college from its inception—is a distinctive asset. Manifest within the consortium itself is the power of partnering undergraduate with graduate, public with private, and research university with liberal arts college.
- The power of learning in a context of **diversity**—ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic and multicultural—is a distinctive asset of the Five College learning environment, which itself includes a remarkable diversity of institutions.
- **Course cross-registration** is a core feature of our collaboration and a basic right of our students. We aspire to make it as easy and seamless as possible. Our institutions maintain closely coordinated academic calendars, with similar start dates for each semester and common mid-semester breaks. We impose no additional levies on students or institutions related to cross-registration, intercampus transportation, or meals on other campuses associated with attendance for courses or consortial activities, and we are committed to making course materials and electronic resources accessible to all students and faculty members from their home campuses.
- Faculty members **teaching** on multiple campuses hold the privileges of faculty members on their host campuses. They receive appropriate recognition and credit for courses and students taught regardless of their—or their students’—home campus.
- We encourage **innovation** and experimentation, seeding some consortial initiatives with start-up funding with the expectation that successful endeavors will locate permanent funding over time.

- We are committed to ensuring the ongoing pursuit of best practices and reviewing, on at least a seven-year basis, the **effectiveness** of our shared enterprises; as well, on at least a ten-year basis, we are committed to reviewing the effectiveness of the consortium as a whole.
- As institutions and individuals, we at Five Colleges are actively engaged **citizens** of our local communities, invested in the strength of our region's schools, workforce, infrastructure, and economic and urban development. Our support for our region is manifest in school-college collaborations and community-based learning.
- Singly and collectively, we are international in our perspective and ambitions, preparing students from around the world for **global** citizenship and leadership.