Building Five College Identity and Community
Working Group Report
May 14, 2010

Process

The group reviewed some 130 ideas brought forth through the various planning retreats and the strategic planning Web site. Over the course of three in-person meetings, follow-up phone conversations, and consultation with the Five College Student Coordinating Board, we developed the following broad and specific recommendations.

Strategic Themes

• Academic opportunities are the ‘gateway’ to students’ and faculty members’ engagement with other campuses. Normalize and widen academic interchange and the social/cultural connections will follow.

• Community building starts with improving the basic infrastructure that makes course interchange possible: aligning academic calendars, reducing transit times between campuses, supporting ridesharing or other transit options, integrating online catalogues, making course registration seamless, clarifying and making transparent each campus’s acceptance of credits from other institutions, etc.

• The ability to earn credentials (e.g., through a Five College certificate program) is an important motivation for students to engage with other campuses.

• The Five College consortium is unevenly experienced, valued and articulated, even within the Five College community itself. An umbrella identity is needed to complement (and in no way compete with) the individual brand identities of each of the institutions.

• Collectively, the five colleges constitute a major employer, a significant revenue-generator, and a nationally recognized source of intellectual capital in western New England. Five Colleges, Inc., has the potential – and responsibility -- to leverage that collective capacity in service of the economic and cultural development of our region.
Initiatives

1. Strengthen community for and among Five College students and faculty.

- Don’t assume students will just “figure it out.” At appropriate points in the first year, starting as early as orientation, provide students opportunities to learn, at the most basic level, how to 1) ride the bus, 2) register for a class at another institution, 3) eat at other campuses, etc. Provide students with a selected list of five “don’t miss” cultural/intellectual/social events, one at each campus, and strongly encourage attendance.

- Consider ways to foster cross-institution student interaction during Interterm, a time when first-year students often feel ready to explore beyond their campus.

- Five College certificate programs have the potential to attract strong numbers of students to other campuses. Review the existing set of certificate programs (and new ones in development) to create greater visibility, uniformity, linkages to advising, and transparency around requirements. International Relations, African Studies and Culture, Health and Science are successful; review those to learn from their approaches. List Five College certificate programs alphabetically within the list of each institution’s programs of study (versus segregating) to normalize and encourage pursuit of them.

- Consider whether five colleges could offer courses/certificates in pre-professional/applied areas not traditionally offered in the context of liberal arts education (e.g., finance, accounting, journalism, nursing, public health, public policy) but that would be useful complements to a liberal arts degree.

- Encourage multi-campus events that showcase students’ academic/intellectual accomplishments, such as a senior research symposium or thesis competition, with meaningful prizes awarded in each of the academic divisions. Similarly, review the existing discipline-specific events (e.g., Chinese speech contest, geology symposium, physics symposium, theater portfolio review) to see whether potential exists to align them with this larger event.

- Encourage co-curricular projects or groups that bring together large groups of students from different institutions for a common purpose. Five College opera is an excellent example. Consider also the development of Five College sports teams, whether in intercollegiate competition or club sports such as Ultimate Frisbee.

- Encourage the Five College Student Coordinating Board to expand its efforts to fund social and cultural events for consortium students by seeking to increase its funding and promoting the fund’s availability.

- Dedicate space on every institution’s news Web site for publicizing Five College events; consider an “editor’s pick” approach, with rotating guest editors (faculty members, staff members, students) from each campus making each week’s selections.

- Encourage programs like the Five College 40th Anniversary Professorships, which provide incentives for established faculty members to teach on other campuses, actively manifesting for students and faculty the value of the Five College intellectual community.
2. Articulate and brand the Five College experience for external audiences.

- Engage a marketing/branding consultant to: 1) develop and test marketing messages and strategies to “sell” the consortial advantage compellingly and accurately (being mindful not to over-promise); 2) refine the value proposition for living and working in the Pioneer Valley, to enhance faculty and staff recruiting; 3) advise on new programs/initiatives that would manifest, advance, and support the overall brand – as well as existing programs that no longer add value and create “noise” in the brand; 4) assess the brand equity of “Five Colleges, Inc.” and whether a new name would add value. Ensure that consultant selection and project direction are guided by a representative group comprised of students, faculty members and staff members from each campus.

- Based on consultant’s recommendations, develop an integrated communications plan to raise the visibility of the consortium and its distinctive programming.

- Ensure that campus admission representatives, including student tour guides and alumni volunteer recruiters, are knowledgeable about the academic offerings of the five colleges, such as the Five College certificate programs, and can represent them positively and accurately in student recruitment interactions.

- Capitalize on the broad reach of WFCR and WNNZ to reinforce the intellectual and cultural value of the five colleges. Establish dedicated segments or programs featuring five-college content, such as faculty research, new books, news commentaries, student achievements, profiles, etc. Increase the involvement of Five College community members in shaping and presenting the station’s overall programming, including music programming.

3. Strengthen Five College engagement of the economic, political and community building issues of our region.

- Whether through a new position or a redirection of existing campus positions develop a consortial approach to community and government relations (local, state, federal) to engage more robustly with key economic development initiatives and leverage funding opportunities. Areas of focus could include regional transit planning, technology infrastructure development, K-12 school support, tourism, environmental sustainability, and job creation.

- Create Five College focal presences in Springfield and/or Holyoke, one-stop meeting and office sites that would provide ready access to the human, cultural and intellectual resources of the five colleges and serve as bases for campus representatives to engage the community (schools, community service organizations, etc). Initial programming at these sites might focus on community based learning and employment recruiting. The University’s Springfield Partnership and associated facilities might serve as a test site for this concept.

- Inventory and align existing partnerships with some 250 public schools and community organizations, in order to enhance community based learning, service learning, and internship opportunities. The Five College Public School Partnership could play a key role in this process.

Working Group

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