I believe it was leadership to a large extent — if we’re talking about the earliest days, in the 60s — it was strong support from the presidents that got cooperation going — Cal Plimpton, Gettel, Mendenhall, Lederle, and later Patterson — all of them saw a new era was coming and knew that not all institutions would be able to cope with the knowledge explosion, and weren’t going to be able to expand their curriculum and student body the way larger places could, so they looked to each other for help. Certainly the joint astronomy department was a product of that period when Sputnik came on the scene. There were only four institutions of course in those days. They also banded together to get money from Ford to expand their Asian and African curriculum — remember, there was very little of non-Western, non-European cultures in the curriculum at that time (1958) — and they hoped to get money for faculty to retrain themselves. I also think they felt that it didn’t make much sense for them to sit here this close together and not use each other, not develop some things jointly. Oh, they had been doing a little of it informally — there’d already been a trickle of interchange — nothing to require hard and fast policies — but the real motivation came from the knowledge explosion at that time and a realization that we all needed to face it together. Back then, however, there weren’t many faculty into this way of thinking at all.

the monorail

Then came the leadership of North Burn, aided by the interest of the students. In those days, before co-education at Amherst, students wanted to travel, to interact, and they wanted transportation to help them do it. The Student Coordinating Board eventually took on transportation as one of its major projects, as did North. But he was prepared to look beyond a bus system to link the campuses. From time to time, he even talked about installing some kind of monorail — which seems not so far fetched to me now each time I cross the Coolidge Bridge on Friday afternoons.

Cooperation really began to move forward in earnest with the founding of Hampshire in 1965. The fact that there was going to be a new college, an experimental college, that the others were going to be involved with was an intriguing idea that rooted its way about the campuses. Of course there was a certain amount of anxiety in some quarters: some faculty thought it was a fine idea, others thought it was a ruse, a way of increasing the number of students without increasing the faculty — because Hampshire students were to take courses at the other campuses. So there was some grumbling that this would mean an additional burden for faculty. Yes, there were different perspectives on it.

five college charter flights

People remember the incorporation in 1965 differently, too. Oh, there were perfectly good reasons to formalize the cooperative enterprise, among them the fact that a new college was about to open. But one of the real driving forces behind the move to incorporate — the most immediate motivation — was to provide legal coverage for Five College charter flights that had become a popular idea at the time. Ironically enough, once Five
Colleges, Incorporated came into existence people seemed to lose interest in the charter flights.

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Even after the incorporation, for many years people equated Five College cooperation with Hampshire. In the late 60s, Five Colleges had offices in Blair Hall next to the Red Barn at Hampshire College. But even those who didn’t know my office was at Hampshire identified Five Colleges with Hampshire. People I’d known for many years would say, “Oh, you’re with Hampshire now.” And I would have to explain, “No, I’m with all five colleges.” They didn’t understand what that was of course.

**a whole new era…**

North Burn had arrived in 1967, full of energy, just two years before me. He set out to initiate a whole new era in cooperation. One of the first things he did was to get the presidents to agree to a long range planning committee, a blue ribbon committee. They met and deliberated for over a year on the whole gamut of opportunities for cooperation in everything from interchange to museums, and produced in 1969 the first long-range planning report, which recommended — among other things — the creation of the position that I was subsequently hired to fill. And they established from the outset a kind of infrastructure for cooperation. Before that, North had been working only with a group of presidential deputies. That first long-range planning committee took a number of critical steps: first, it recommended enlarging the role of the deputies enormously by creating an Academic Policy Advisory Council (APAC). And it also helped form a number of interdisciplinary councils charged with coordinating offerings in their fields. The membership of APAC included a presidential deputy plus a member of each academic policy committee, along with a student from each institution.

**miracles**

You might say that the imminent opening of Hampshire had really gelled a whole bunch of ideas about cooperation: it made imperative, for instance, that we have common calendars. So the APAC began tackling problems like the 4-1-4 calendar. The council worked hard to get that approved through each of the institutions. It was a major achievement — in fact, when I look back on it now, I don’t see how we did it. You might describe that event in 1970-71 as a kind of miracle. Doing away with the financial accounting for interchange was a similar kind of miracle. And both were brought about in large part by the opening of Hampshire College in 1970. The council also sorted out things like a grading system and arrangements for Five College joint appointees (by 1972-73 we had our first joint appointments). APAC continued to function as an interinstitutionalized policy group for almost a decade, until it became superfluous in the late 1970s with the emergence of the Five College Deans’ Council.

**imbroglio…**

One of the most difficult Five College meetings I’ve ever had occurred in this same period, the early part of the 70s — it was either 1970 or 71. One of my earliest responsibilities was chairing a planning committee for a Five College bridge program, which had one or two reps from each school. I remember that we were meeting at Hampshire in the Blair Hall conference room, around that big table. At one point in the discussion, emotions began to build and a member of the Hampshire administration and a graduate student from the University, who were seated at opposite ends of the table, got up onto the table and started towards each other. I don’t remember the specific point of the quarrel now, but they became very angry indeed and were at each other’s throats. It took a very large voice, standing up, on my part in order to keep them from fisticuffs. I guess my voice was big enough because they didn’t come to blows, but we never did get a Five College proposal out of the Valley — we simply couldn’t get enough agreement.

**breakthroughs**

People sometimes ask me about the great dramatic moments in the development of Five College cooperation — breakthroughs — but mostly it’s been an inch-by-inch process. In my own faculty groups, it seemed to me that every time I thought I had a breakthrough, it turned out not to be a breakthrough. In fact, I thought I had breakthroughs at three different times with one group. Once I even pulled out all the stops and took them off to the Hotel Northampton for a retreat to plan a Five College major. The upshot of that meeting was that they came up with a Five College major that was different at each campus!

**the warm-up**

Two things — apart from calendars and transportation — pervade our whole early history: finding a home for Five Colleges and finding ways to serve people lunches and dinners. After Hampshire opened in 1970, they needed space of course, since they had so few buildings, so we had to shop around for a new office to house the staff. The Deans, North, and I toured a number of old farmhouses and for a time even considered building a place on Hampshire land. Then, as an interim solution, Amherst gave us space on the ground floor of White Homestead, where their Admission office is located today. In those days the building was scheduled for major renovation, but we moved in anyway in the fall of 1972, expecting to stay for three or four months. We ended up “baching” there for nine years. Everything was done rather ad hoc: one of the two secretaries used to stop by the Miss Flo Diner on her way to work and pick up sandwiches for the day’s meetings. The energy crunch followed soon after we moved in, so everyone was very energy conscious. Amherst was waiting for a report from its energy committee before undertaking renovations to the building, but in the meanwhile our offices were extremely drafty and cold. Our repeated calls for someone to come by to look at the furnace produced polite interest but no heat. One particularly cold day when North was away and the five physical plant directors were coming in for a meeting, the secretaries and I conspired to put them in one of our offices instead of the big sunlit room where they usually met. You could see your breath in that office — and we met there for a full hour-and-a-half! This was definitely one of the coldest meetings I’ve ever endured. A few hours after the meeting broke up — energy crisis or no energy crisis — someone from physical plant came by to adjust the furnace. When North returned to a toasty warm office, we just explained that sometimes cooperation moves in mysterious ways.