

College Strategic Plans

A Strategic Approach to Interdisciplinary Collaboration: A Case Study

There is no single solution to world problems. Solving such problems necessitates knowledge, typically generated from interdisciplinary vantage points. Imagine a scenario in which an Ohio State philosopher joins with an Ohio State engineer who joins with an Ohio State physician to develop a medical procedure that will save lives worldwide.

Faculty Recruitment/Selection:

This scenario involves hiring 4 faculty members, 3 of whom could be hired by multiple colleges.

If these 3 faculty can be supported by 2 colleges each and the 4th faculty member supported by one college, 7 colleges will share the cost of 4 faculty.

Lab Space/Expenses:

These colleagues need a lab space in which to work. Establishing the lab will cost \$2 million.

One college has a donor so keen on the project that she has agreed to provide \$500,000 to support it, with the additional promise of a \$3 million deferred gift in 3 years—if this interdisciplinary collaboration leads to successful outcomes. The lab will thus cost the colleges \$1.5 million.

A grant of \$50,000 is provided to the project by the American Philosophical Association, reducing the colleges' obligation to \$1,450,000.

The units propose to locate the lab in a space with \$250,000 in deferred maintenance. Those funds will be secured through the university capital process. The remaining \$1.2 million to fund the lab, when shared by 7 colleges, brings each college's share to just under \$171,500.

Teaching New 3-course Sequence:

The 4 researchers develop a plan for a new 3-course sequence of 4 credits per course. The sequence will be required in 2 majors and an option for 5 other majors. Course enrollment is expected to be 100 students as required by one major and 50 from the other, plus 50 students taking the sequence electively. The four researchers have responsibility for the courses as follows: 25%; 20%; 20%; 20%, and 15%. The colleges have agreed that marginal revenues will be distributed as follows: 15% off the top for course enhancement and 85% split according to the percent effort of the researchers.

200 students per quarter X 3 courses X 4 hours = 2,400 credit hours
2,400 credit hours X \$192 effective rate = \$460,800 in new revenue

Center for Innovation:

These new funds (teaching) permits the hiring of 3 graduate students, a post-doctoral fellow, two major pieces of equipment, travel funds research collaborations with two international scholars. The research core now becomes a Center for Innovation that receives \$500,000 annually for 5 years, or \$2.5 million. The proposal for receipt of the resources pays for ¼ of the salary for each faculty member over the five years. One-half of the remaining funds support operations of the research enterprise. The disposition of remaining funds is determined by the research advisory group that includes the four faculty members, the associate vice president for research, and two senior faculty members from outside of these four colleges.

Research Activities:

For the concluding three of those years, the Center secures extramural funding of \$8 million, which nets after research assessment \$2,000,000 in indirect cost recovery. The original agreement stipulates that the colleges will recover incrementally the one-half of their initial investment in the laboratory to help fund other new initiatives.

Table Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways does this case illustrate what is or is not happening at Ohio State? What supports this type of interdisciplinary collaboration? What are the challenges?
2. In your experience, what are the most effective means for overcoming the challenges?
3. What interdisciplinary collaboration can you begin exploring today?
4. What might be the principles of an initial agreement for such a collaborative approach?