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**Collaboration among Tertiary Institutions: Testing the Taxonomy**  
An Evaluation of The Five College Consortium in Western Massachusetts

Alexis Brooke Redding  
The Good Project  
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Howard Gardner, Series Editor

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## **Background**

In 2011, I created a taxonomy to evaluate two types of relationships between tertiary institutions: (1) Comprehensive Consortia and (2) Focused Collaborations (Appendix A). This tool was designed to understand the context of intercollegiate relationships, identify the shared benefits of collaboration, and diagnose the pitfalls that can derail these joint ventures. The taxonomy, based on an evaluation of seven consortia (Appendix B), was developed through analysis of written documents available online and in print including school websites, reports in the popular media, school newspapers, and industry publications.

The taxonomy was a preliminary attempt to define the characteristics of higher education collaborations and to evaluate the components of robust relationships. However, since the taxonomy was based on written material, much of which was produced by the schools involved in the consortia and/or written for publicity purposes, I felt that it was important to test this instrument in the real world. With the assistance of the Good Collaboration Team, I conducted a two-part study to examine the accuracy and usefulness of the instrument. This report summarizes the findings from the first part of that study: an evaluation of the Five Colleges, Incorporated in Western Massachusetts.

## **Methods**

The Good Collaboration Team selected the Comprehensive Consortium category from the Taxonomy for in-depth analysis (Table 1). During the Fall 2012 school semester, a small team of researchers from The Good Project embarked on two daylong

|  | <b>Comprehensive Consortia (CC)</b><br><i>Must meet criteria from <u>all 6</u> categories</i>  |
|--|--|
| (1) Academic Integration                       | <b>Must</b> contain <u>2 or more</u> of the following:<br>- expanded curricular options<br>- joint programs/certificates<br>- intercollegiate departments  |
| (2) Shared Academic Resources                  | <b>Must</b> contain a joint library system<br><br><b>May</b> contain at least one other shared academic facility (ex. Art museum, research lab)<br><br><b>May</b> also contain shared equipment to facilitate academic research  |
| (3) Logistical Support Services (Academic)     | <b>Must</b> operate a consolidated database of courses offered at the member institutions<br><br><b>Must</b> have a protocol for cross-registration<br><br><b>Must</b> offer full transfer of credits among institutions <b>and</b> grades must appear on the home institution transcript<br><br><b>Must</b> make efforts to synchronize calendars   |
| (4) Logistical Support Services (Student Life) | <b>Must</b> offer free shuttle service that provides full access to academic and extra-curricular options (if necessary due to distance)<br><br><b>Must</b> offer dining options on multiple campuses (though this may be limited to certain hours or dining facilities)<br><br><b>May</b> also offer joint services and facilities (ex. health center, campus mail)<br><br><u>At least one</u> member institution <b>must</b> be involved in overseeing these operations. |
| (5) Integrated Campus Life                     | <b>Must</b> offer at least <u>3</u> of the following:<br>- combined extra-curricular groups<br>- joint student council<br>- shared intramural sports<br>- joint publications (ex. student paper)<br>- shared calendar showcasing events and performances on multiple campuses  |
| (6) Organization                               | <b>Must be</b> run by <b>either</b> a Board of Directors/Trustees <b>or</b> have <u>at least one</u> joint operations committee<br><br><b>May be</b> incorporated as a non-profit organization<br><br><b>May</b> also have a shared operating budget   |

**Table 1: Features of Comprehensive Consortia**

visits to the Five Colleges, Incorporated of Western Massachusetts for the first phase of this study. This consortium was selected because it is considered a model of tertiary collaboration in the higher education community and was conveniently located. The

consortium consists of 4 colleges (Amherst, Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Hampshire) and 1 research university (The University of Massachusetts at Amherst).

Wendy Fischman, Project Manager of the Good Collaboration Study; Wiljan Hendrikx, a visiting researcher from the Netherlands; and Alexis Brooke Redding, a researcher with the Good Collaboration Study each visited at least four of the five campuses involved in the consortium over the span of two days in October and November 2012. Researchers conducted a three-part study on each campus: (1) attendance at an information session in the admissions office, led by a member of the administration; (2) participation in a campus tour led by a current student; and (3) a visual survey of resources on campus (including collection of brochures and photographing campus facilities). Each campus was visited by at least two researchers to allow for a comparison of information and perspectives.

Two of the researchers also used the transportation system to navigate between the campuses to evaluate the efficiency of the free transit system and to also share in the student experience. One researcher also engaged in informal conversations with students during both visits to gather additional insights about student experiences and opinions.

Each researcher wrote detailed notes of his or her impressions of each campus and compiled the photographs and print materials collected during the visits. These documents were used to evaluate each aspect of the original taxonomy and to examine how accurately this tool reflects the real world functioning of the consortium.

The depth of the collaborative relationship also yields information about how successfully the schools have realized the joint Five College Mission Statement (2012).

For the purposes of this study, I developed a second instrument to measure the strength of execution at each level of the taxonomy (Table 2).

|  | Fully Realized | Partially Executed | Significantly Limited or Non-Existent |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (1) Academic Integration                       |                |                    |                                       |
| (2) Shared Academic Resources                  |                |                    |                                       |
| (3) Logistical Support Services (Academic)     |                |                    |                                       |
| (4) Logistical Support Services (Student Life) |                |                    |                                       |
| (5) Integrated Campus Life                     |                |                    |                                       |

**Table 2: Index for evaluating the depth of a Comprehensive Consortium**

Using this index, an analysis of the depth of integration between the Five Colleges institutions was conducted as part of the data analysis.

**Evaluation of Five Colleges, Inc.**

My evaluation of the Five Colleges, Inc. of Western Massachusetts revealed that the consortium has successfully achieved its two most important goals: academic integration and shared academic resources. However, logistical impediments (transportation, dining, lack of information) prevent full access of collaboration resources for students. Additional costs (of money or time) can prevent a student from making use of these resources as well. Further, a lack of consistency between school policies leads to

some confusion around issues of grading and credit transfer. Stereotypes about campuses and students also lead to perceptions of academic superiority that shape the use of some campus resources and create a unidirectional flow of students between some campuses. Due to these obstacles, individual schools have different levels of engagement across the categories of collaboration and benefit from shared resources differentially.

**Academic Integration**

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| (1) Academic Integration | <p><i>Must</i> contain 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expanded curricular options</li> <li>- joint programs/certificates</li> <li>- intercollegiate departments</li> </ul> |
|--------------------------|--|

The Five College collaboration is designed to enhance educational opportunities for students, affording them a greater range of intellectual options that could be supplied by any single institution. The Mission Statement of the Consortium illustrates this focus:

Five Colleges, Incorporated, sustains and enriches the excellence of its members [...] through academic and administrative collaboration. The consortium facilitates intellectual communities and broad curricular and cocurricular [*sic*] offerings; affording learning, research, performance and social opportunities that complement the distinctive qualities of each institution (2012).

Indeed, the consortium contains examples of all three components of academic integration in the taxonomy: (1) expanded curricular options; (2) joint programs/certificates; and (3) intercollegiate departments.

**Expanded curricular options**

An Amherst admissions officer summed up the academic importance of the collaboration by remarking how “there are 850 classes here, but with the collaboration,

students have more than 5,000 options!” This expanded access to a range of courses is also described in a brochure distributed in the Hampshire College Admissions Office, *The Power of Five Colleges*, that notes that there are 5,300 classes to choose from, “provid[ing] a breadth and depth to its programs no single campus could match.”

According to one admission officer at Smith, “[t]he collaboration *is* the icing on the cake because it increases student options.” An Amherst admission officer similarly explained how “the collaboration is an opportunity to change the context – it provides an opportunity to have a small environment, and make it as big as you want.” A different Amherst admission officer similarly articulated her view that “the consortium offers the best of both worlds – the intimacy of a liberal arts school, but the academic vibrancy of a university.”

Parents and students on nearly all campus tours asked questions about the benefits and logistics of cross-enrollment. Arguably, even if students do not make use of the resources once they arrive, there is recruiting value in the existence of the collaboration.

### **Joint Programs & Certificates**

The benefits of using The Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, housed at UMass Amherst, was highlighted on multiple campuses. This joint language center is a fully articulated example of successful co-curricular collaboration. A Hampshire student described the foreign language learning opportunities at the center as “one of the true gems of the collaboration.” One assistant dean of admission at Amherst explained that students could take more “obscure” languages there that they could never

offer on their own. At Mount Holyoke, the student tour guide said that it was easy to take language classes at UMass Amherst and remarked that many of her friends had done so.

Additional certificates were mentioned at Smith, including Marine & Coastal Studies and Public Health. They were described as being different from a minor because they are issued *by* the collaboration and seen as an add-on to what each individual campus is able to offer.

### **Intercollegiate Departments**

Joint majors were also mentioned as being particularly important benefits of the collaboration. According to a Hampshire College admission officer, the consortium offers the largest dance major in the country, built from complementary programs that came together to form one intercollegiate program that is now celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This program was also mentioned during information sessions at Smith, Hampshire, and Amherst. Similarly, the Five College Architectural Studies major was noted during the Amherst information session. This intercollegiate department was highlighted because it was brought about by student interest. The admission officer explained that this institutional collaboration is considered to be a powerful example of what is possible due to the close relationships among faculty across multiple campuses.

### **Depth of Engagement**

Despite the benefits of these enhanced co-curricular offerings, one admissions officer at Amherst made an intriguing comment explaining, “the 5C departments are too complicated, I won’t even talk about it,” in response to a parent’s question about cross-

registration procedures. When a researcher asked a Mount Holyoke tour guide about this, she was unclear on the procedures for participating in one of these intercollegiate programs. The only other mention of these programs was at Smith, where the tour guide mentioned that some professors rotate between campuses “as part of the colloquium program.”

Data on student use of cross-enrollment that was given by college representatives showed differences between institutions and their engagement with co-curricular opportunities. A Hampshire senior noted that students at his college “take advantage of cross-enrollment the most, by far.” Statistics given by the admissions representative who was co-facilitating the Hampshire session confirmed this. He explained that each Hampshire student takes an average of 7 courses at the other 4 colleges and that some take significantly more than that.

By contrast, Amherst’s assistant dean of admission noted that only about 50% of their students took a class off campus. She also conducted a guessing game with the parents and students in attendance to see how many classes they thought students would take on the other four campuses. Of the 13 people in the room, 10 ventured a guess at the answer, hypothesizing that the average student would take between 4 and 10 classes in the consortium. Only then did the admissions officer reveal that the average was actually 2.4 classes, joking that “our students come here [Amherst] for a reason!” She did point to the fact that more than 50% of Amherst students who do take a class on another campus tend to repeat the process, indicating that this was a confirmation of the positive nature of the experience.

Statistics about cross-registration were not always consistent. Another Amherst admission representative who presented later the same day mentioned that 50% of Amherst students take an average of 3-4 courses on other campuses. This painted a slightly different picture than her colleague. At Smith College, researchers also attended two information sessions led by different admissions representatives and received different data. In the morning session, the admissions officer noted that 50% of Smith students take a class in the consortium, though most take only 1. In the afternoon session, another admissions officer pointed to a higher rate of cross-enrollment, stating that 65-75% of students take courses at one of the other campuses, focusing on the ease of doing so and not mentioning that this was usually only a single course.

Given the primacy placed on these expanded curricular options in published materials, researchers were intrigued to find that the tour guides we met at Smith, Mount Holyoke, and Amherst had never taken a course on another campus. By contrast, during all three Hampshire tours we observed, student guides were enthusiastic about the opportunity to study on other campuses and talked at length about those classes and their benefits. When multiple guides on each of the other four campuses were asked about cross-enrollment, this experience and enthusiasm were absent. Two tour guides at UMass Amherst mentioned that they didn't have the time to take classes on other campuses. An Amherst College tour guide, by contrast, noted that she found everything she needed on her home campus and so she never felt the need to explore any of the others. This sentiment was echoed in a subsequent information session, in which the admissions representative noted how "most people find more [classes] than what they need here!"

## **Perception of Value**

In one of the information sessions, a Hampshire admission officer asserted, “I cannot overestimate how important the Five Colleges are... it is an essential part of the Hampshire education.” This school, founded by the other four member institutions, highlighted this importance both in the central role that the consortium played in discussions on campus tours, during info sessions, and in the enthusiasm they displayed as well.

However, not all of the member institutions described similar value. A guide at Mount Holyoke noted that she did not feel some of the campuses were academically comparable to hers, so she did not feel compelled to go elsewhere. She explained that Mount Holyoke, “is as academically rigorous as Amherst” and indicated that both institutions were academically superior to Smith. She explained, “Smith is more focused on writing and things, while [Mount Holyoke] is focused on science.” Another Mount Holyoke student who was informally interviewed explained that stereotypes about students at some of the schools prevent students from taking classes there. She mentioned that Hampshire courses, in particular, were perceived as less valuable and not always accepted for Mount Holyoke credit for this reason. Despite these comments, a third student tour guide described that approximately 75% of students took at least one class on another campus and that most of her classes included at least one “outside” student.

These perceptions of students on other campuses were a consistent theme in the discussion of shared academic opportunities. A Hampshire junior explained that she felt students at Mount Holyoke were “too stressed” and Amherst was “too conservative,” so she preferred to stay at her home institution. She also indicated that she found UMass too

large and overwhelming. By contrast, a guide at UMass Amherst described how he had taken two French classes at Amherst because the smaller classes offered a “different experience” than taking a similar course on her home campus.

### **School Stereotypes**

In the Amherst information session, an admissions representative echoed the importance of school culture, describing how “Hampshire has a creative flair; it is non-traditional” and joking how “you know you are at Hampshire when you see the llamas on the hill.” A Mount Holyoke guide also explained that Hampshire and Smith students tended to “hang together” and that there were “pairs and factions” within the consortium. This view was echoed by an Amherst information session in which one admissions representative called Hampshire students “wacky.”

In response to a parent question about campus safety, in light of the recent headlines about campus sexual assaults, an admission representative explained that Amherst’s campus was “comparably safe” and pointed to more significant issues at UMass, which she described as “huge” and said “they have a problem with drinking and fraternities.” She explained, that these students also experienced a bad reputation in the town because of their “antics.” In contrast, she elaborated, “Amherst students are very well thought of [in the community].”

Taken together, these stereotypes may represent potentially divisive aspects of the consortium that can impede full cross-campus collaboration. While each campus does indeed have a different school culture that it embraces, disparaging comments about other campuses in the consortium undermine the notion of genuine collaboration.

**Imbalance**

Based on our observations, it is clear that some campuses place greater emphasis on the benefits of the academic collaboration. While recruiting materials promise enhanced educational opportunities, actual use of these expanded options were not always either promoted or enjoyed. This situation was particularly notable with one student at UMass who was interviewed and had no idea that there was such a thing as the Five College Consortium, clearly indicating that this played no role in her undergraduate experience. In an interview with another UMass student, she explained that her home institution does not advertise or encourage students to take classes at the other schools.

**Conclusion – Academic Integration**

Overall, some references made on campuses and in published materials point to the significance of these expanded curricular options. Findings across campuses demonstrate that the Five Colleges, Inc. do meet the Academic Integration criteria for a Comprehensive Consortium as outlined in the taxonomy. However, individual schools benefit unevenly. While the opportunity for integration exists, not all schools make universal use of resources. This finding points to the importance of understanding the culture of the schools in the collaboration, including the stereotypes that may influence the perceived value of individual institutions and their contribution to the consortium.

**Shared Academic Resources**

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| (2) Shared Academic Resources | <p><b>Must</b> contain a joint library system</p> <p><b>May</b> contain at least one other shared academic facility (ex. Art museum, research lab)</p> <p><b>May</b> also contain shared equipment to facilitate academic research</p> |
|-------------------------------|--|

Five Colleges, Inc. meets the criteria for Shared Academic Resources with its joint library system, which is seen as a cornerstone of the collaboration. The fact that students have access to more than nine million books and periodicals was found in published materials and touted during campus visits. This statistic is prominently featured in *The Power of Five Colleges* brochure. It is also referenced in the *Five College Student Guide*, which promises: “Find 9 million books... on your laptop” and describes the single computer reference that allows students to summon a book from any of the other institutions in two days or less (p. 3).

Information about the library system was the single most consistent message across the visits at all five campuses. At Amherst, admission representatives in both information sessions pointed to the 1.4 million volumes on their campus and the expanded 9 million volume collection that was a benefit of the collaboration. One admissions officer described how “it is one click on the computer to get a book here!”

The importance of the joint library system was reinforced during the Amherst Campus tour that stopped at the Robert Frost Library. Pink and blue pamphlets were available at the entry describing how to access a range of materials from the other libraries. These documents, *Books from the Other Five College Libraries*, outline procedures for accessing books, periodicals, and DVDs. This pamphlet also describes how to pick up and return books without leaving the Amherst campus.

At Hampshire College, similar comments were made about the access to 9 million books of the consortium. In the information session, an admission officer explained that this collection makes the Five College Consortium Library System the third largest in the country and referenced the fact that no single small school could offer such an extensive

resource collection. During one Hampshire campus tour, a guide pointed to a distant mountain, asserting that the bulk of the library collection was so large that it had to be housed underground.<sup>1</sup>

The nine million number was quoted at Smith as well, with one tour guide remarking how “if there’s not a book here, you just request it and it is delivered right to Smith!” Mt. Holyoke’s tour guide similarly asserted that, “the main asset of the collaboration is the library and its nine million books and periodicals.” Finally, at UMass Amherst, the consortium library was the only reference to the collaboration made during an info session and tour attended by one of the researchers. On this tour, two guides joked that they could not even find their way to Smith College, but when one needed a book from the Smith Library, it simply arrived the next day.

### **Conclusion – Shared Academic Resources**

Findings from the campus visits demonstrate that the Five Colleges, Inc. do meet the Shared Academic Resource criteria for a Comprehensive Consortium as outlined in the taxonomy. Consistent messages about this resource dominated the campus tours and were experienced by each of the three researchers as one of the key narratives about the collaboration across all five schools. This finding supports the conclusion that this shared academic resource is a successful element of the Five College collaboration.

No mention was made of other shared academic facilities or equipment to facilitate academic research during the campus visits. These items are part of the original taxonomy because their importance was documented in the literature and described in the

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the old military bunker located beneath this mountain does indeed contain the book repository for the Five Colleges was confirmed on the Five College Depository page (2012) of the Five College, Inc. website

2011 report. However, these are not required elements of this dimension of the taxonomy; the fact that the information sessions and tours did not highlight these aspects of the collaboration does not undermine the depth of engagement in this category.

**Logistical Support – Academic**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| (3) Logistical Support Services (Academic) | <p><i>Must</i> operate a consolidated database of courses offered at the member institutions</p> <p><i>Must</i> have a protocol for cross-registration</p> <p><i>Must</i> offer full transfer of credits among institutions <i>and</i> grades must appear on the home institution transcript</p> <p><i>Must</i> make efforts to synchronize calendars</p> |
|--|---|

Five Colleges, Inc. meets the criteria for Shared Academic Resources with its consolidated course database, clear cross-registration procedures, a policy to address credit transfer, and a synchronized calendar. Despite meeting all criteria of the taxonomy, impediments to course enrollment, regulations that limit credit transfer at some institutions, and dissonant grading policies impede full execution of this category.

**Consolidated Course Database**

Multiple students and admissions representatives referenced the existence of a consolidated online course database that was accessible to all Five College students. Only one Hampshire tour guide elaborated on this point, explaining how “I don’t even think about campuses any more, I just put in a keyword to find the course I need!” His comment highlights the ease of using this consolidated course database.

## Cross-Registration Protocol

Cross registration was described as being “easy” by students at all four colleges. However, discussions with students and attendance at information sessions revealed an added obstacle to this aspect of tertiary collaboration. While the actual process is not hard, finding available space in classes offered on other campuses appears to be a potential impediment to accessing these academic resources.

One Mount Holyoke tour guide explained that home campus students have priority and that “5C students can join only when seats are available.” An Amherst admission officer similarly explained that, “there are 3 seats in every Amherst class for 5C students,” though one Amherst tour guide (a Junior) said that she could not remember being in any course at Amherst with any 5C students. To address this issue, an acknowledgement was added to the revised taxonomy (Figure 3) that spaces for cross-registrants *must* be available so that the collaboration is not in name only.

Further, in the original taxonomy, I did not include a specific criterion that cross-enrollment be free of charge. After the campus visits, all three researchers realized that this information was an important detail that was overlooked. The fact that there is no additional cost involved with cross-registration is highlighted on the front page of the *Five College Student Guide* (2008), which proclaims “The Interchange: 5,000 course out there, AND THEY’RE ALL FREE.” This opportunity was also mentioned by an Amherst admissions officer when she first introduced the collaboration to prospective students and their parents. Several parents asked questions about associated costs for cross-registration during information sessions, supporting the idea that this is an important element. To reflect this finding, I have added this criterion to the revised taxonomy (Table 3).

## **Credit Transfer Among Institutions**

An additional issue was noted with Logistical Supports (Academic): individual school-based policies, such as Smith’s regulation that at least half of all classes must be taken on the Smith campus, including semester abroad credits. Smith’s admission officer also explained that there are pre-approved courses that students can take within the Five College system and that procedures need to be followed to ensure that you will get credit. Mount Holyoke also puts limits on which courses it will accept for credit. One student who was interviewed described how, “Mount Holyoke considers itself the most scientific, so it does not easily accept courses from other schools.”

At Amherst, one parent asked about procedures regarding cross-enrollment and was told that there are sometimes pre-requisites for classes on other campuses and that students “need to do their research in advance,” suggesting an additional impediment to using the academic resources of the consortium. Since automatic transfer of credit between institutions was a potential impediment to cross-registration, the requirement on the taxonomy that schools “*Must* offer full transfer of credits” was changed to “*Must* provide clear information about credit transfer and eligibility” on the revised taxonomy (Table 3). As long as these requirements are explicit they should not impede access to shared academic resources. Further, the ability of individual institutions to determine which courses meet their academic threshold is important to their autonomy.

## **Grades**

The topic of grades brought up one unexpected issue of misalignment that surfaced in this study. Hampshire College does not give letter grades, while the other four

schools in the collaboration work on a traditional 4.0 grading scale. To compensate for this discrepancy, schools have had to create specific rules for credit transfer. Smith will only give credit for a Hampshire course if the student is issued a letter grade while Mount Holyoke will only accept credit from a pre-approved list of Hampshire courses.

Hampshire students who take classes at the other four schools do get letter grades on their transcripts and one student tour guide explained that this can be “kind of confusing for grad schools and things later.” He subsequently explained how he and his peers could use this to their advantage, taking courses at Amherst to “get an Amherst A!” As he explained, “med schools know what that means, so you want to show them, see... I can get an A at Amherst. So they know what you can do.” However, he also acknowledged that he preferred the Hampshire method of narrative feedback and that letter grades don’t personally mean anything to him. He recognized that gaming the system to his advantage may help him down the road.

Another student, also from Hampshire College, found another way to use the consortium to access traditional grading methods. She described how she cross-registered for a math class at Mount Holyoke because she didn’t think math could be accurately judged by the narrative feedback given at Hampshire.

### **Synchronized Calendar**

Having a shared academic calendar is described as a key aspect of the logistical facilitation of the collaboration. Both Amherst and Smith admissions officers mentioned that syncing school schedules was noted as a recent and important success.

## Conclusion – Logistical Support Academic

While most of the criteria of the Logistical Support Services (Academic) are met at the Five Colleges, not all areas are seamlessly integrated into the policies and procedures of the collaboration.

Evaluation of this category highlights that it is not only the existence of logistical support services for academics that is important. It is also important that these supports be consistent, clear, and easy to navigate. At the present time, there are some limitations to the support services that are offered to students.

Additions were made to the taxonomy to account for the nuances of supporting students who want to access the shared academic resources of the consortium. With these modifications, the taxonomy more clearly addresses the policy-based obstacles that can impede an otherwise functional cross-registration system.

## Logistical Support Services – Student Life

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|--|---|
| (4) Logistical Support Services (Student Life) | <p><b>Must</b> offer free shuttle service that provides full access to academic and extra-curricular options (if necessary due to distance)</p> <p><b>Must</b> offer dining options on multiple campuses (though this may be limited to certain hours or dining facilities)</p> <p><b>May</b> also offer joint services and facilities (ex. health center, campus mail)</p> <p><u>At least one</u> member institution <b>must</b> be involved in overseeing these operations.</p> |
|--|---|

Five Colleges, Inc. only partly meets the criteria for Logistical Support Services – Student Life. While the schools do have both required criteria from the taxonomy, a free shuttle and dining options, both have execution issues potentially impede student access.

## **Shuttle Service**

As noted in the taxonomy (2011), a tertiary collaboration “*Must* offer free shuttle service that provides full access to academic and extra-curricular options (if necessary due to distance).” The Five College transportation system is completely free to students, faculty, and staff, which was noted by admissions officers at Amherst, Hampshire, and Smith. At Amherst, one tour guide proudly explained that they operate “the largest free bus system in the USA – Bigger than Disney!” Two of the researchers used the bus system extensively during both trips and found them to be centrally located, easy to use, and a convenient way to travel from school to school.

During an information session at Amherst, one admission officer explained that the furthest campus was Mount Holyoke, 10 miles away, and easily accessible by bus or bike. She also mentioned that some students would walk, weather permitting. A Hampshire tour guide later pointed out that Zip Cars are available for students who don’t have a car on campus. In the words of one Amherst tour guide, “you’re never stranded anywhere for more than thirty minutes!”

While the bus system and class schedules are closely aligned, timing of courses and duration of travel are described as a consideration for students. As noted in an interview with a transportation officer, the schools align their schedules to the busses, not the other way around. At Hampshire, one tour guide explained that the only limit he had to taking classes on other campuses was the “space-time continuum” so he knew to pay attention to the shuttle schedule when selecting courses. Another tour guide at Hampshire offered an example of a student whose professor gave her permission to arrive late for

class due to a slight misalignment in the bus and class schedules as a demonstration of how little transportation impedes access.

Hampshire is a main transportation hub, described by a bus driver as offering transportation to every campus at least every 30 minutes. A Hampshire tour guide excitedly explained this fact as well, while a Mount Holyoke guide lamented over this structural feature. The fact that other campuses experience some obstacles with transportation due to location and transit lines is notable. As explained by both a student at Mount Holyoke and a tour guide, theirs is the most difficult campus to reach and transportation between Mount Holyoke and Smith had been notoriously challenging. Another Mount Holyoke student described the dreaded “bus gymnastics” involved in cross-registration and explained that this factor led her to stay on her home campus. A third Mount Holyoke student similarly explained that, “while the bus system is good, you have to be organized” and also noted that busses don’t run to their campus late at night, limiting access to off campus events, especially parties and concerts.

In information sessions at both Smith and Hampshire, admissions officers explained that a new shuttle bus had been added to go directly between the two campuses in only 20 minutes. The Mount Holyoke representative explained that the new bus means “you don’t have to make all the stops like before.” One researcher took this trip, via the small 12-seat bus, and it took 28 minutes from one campus to the other due to traffic. Students on the bus, who said they regularly traveled on the bus, were unphased by the delay. In fact, they all seemed to relish the ride together and engaged in a boisterous conversation about dating.

However, one student on the shuttle between Smith and Mount Holyoke also described the need to factor in wait time, travel time, and then the return trip when picking a class on another campus. One exclaimed, “I mean, it has to *really* be worth it! Half your [school] day is eaten up.” In contrast, a tour guide at UMass Amherst explained that “you never really *need* to leave campus” so transportation was not an issue for her.

### **Dining Options**

Dining options are also important and are included as a requirement for meeting the criteria of a Comprehensive Consortium. While the *Five College Student Guide* (2008) explains that “[i]f you’re on the meal plan at your home campus, you can eat on another campus for free.” However, they also explain that to do so, you have to get a meal pass from your school’s dining services office for each off-campus meal. The fact that these passes are only available for students taking courses on the other campuses is a limiting factor.

Students enrolled in cross-campus extra-curricular activities or who choose to stay on another campus to use academic facilities beyond their class end time have to purchase a meal on campus or in a local restaurant. A Smith student criticized the fact that she often had to buy meals elsewhere, which “is dumb, since I already pay for a meal plan, but just can’t get back before [the Smith dining hall] closes.”

When one Mount Holyoke tour guide was asked about how to dine on other campuses, she was unaware of the rules and suggested that the researcher ask at the office. A parent asked a similar question during an Amherst information session and was

told that, “as long as it corresponds to when a student is there for class and they [*sic*] get approval,” he or she could dine for no additional fee.

**Conclusion – Logistic Support Services – Student Life**

The criteria for Logistical Support Services (Campus Life) are only partially met at the Five Colleges. This fact confirms one significant finding from earlier interview-based research of The Good Collaboration Study: logistical operations can significantly hinder the successful execution of any collaborative mission.

The research visits to Western Massachusetts confirmed the key significance of two key logistical issues that can impede student use of the collaboration: transportation and dining. Despite having an extensive transportation system, the distance between some of the campuses and the schedule do offer some obstacles to full execution of this kind of logistical support. The rules surrounding eating meals at other campuses are similarly unsupportive of the goals of the collaboration.

**Integrated Campus Life**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| (5) Integrated Campus Life | <p><b>Must</b> offer <u>at least 3</u> of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- combined extra-curricular groups</li> <li>- joint student council</li> <li>- shared intramural sports</li> <li>- joint publications (ex. student paper)</li> <li>- shared calendar showcasing events and performances on multiple campuses</li> </ul> |
|----------------------------|---|

While aspects of integrated student life (a joint student council, shared intramural sports, and joint publications) were documented in recent school publications, they were not extensively referenced during information sessions and tours. Administrators and students both focused on more informal benefits of the collaboration instead. An Amherst

admission officer explained that one benefit of the consortium is that it widens students' social circles. She also described how it was helpful to have the other campuses because "if you don't find something to do [at Amherst], you have the other four schools to look at. You will *always* find something!" She also described how there is "so much going on that you won't feel like you are in the boonies!" To capture this dimension, "expanded social network" was added to the list of possible characteristics on the revised taxonomy (Table 3).

This expanded social network, however, varied by campus. With two single-sex campuses, it is not surprising that there were multiple references to gender issues in campus life during both visits. One Amherst admission officer joked, "Visits to Smith and Mount Holyoke [parties] are very popular with male students... we don't know why!" A Mount Holyoke guide described this as well, explaining that "if there are parties on campus, no girls come to [Mount Holyoke]... only guys." This unidirectional flow of students was remarkable to researchers, though not further addressed on the campuses.

### **Combined Extra Curricular Activities**

A Smith student explained how "everyone uses [the consortium] in some fashion – classes, lectures, friends, parties, concerts." The draw of the 30,000 students in the area was also mentioned by Amherst's assistant dean of admission explained that the density of students from all five colleges "brings big name [performers] we couldn't get otherwise." Both of these comments point to the importance of enhanced extra curricular offerings for students in the region.

Joint extra curricular activities were discussed during the visits as well. At Amherst, a tour guide explained that open auditions for Five College theater groups are a popular way for students to use the consortium. A Smith tour guide described how “if you want to take tango at Mount Holyoke, you can! People join music and theatre groups [on other campuses].” Noted one Hampshire student, “the only thing you can’t do are play division sports or live in another school’s dorm – otherwise it’s open!”

### **Shared Calendar Showcasing Events and Performances on Multiple Campuses**

While a shared calendar does exist online, most students describe getting their information about events from flyers posted around campus, e-mail lists, or word-of-mouth. Each of the three researchers actively looked for flyers on all five campuses that advertised joint activities and presentations. They were missing from most bulletin boards, which almost exclusively focused on events that were from the campus where they were posted. Only a few flyers either referring to events on other campuses or branded as Five College activities were documented during both trips. More research is needed to determine if other messages about shared activities are communicated to students. If these messages are present, it is important to document how and where the event information is shared among students.

Future research with students, faculty, and administrators could include surveys or small group discussions to find out more about how students use social media, shared ListServes, and e-mail blasts to connect across campuses. This exploration may also shed light on the fact that many print materials about the collaboration are out-of-date, including a 2008 newsletter about the consortium that was collected from the daily

newspaper display at Amherst College’s Frost Library. I added this category to the taxonomy for potential exploration.

**Conclusion – Integrated Campus Life**

While the Five College Consortium meets the requirements for Integrated Campus Life, full integration is hampered by the fact that information is not as accessible across institutions. This lack of information may keep some students from fully accessing the social benefits of the collaboration. Further exploration of online communication is needed to further evaluate this component of the taxonomy.

**Organization**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| (6) Organization | <p><i>Must be</i> run by <i>either</i> a Board of Directors/Trustees <i>or</i> have <u>at least one</u> joint operations committee</p> <p><i>May be</i> incorporated as a non-profit organization</p> <p><i>May</i> also have a shared operating budget</p> |
|------------------|---|

This category was not evaluated during the campus visits, as it was not relevant to the information provided by representatives of the schools and their enrolled students.

**Revised Taxonomy**

Based on the analysis above, I made minor changes and additions to the original taxonomy (Appendix A). These enhancements make the tool more effective for subsequent analysis of tertiary collaborations. Findings revealed that issues of access – to courses, to other campuses, and to information – was significant to fostering successful collaboration. My revisions to the taxonomy (Figure 3) reflect these conclusions.

|  | <b>Comprehensive Consortia (CC)</b><br><i>Must meet criteria from <u>all 6</u> categories</i>  |
|--|--|
| (1) Academic Integration                       | <p><b>Must</b> contain <u>2 or more</u> of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expanded curricular options <b>at no additional charge</b></li> <li>- joint programs/certificates</li> <li>- intercollegiate departments</li> </ul> <p><b>Access to these courses <i>must</i> be preserved (i.e. by reserving a set number of seats for students from other campuses)</b></p>   |
| (2) Shared Academic Resources                  | <p><b>Must</b> contain a joint library system</p> <p><b>May</b> contain at least one other shared academic facility (ex. Art museum, research lab)</p> <p><b>May</b> also contain shared equipment to facilitate academic research</p>   |
| (3) Logistical Support Services (Academic)     | <p><b>Must</b> operate a consolidated database of courses offered at the member institutions and courses <b>must be free of charge to students</b></p> <p><b>Must</b> have a protocol for cross-registration <b>that ensures access/reserves seats for students from other campuses</b></p> <p><b>Must</b> provide clear information about credit transfer and eligibility among institutions <b>and</b> grades must appear on the home transcript</p> <p><b>Must</b> make efforts to synchronize calendars</p>  |
| (4) Logistical Support Services (Student Life) | <p><b>Must</b> offer free shuttle service that provides full access to academic and extra-curricular options <b>in a timely manner</b> (if necessary due to distance)</p> <p><b>Must</b> offer <b>free</b> dining options on multiple campuses <b>for students with a meal plan</b> (though this may be limited to certain hours or dining facilities)</p> <p><b>May</b> also offer joint services and facilities (ex. health center, campus mail)</p> <p><u>At least one</u> member institution <b>must</b> be involved in overseeing these operations.</p> |
| (5) Integrated Campus Life                     | <p><b>Must</b> offer <u>at least 3</u> of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>expanded social network</b></li> <li>- combined extra-curricular groups</li> <li>- joint student council</li> <li>- shared intramural sports</li> <li>- joint publications (ex. student paper)</li> </ul> <p><b>Must</b> offer information about activities on different campuses that is <b>accessible to students (posted flyers or via social media)</b></p>   |
| (6) Organization                               | <p><b>Must be</b> run by <i>either</i> a Board of Directors/Trustees <i>or</i> have <u>at least one</u> joint operations committee</p> <p><b>May be</b> incorporated as a non-profit organization</p> <p><b>May</b> also have a shared operating budget</p>  |

**Table 3: Revised Features of Comprehensive Consortia (additions in red)**

## Depth of Integration

A subsequent analysis using the Depth Index revealed that, though well-established, highly-functional and successful, there are some limitations to this collaboration (Table 4). Logistical issues are not fully addressed across the five campuses and integrated campus life is not as robust as it could be due to this lack of information. The main issues preventing full integration are due to issues of access: to courses, to information about shared events, and to other campus facilities. A secondary issue, not captured by the taxonomy, is the role of campus perception and student stereotypes. These nuanced elements could only be discerned by on campus visits and discussions with administrators and enrolled students. Stereotypes not only influence social engagement among students from different campuses; but they also underlie important decisions about which off campus classes are valuable.

|  | Fully Realized | Partially Executed | Significantly Limited or Non-Existent |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (1) Academic Integration                       |                |                    |                                       |
| (2) Shared Academic Resources                  |                |                    |                                       |
| (3) Logistical Support Services (Academic)     |                |                    |                                       |
| (4) Logistical Support Services (Student Life) |                |                    |                                       |
| (5) Integrated Campus Life                     |                |                    |                                       |

**Table 4: Index for evaluating the depth of the Five College Consortium (MA)**

## **Limitations**

As a preliminary test of the taxonomy, this study includes the observations of three researchers over two days of campus visits. Further observations over a longer period of time, during different points during the semester, and among different groups of students would have been beneficial to the research team.

As noted, the information gathered from informal conversations with students and employees of the Five Colleges, Inc. contain important insights. Elements of the taxonomy could be further evaluated through formal interviews conducted with students, faculty, and administrators across the five campuses. Further, interviews with consortium leaders and members of the Five College Board of Directors could provide important additional information about meta-level issues facing the collaboration that may not be known to members of individual campuses.<sup>2</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By spending time visiting the campuses that are part of the Five College Collaboration, researchers were able to observe the real world implications of each dimension in the original taxonomy. Attendance at information sessions and campus tours, offered by each college's admissions office, provided additional insight into how each college viewed the importance of these relationships and described the benefits of the consortium for prospective students.

The combined observations of the research team were used to modify the existing taxonomy (Table 3). Further, these campus visits revealed that the depth of integration

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<sup>2</sup> The research team attempted to contact the Executive Director of the Five College Collaboration to facilitate this kind of exploration. He did not respond to either of our requests.

for each category was not captured in the original instrument. To examine the robustness of the relationships across the collaboration, a Depth Index (Table 4) was added.

The revised taxonomy, along with the new depth index, can be further applied and tested as we strive to understand the nuances that lead to successful collaboration among tertiary institutions. These tools are also intended to be useful to administrators who seek either to create or refine existing collaborative relationships with local colleges and universities.

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## Resources

*Books from other Five-College libraries.* [Brochure]. (n.d.) Amherst, MA: Five Colleges, Inc.

Five Colleges, Inc. (2012). *Five College Library Depository*. Retrieved from <https://www.fivecolleges.edu/libraries/depository>

Five Colleges, Inc. (2012). *The Consortium: Mission*. Retrieved from <https://www.fivecolleges.edu/consortium/mission>

*Five College student guide* [Brochure]. (2008) Amherst, MA: Five Colleges, Inc.

Redding, A.B. (August 2011). Collaborations among tertiary institutions: State of the art (Good Work Project Report Series No. 75). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Project Zero.

*The power of the Five Colleges* [Brochure]. (n.d.) Amherst, MA: Five Colleges, Inc.

## Appendix A

|  | <b>Comprehensive Consortia (CC)</b><br><i>Must meet criteria from <u>all 6</u> categories</i>  | <b>Focused Collaborations (FC)</b><br><i>Must meet criteria from <u>at least 2</u> categories</i>  |
|--|--|--|
| (1) Academic Integration                       | <b>Must</b> contain <u>2 or more</u> of the following:<br>- expanded curricular options<br>- joint programs/certificates<br>- intercollegiate departments  | <b>May</b> contain some elements of academic integration, but not required   |
| (2) Shared Academic Resources                  | <b>Must</b> contain a joint library system<br><br><b>May</b> contain at least one other shared academic facility<br>(ex. Art museum, research lab)<br><br><b>May</b> also contain shared equipment to facilitate academic research   | <b>May</b> contain a joint library system, shared academic facility, and/or equipment that facilitates academic research, but not required   |
| (3) Logistical Support Services (Academic)     | <b>Must</b> operate a consolidated database of courses offered at the member institutions<br><br><b>Must</b> have a protocol for cross-registration<br><br><b>Must</b> offer full transfer of credits among institutions <b>and</b> grades must appear on the home institution transcript<br><br><b>Must</b> make efforts to synchronize calendars   | <b>May</b> operate some logistical support services, but not required  |
| (4) Logistical Support Services (Student Life) | <b>Must</b> offer free shuttle service that provides full access to academic and extra-curricular options (if necessary due to distance)<br><br><b>Must</b> offer dining options on multiple campuses (though this may be limited to certain hours or dining facilities)<br><br><b>May</b> also offer joint services and facilities (ex. health center, campus mail)<br><br><u>At least one</u> member institution <b>must</b> be involved in overseeing these operations. | Transportation is: (1) not required for use of the consortium, (2) outsourced to another company, or (3) arranged by students, at their expense                                    |
| (5) Integrated Campus Life                     | <b>Must</b> offer at least <u>3</u> of the following:<br>- combined extra-curricular groups<br>- joint student council<br>- shared intramural sports<br>- joint publications (ex. student paper)<br>- shared calendar showcasing events and performances on multiple campuses  | <b>May</b> offer some elements of integrated campus life, but not required.  |
| (6) Organization                               | <b>Must be</b> run by <i>either</i> a Board of Directors/Trustees <b>or</b> have <u>at least one</u> joint operations committee<br><br><b>May be</b> incorporated as a non-profit organization<br><br><b>May</b> also have a shared operating budget   | <b>Is not</b> run by a Board and has no joint operations committee<br><br><b>Is not</b> incorporated as a non-profit organization<br><br><b>May</b> have a shared operating budget |

### Original Taxonomy - Features of Comprehensive Consortia versus Focused Collaborations

## Appendix B

| <b>Name of Consortium</b>           | <b>Region</b> | <b># of Member Institutions</b> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Claremont University Consortium     | Pacific       | 7                               |
| Five Colleges, Incorporated         | Northeast     | 5                               |
| Bi-College Consortium               | Mid-Atlantic  | 2                               |
| The Colleges of the Fenway          | Northeast     | 6                               |
| Tri-College Consortium              | Mid-Atlantic  | 3                               |
| Five Colleges of Ohio, Incorporated | Mid-West      | 5                               |
| Quaker Consortium                   | Mid-Atlantic  | 4                               |

### Consortial Relationships Explored in the 2011 Paper