



Search The Site

Go

[More options](#) | [Back issues](#)
Home**News**[Today's news](#)[Current issue](#)[Salary surveys](#)[The Faculty](#)[Research & Books](#)[Government & Politics](#)[Money & Management](#)[Information Technology](#)[Students](#)[Athletics](#)[International](#)[Community Colleges](#)[Special issues & data](#)[Short Subjects](#)[Gazette](#)[Corrections](#)**Opinion & Forums****Careers****Multimedia****Leadership Forum****Technology Forum****Resource Center****Campus Viewpoints****Services**[Help](#)[Contact us](#)[About The Chronicle](#)[Subscribe](#)[Day pass](#)[Manage your account](#)[Advertise with us](#)[Rights & permissions](#)[Employment opportunities](#)

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Money & Management[Subscribe](#) | [Day pass](#)

From the issue dated February 13, 2009

Sharing Ideas: Tough Times Encourage Colleges to Collaborate

By PAUL FAIN, GOLDIE BLUMENSTYK, and LIBBY SANDER

Despite its veneer of cooperation, higher education is a competitive industry, where resource sharing is eyed warily. But the recession is chipping away at that reluctance, and institutions are pursuing partnerships, both to cut costs and to keep pace with expanding academic fields.

Joseph E. Aoun, Northeastern University's president, says cooperation helps colleges better leverage their resources. Through partnerships, they can expand their fields of research and teaching, such as in language studies.

"You cannot go at it by thinking that the world stops at this campus," says Mr. Aoun. "No university is self-sufficient."

Northeastern has forged several such agreements in recent years, including an extensive partnership with nearby Hebrew College that includes joint degree programs, and a nanotechnology center that Northeastern leads with two public-university partners.

Lawrence G. Dotolo has encouraged links among universities for decades. Executive director of the National Association for Consortium Leadership, he also leads the Virginia Tidewater Consortium for Higher Education, a group of 15 institutions. He says his phone has been buzzing with calls from colleges looking for tips on building new collaborations or improving existing ones.

A few intercollege consortia have existed for decades, most notably the Five Colleges Inc., in Amherst, Mass., and the Claremont Colleges, in California. And in recent years, scores of institutions have worked together in library offerings, information technology, and research centers.

But resource sharing may now be expanding beyond those traditional areas.

"Some things they never wanted to cooperate in," Mr. Dotolo says, citing as examples campus security and financial-aid services. "Now they're stepping back and saying, 'Let's do this.'"

Cooperation, however, does not come naturally to colleges. And some experts remain skeptical that partnerships will gain much ground, even in a rough economy. James H. Roth, a vice president at the Huron Consulting Group, leads the firm's education branch. "It makes economic sense and business sense" to find partners, he says, but so far "I've not seen a lot of collaboration."

Several types of partnerships can be beneficial, he says, like student-transfer agreements between community colleges and public universities.

In the following articles, we look at three new or expanding partnerships that illustrate the rising wave of cooperation.

THE FIX: JOIN FORCES

When fire broke out at a residence hall last fall at Hampshire College, police officers, including a few based at Mount Holyoke College, seven miles away, were on the scene within minutes. Weeks later, when an assault was reported after a dance at Mount Holyoke, officers from Hampshire were part of the team that responded and made an arrest.

Campus ViewpointsFind out what **unique** ideas are taking shape at

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Article tools

Printer friendly



E-mail article



Subscribe



Order reprints

[Discuss](#) any Chronicle article in our forums**Latest Headlines****President's Budget Would End Bank-Based Student Lending**

Mr. Obama's blueprint calls for using the savings from abolishing the bank-based student-loan program to raise the maximum Pell Grant and make it an entitlement.

[Plan Would Reduce the Value of Some Charitable Deductions](#)

[Proposal Includes Big Increases for Science](#)

[Highlights of Obama's Budget for Education and Research for 2010](#)

[George Mason U. Will Close Its Campus in the Persian Gulf](#)

[Surgeon's Royalties Bring Heat to a Medical School With a Strict Ethics Policy](#)

[College Makes New Connections With Service-Learning Program](#)

[Business-Management Student Works to Realize a Sweet Dream](#)

SIGN UP FOR A **FREE WEEKLY PREVIEW**The **award-winning** magazine of ideas from The Chronicle

It's "where academia's best and brightest can take their gloves off and swing with abandon," said Utne Reader in awarding The Chronicle Review its 2007 Independent Press Award for political coverage.

Get the free e-mail newsletter that takes you inside every issue and see for yourself.

Sign Me Up

"We sent people right over instead of calling people in from home," says Paul L. Ominsky, who has directed the police forces of both colleges since June, when they merged their public-safety departments.

Combining Hampshire's department, which has the equivalent of about 15 employees, with Mount Holyoke's, which has the equivalent of 26, has reduced costs for training, added flexibility to staffing at major events on each campus, and created opportunities for promotions and new positions. An officer from Mount Holyoke is now a detective in the joint department, and Mr. Ominsky was able to add a civilian position to work with student groups on matters like crime prevention.

"We have a lot more investigative depth. We have a lot more outreach depth," says Mr. Ominsky, adding that he hopes the merger will bring a higher overall level of professionalism and help reduce turnover.

Mary Jo Maydew, vice president for finance and administration at Mount Holyoke, says the arrangement has helped cut costs at her college and raise the level of service at Hampshire.

That level of collaboration is unusual even for institutions with a tradition of working together, as these two have for nearly 40 years as members of the Five Colleges consortium.

Traditionally, campus leaders have been hesitant to combine operations that are so hands-on and round-the-clock. Mr. Ominsky calls such reluctance a mistake. Instead, he says, colleges should think how they might model their security departments after the precinct approach used by many city police forces, in which a single chief oversees a network of community-based squads. "If it works in the city, it can work on the campuses," he says.

A system like that is especially useful for colleges that are close to one another, he says. It also helps if the respective staffs are "flexible and professional."

Colleges considering that kind of collaboration also need to think about matters like insurance (which wasn't a big issue for Mr. Ominsky, because the Five Colleges already operated under a single risk-management department), compatibility of computer and communications systems, and aligning policies and approaches. "The more you can be consistent, I think it improves public safety generally," he says, noting that this is especially true for his institutions, where academic arrangements encourage many students and faculty members to spend time away from their home campuses.

It helps, too, if the colleges have somewhat similar cultures. Both Hampshire and Holyoke are small, private, residential liberal-arts colleges. "Otherwise," he allows, "I do think it could get a little bit confusing."

Mr. Ominsky's duties extend to Smith College, another Five Colleges member. He is director of public safety there, overseeing a department of sworn officers and other personnel who are not part of the merged department. (For one thing, the Smith force is the only one that is unionized.)

Half of Mr. Ominsky's salary comes from Smith, and the rest from Hampshire and Holyoke.

Arrangements like those are a new effort for the Five Colleges. (Amherst College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst are the group's other two members.) Until recently the consortium focused on academic collaborations over administrative ones, although it does operate a single transportation system, and some of the colleges have combined the management of energy use and recycling.

Those collaborations, like Mr. Ominsky's role as a multicampus public-safety chief and the departmental mergers of Mount Holyoke and Hampshire, predate the biggest economic shocks now hitting many colleges.

The members are always looking for new collaborations. But now all of the institutions have been looking more intently, says Ms. Maydew. "We're seeing new urgency."

THE FIX: SHARE NETWORKS

Since 1958 the 11 universities of the Big Ten Conference have worked with a former member, the University of Chicago, in a partnership called the Committee on Institutional Cooperation. But that collaboration has heated up in recent years, say several presidents of constituent institutions.

The slumping economy and interest in cost-saving measures has led to "a marked acceleration in the depth of the cooperation between our members," says Barbara McFadden Allen, the committee's director for 11 years.

Besides the quest for savings, technological developments have played a role. Social-networking tools and videoconferencing technology have helped make ideas for collaboration a reality, she says.

And the member universities have put big money behind some of those ideas.

The chief information officers of committee members had been meeting for years and had compared the bids they were considering to build out fiber-optic networks on their campuses. They decided to invest together in those networks, with each university ponying up a share, and to link their capacity together.

"They built something better, faster, and cheaper" than what they could have purchased on their own, Ms. Allen says.

All of the campuses, which stretch across eight states, are now connected online through Chicago. The shared network is much more powerful than what a single campus could have mustered.

And the savings are impressive. In addition to an estimated \$23-million saved jointly in the purchase of the network (compared with the total that would have been spent on independent systems), each university saves \$600,000 in annual maintenance costs, says Ms. Allen.

Another relatively new effort of the committee is to share language-study offerings. Taken together, the 12 universities teach about 120 languages — but only about 30 on each campus.

Through a three-year pilot program, currently in its final year, the committee has arranged for 40 language courses to be taught across the group. The participating faculty member typically uses videoconferencing to reach students at other universities.

But the real "magic" of the partnership takes place in the registrars' offices, Ms. Allen says. The committee's role is to minimize friction and red tape.

Carolyn A. (Biddy) Martin, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, acknowledges that competition can make collaboration difficult. But universities' self-interest, she says, must be balanced with the potential benefits for students and faculty members.

More partnerships are on the way, she adds. "That's going to have to be a big part of the future."

THE FIX: LINK CLASSROOMS

After the long, slow fade of its signature textile industry, Danville, Va., is trying to transform its economy into one based more on science and technology than on textiles, tobacco, and manufacturing.

In doing so, the city of 45,000, just over the North Carolina border, has received a welcome boost from two of Virginia's most prestigious universities.

Through a distance-learning liberal-arts curriculum for adults at the University of Richmond's School of Continuing Studies, and an engineering-science program at the University of Virginia's School of Engineering and Applied Science, residents of Danville who are eager to participate in the region's economic rebirth can do so without leaving their city on the Dan River.

The budding partnerships are products of a statewide collaborative spirit among two-year and four-year colleges that has taken hold in Virginia. Although the links were forged before the recession, officials say the programs make even more economic sense now, and could offer a road map to even more creative ways of delivering education in times of fiscal hardship.

As enrollment at community colleges has grown, and as universities look to tap into other pipelines of qualified students, articulation agreements have become more common. The arrangements specify the community-college courses for which a four-year college will grant transfer credit and ease the transition for students. Since the 1980s, 30 states have written into law transfer or articulation agreements intended to better integrate two-year and four-year colleges.

But new, narrowly targeted programs in Virginia could further smooth the path from community college to university — with significant benefits to the state as well, officials say.

"The economic developments in this country are going to push us all in that direction," says James F. Groves, an assistant dean at the engineering school who directs the engineering program. "How can we not be responsive?"

In the four or so years since Virginia's state lawmakers called on public four-year institutions to be more attentive to economic development and work more closely with their two-year counterparts, the collaborative efforts have grown more creative, and more specific.

Articulation agreements are now enhanced by program-to-program outreach efforts.

The result is a much more efficient way of linking the resources of major universities with community colleges in the same regions, many of them rural, that are hungry for a broader array of educational options, officials say.

"We have a wide work force that is really looking for work or looking to start a second career," says Stephanie Ferrugia, site coordinator at Danville for Richmond's Weekend College, as the program is

known. "They're bracing themselves and saying, 'I need to diversify myself and make myself different from the guy working next to me on the line at the plant.'"

Only about one in 10 of the residents of southern Virginia hold college degrees, Ms. Ferrugia says. Until recently, the educational pickings were slim for people whose job or family responsibilities prevented their leaving Danville to study elsewhere.

But all that is changing. To attract companies looking to move to the Danville area — and to guarantee that Danville's residents could actually land new jobs — local officials needed a way to expand educational offerings, and quickly.

By 2006, UVa's Mr. Groves and his colleagues were hearing urgent calls for undergraduate engineering education from communities and employers around the state.

One plea came from a technology company in Manassas, a Washington suburb, that manufactures memory for iPods and other digital devices. It wanted part-time engineering education for workers so they could train but still remain employed at the plant. Another came from a nuclear-energy company, which predicted that it would soon need as many as 1,000 engineers.

Then there were the Danvilles — small cities eager to reinvent themselves but in need of the education and training required to attract employers and jobs.

In all of the cases, Mr. Groves recalls, the question was the same: Is there something you can do to bring engineering education to our community?

The collaborative program, whose first cohort of students is to enter UVa this fall, began with just one institution, Central Virginia Community College, in Lynchburg. It recently expanded to include 10 of Virginia's 23 community colleges, including Danville Community College.

The program allows students to earn bachelor's degrees in engineering science on a part-time basis, and without leaving their communities.

Students complete the first two years of classes in mathematics, chemistry, and physics at their local community colleges. After earning associate degrees in engineering, eligible students can transfer to the UVa's engineering school to complete the remaining classes online. Officials there assume that students will not be studying full time — a significant departure for Virginia's prestigious university.

"We have traditionally been a residential, full-time student population, and what we're doing here is allowing people to go part time, at a distance," Mr. Groves says. "That's a big shift."

Richmond's Weekend College, meanwhile, offers on-campus or distance-learning classes in a liberal-arts curriculum to students at two community colleges. The program, designed for older students with some college credits, focuses on writing, public speaking, business literacy, and management — courses that officials say prepare them to work in corporate settings.

"I ask students, 'Why are you looking at our program?,' thinking that the attraction is the Richmond name," Ms. Ferrugia says. "But actually, it is the accessibility. The reputation is second."

<http://chronicle.com>

Section: Money & Management

Volume 55, Issue 23, Page A20

Copyright © 2009 by The Chronicle of Higher Education | [Contact us](#)
[User agreement](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [About The Chronicle](#) | [Site map](#) | [Help](#)
[Subscribe](#) | [Advertise with us](#) | [Press inquiries](#) | [RSS](#) | [Today's most e-mailed](#)

[Home](#) | [Chronicle Careers](#) | [The Chronicle Review](#)