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Among those early collaborations were the following:

- The campuses began allowing students to cross-register for courses in the 1930s; in 2014–15 students took more than 5,200 courses on other campuses.
- The first shared faculty member was hired in 1948 in economics; in 2014–15 we recruited our newest joint appointees—Felicity Aulino (in medical anthropology), Jean Jaminet (in architectural studies) and Conor Peterson (in art and technology)—to join 35 other continuing joint appointees in fall 2015.
- The Hampshire Inter-Library Center opened in 1951, providing a framework for sharing subscriptions and collections and giving students full access to the libraries on all four campuses; the number of print volumes available in the consortium libraries now totals some 12 million, with millions of additional electronic files also accessible.
- The inter-campus bus system was born in 1961 with the campuses operating a limo, a station wagon and a couple of vans; in 2014–15 the Five College bus system operated by the regional transit authority provided 1 million rides.
- Not every initiative continues—the radio program the campuses created in the 1920s as a distance learning experiment lasted only a year or so—but the many that do remain remind us of the strength and endurance of our campuses’ commitments to improving the lives and educations of their students through collaboration.

With energy, persistence, innovation and flexibility, our consortium is well positioned for continued success for at least the next 50 years.

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Neal B. Abraham
Executive Director

Reflections on the Year

Clockwise from top left: Five College Bus riders, 2014; Four College Bus riders, circa 1964; The Hampshire College library, 2015.
Each year the campuses jointly pursue new opportunities for accomplishment. They may be exploring potential programs or developing events to celebrate achievements in research or the performing arts.

Some of the most exciting initiatives undertaken during the past year are being funded by 10 grants totaling more than $3 million. Of that, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has given $2 million to fund innovations in language teaching. This effort is sweeping in its scope, covering faculty fellowships, curriculum development, enhanced use of technology and video conferencing, and expanded presence in many languages.

Included among the consortium’s other grants are funds to expand emergency preparedness capacity, promote peace education between the United States and Japan and hold a summer institute on Native Americans of New England.

This year also saw events that come around only once every few years, such as the Five College Choral Festival, which culminates in hundreds of student voices joining together in one song, and the Jazz Festival, featuring a dozen bands from the campuses and beyond.

Whatever each year’s accomplishments bring, they continue to keep the consortium relevant and engaged with the campus communities it represents.
Cooperation to develop economic sustainability within Five Colleges takes several forms. It helps our campuses carry out existing endeavors less expensively, expands programs without increasing costs and makes affordable opportunities that had been beyond reach. Examples of each are easy to find.

Compliance and risk management, through which the four college campuses share efforts in claims administration, loss prevention, risk management and insurance, has saved more than $20 million over the past 20 years.

Hiring full-time professors to teach courses in new disciplines can be beyond the financial grasp of a campus. Thanks to the consortium’s Joint Faculty and Faculty Exchange programs, 80 professors taught 160 courses on multiple campuses last year, allowing the campuses to expand their curricula at an affordable cost.

By pooling their online collections into a single database, our campus museums have created a collection of tens of thousands of digitized objects, vastly expanding research opportunities without increasing costs to the museums.
Many Five College efforts evolve to improve the educational experiences of people on our member campuses and beyond. In some cases, the efforts themselves have not evolved but our perspectives of them have, and we have learned to look at long-standing opportunities differently, developing a better understanding of their value.

For example, our campuses began allowing cross-registration of courses decades before the consortium was incorporated, and the big numbers we track are impressive: more than 5,000 courses are now taken each year by students going to other campuses. But there are smaller numbers that are impressive as well, such as 42. That’s the percentage by which Amherst College’s course offerings were expanded by its students taking advantage of courses at the other four campuses last year.

Some numbers, impressive in themselves, become astounding when we consider their broader impact. Three Five College initiatives—Museums10, the Schools Partnership and the Center for East Asian Studies—saw a total of nearly 900 K–12 educators take advantage of offerings ranging from two-hour webinars to semester-long professional learning communities. Add to that the thousands of students with whom these educators interact, and we begin to grasp the impact of such efforts.

Other numbers prove to be beyond our ability to tally, such as the number of students who go to other campuses to join clubs, use the libraries, meet new friends and in general enrich their higher education experiences. But enrichment, almost by definition, is often beyond our ability to quantify. It’s something we have to experience to fully appreciate.
Pooling efforts while sharing costs can create a fertile environment for trying new ideas. Even before the consortium was formed, our campuses collaborated on new ideas—offering course instruction over the radio in 1922, drafting a blueprint for a new college in 1958. Notable innovations over the past year pushed the digital limits in research and teaching.

Take the Blended Learning Initiative. With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Teagle Foundation, Five Colleges has brought together faculty and staff members to create courses that combine face-to-face interaction with self-paced, online learning that can occur outside the classroom. We support those courses with project funding and technical assistance.

In 2011 Five Colleges launched a Mellon Foundation–funded effort to encourage projects and initiatives in the “digital humanities”—a term used to describe scholars integrating technology into their research. Over the past year, in addition to supporting new research efforts, the consortium’s Digital Humanities Program also emphasized helping researchers develop assessment methods for their efforts.

As with Blended Learning and Digital Humanities, the Five College Bridging Initiative in the Public and Applied Humanities has become an established program that each semester yields innovative approaches to education. Over the past year, 19 courses were taught through the initiative across the five campuses, linking undergraduate work in the liberal arts with graduate and professional work at UMass.