

Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)  
November 16th, 2019 | Portland, OR

# A Spectrum of Partnerships: Intentional Collaborations to Improve Transfer Outcomes



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*Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

# Overview of Presentation

- Why discuss transfer partnerships?
- Transfer partnerships in the literature
- Study methods & research questions
- Analysis & conceptual framework
- Findings
- Conclusions

# Why Transfer Partnerships Are Important For Underserved Students

- We lose many students in the transfer process, particularly those facing more barriers and with fewer resources
- Collaboration within and among higher education institutions is increasingly recognized as an essential strategy to improve student outcomes as well as institutional effectiveness (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2006)

# Transfer Partnerships in the Literature

- Transfer partnerships are often assumed if two institutions exchange students
- We define transfer partnership as a “collaboration between one or more community colleges and a bachelor degree–granting institution for the purpose of increasing transfer and baccalaureate attainment for all or for a particular subset of students.” (Kisker, 2007)

# Transfer Partnerships in the Literature

- **Culture:** Transfer-affirming and transfer-receptive cultures can lead to greater transfer student support and success (Dowd et al., 2008; Handel, 2011a; Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2011).
- **Policy:** Program maps, articulation agreements, and rigorous, aligned curriculum have all been described as components of solid institutional transfer partnerships (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Handel & Williams, 2012; Miller, 2013; Wilson & Lowry, 2016; Wyner et al., 2016).
- **Practice:** Consistent communication and collaboration between staff at all levels of both partnering institutions, as well as collaborative campus programming and the physical presence of staff on the partner institution campus have been noted as practices that can strengthen partnerships (Dolinsky et al., 2016; Dowd et al., 2008; Miller, 2013; Wilson & Lowry, 2016; Wyner et al., 2016).

# High-Performing Transfer Partnerships Study

Multistate, mixed-methods study of partnerships between 2- and 4-year institutional pairs:

- Quantitative: Students from higher-performing pairs have higher than average odds of all transfer students graduating or still being enrolled
- Qualitative: State policy context analysis, site visits, website reviews and interviews

## Qualitative Phase: Methods

- Interviewed staff, faculty and students at each partner institution (3 states, 7 institutional pairs)
  - Semi-structured interviews & focus groups
  - N=231 individuals  
staff (N=119), faculty (N=51), students (N=61)
- Transcribed interviews and conducted multiple rounds of coding and iterative analysis to identify themes
- Focused on practitioner definitions and descriptions of partnerships

# Research Questions

1. How do transfer partnerships vary in their degree or levels of collaboration?
2. What does the continuum of collaborative efforts look like, within the domains of institutional culture, policy, and practice?



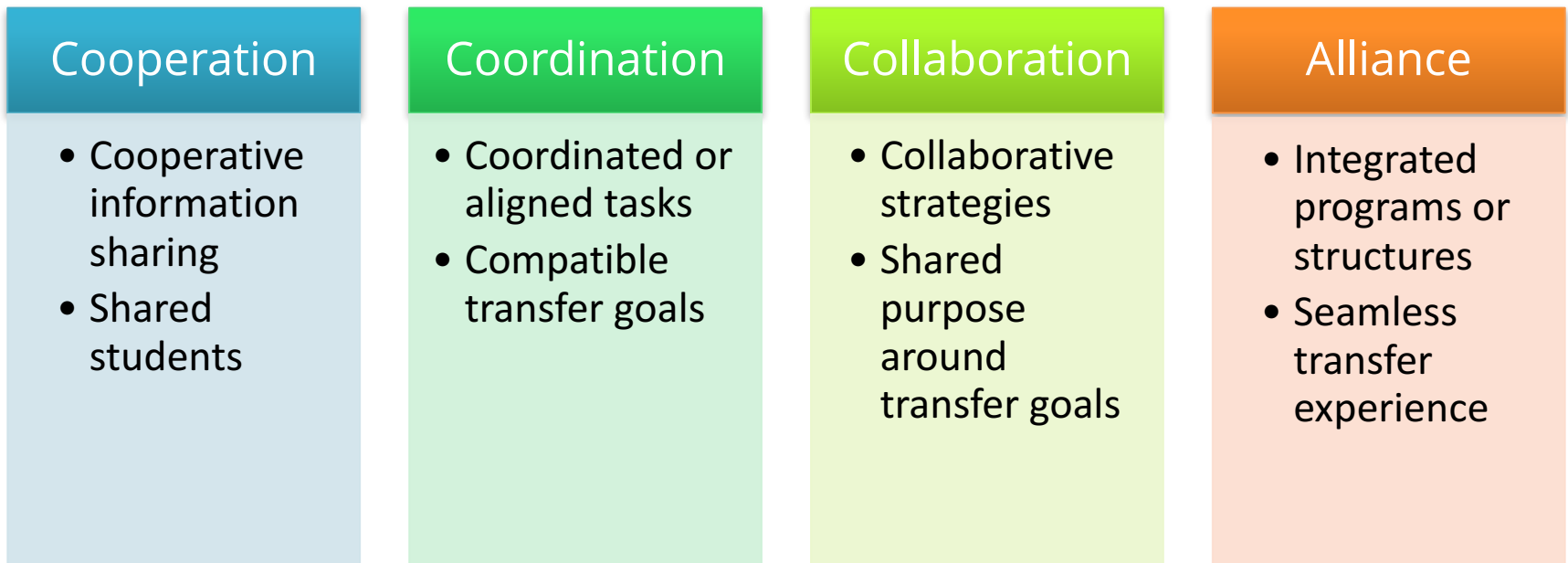
# Analysis

- Analyzed themes with respect to practitioner definitions and descriptions of partnerships
- Observed varying levels of partnership along dimensions that fall within the intersection of the three areas of culture, policy and practice
- Referenced broader literature on institutional collaboration

# Conceptual Framework

- Strategic alliances in health & human services (Bailey & Koney, 2000)
- Interprofessional collaboration (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter & Warmington, 2009)
- Interorganizational collaboration (Heath & Isbell, 2017)
- Collaboration for change (Himmelman, 2002)

# Findings: Levels of Collaboration



Adapted from Bailey & Koney (2000), Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter & Warmington (2009), Heath & Isbell (2017), Himmelman (2002)

# Findings: Partnership Dimensions

## Culture & Practice

- Leadership
- Relationships
- Trust & Respect
- Focus on Students
- Communication
- Focus on Equity & Transfer

## Policy & Practice

- Programs & Course Transfer
- Institutional Policies Regarding Partnership
- Institutionalized Partnership

## Policy & Culture

- Competition

# Continuum: Focus on Students

Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	Alliance
<p>Institutions make decisions based on what works best for their own institution rather than transfer students; institution provides information but students are primarily responsible for their own successful transfer</p>	<p>Some departments have relationships with counterparts at other institution to help with student transfer, but there is no consistent or cohesive structure for student transfer from one institution to the next</p>	<p>Both institutions have relationships with staff at partner college, enabling them to make a warm hand-off during transfer. Both institutions provide substantial support for completion and transfer</p>	<p>Both institutions demonstrate philosophy of focusing on students' best interests, and design policies, procedures, and structures in order to holistically accommodate student needs and realities</p>

# Continuum: Institutionalized Partnership

Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	Alliance
<p>No one at either institution is consistently thinking about or attempting to build transfer partnerships.</p>	<p>A small number of people prioritize support transfer students and processes (transfer champions); staff turnover creates discontinuity in these support systems.</p>	<p>Multiple transfer champions throughout both institutions work together in an attempt to build structures that make the transfer process easier for students to navigate.</p>	<p>Institutional structures have been put in place for consistent and long-term focus on the partnership (eg: university centers). One or both institutions may have a permanent director level position that focuses specifically on partnerships.</p>

# Institutional Practices Along a Continuum

	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	Alliance
<b>Advising</b>	Advisors direct students to look online for information about the partner institution.	Advising staff refer students to a particular person at the partner institution. Advisors occasionally communicate with each other if there is a question or problem.	Advisors visit partner institution on a regular basis to do pre-advising. Advisors at partnering institutions regularly communicate with each other.	Institution may have shared staff or use a co-advisor model. Advising staff from both institutions may meet with each other periodically to share updates.
<b>Recruitment &amp; Enrollment</b>	Institutions send students back and forth to each other using passive recruitment strategies (brochures, etc).	There is some deliberate effort to send and recruit students to/from the particular partner institution. The relationship is primarily transactional.	May have university centers, co-located courses, or co-located degrees. They may staff a recruiter at the partner institution on a regular basis.	Institutions partner to create a formal, co-branded transfer program. Community college students may be able to begin participating in some events at the four-year school.
<b>Financial Aid</b>	Staff share information about scholarships for transfer students.	Staff at two-year explain to students how course taking will impact financial aid options at the four-year institution. Four-year staff are aware of scholarships for transfer students.	Staff help students with consortium agreements if they are concurrently enrolled at both schools. They may offer specific financial incentives to complete associates at the partner institution before transferring.	There are specific scholarship programs for students who transfer from one partner institution to the other. There may be a staff person who advises them about financial aid throughout the transition.

# Institutional Practices Along a Continuum

	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	Alliance
<b>Faculty practice</b>	A few individual faculty will work with a counterpart on a specific project; there is a general lack of trust between faculty at both institutions.	Sets of faculty work together (by discipline) on state-mandated articulation agreements; they may revisit these agreements every few years.	Some deans and/or faculty work closely with their counterparts on improving program pathways and curricular alignment. They may share adjunct faculty.	Multiple deans and chairs work with their counterparts at the partner institution. There is active encouragement for multiple departments to collaborate to improve curriculum alignment.
<b>Data sharing</b>	Very little data sharing (if any) takes place between institutions. Data sharing may occur informally between two counterparts on an as-needed basis.	Some data-sharing takes place, but it is inconsistent and may depend on relationships between specific departments or programs at the partner institutions.	Partner institutions are interested in sharing transfer outcomes data with each other. They may have some informal procedures for data sharing on degree progress and completion.	Data-sharing about transfer outcomes exists at the institutional or program level, to at least some degree. Both institutions are invested in improving the data-sharing system.



# A Case of Collaboration: A Co-branded Transfer Program

## **Advising:** *Collaboration moving toward Alliance level*

- Students access advising at both institutions
- 2-year has career communities & 4-year centralized advising
- Meeting between advisors at both institutions

## **Enrollment & Financial Aid:** *Alliance level*

- Co-branded 2+2 program
- Students apply to program through the 4-year institution
- Guaranteed admission to 4-year
- Specific financial aid package
- Housing & access to 4-year student supports and activities

# A Case of Collaboration: A Co-branded Transfer Program

## **Faculty Practices:** *Alliance level*

- Regular communications between deans and chairpersons
- Examining student-level course data to inform curricular decisions

## **Data Sharing:** *Collaboration moving toward Alliance level*

- Departmental level sharing
- Putting application for co-branded program on 4-year website so they could access student data pre-arrival

# Conclusions

*“The challenge is to chart a middle ground and identify findings informative at a level that can be used to guide change processes”*

(Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 436)

1. Collaborative transfer relationships vary along a continuum of levels as well as dimensions
2. Created a framework for institutions to understand where they are and where they want to be along a collaboration continuum
3. There are multiple ways to enact transfer partnerships and not all pairs are partnerships
4. Transfer partnerships are dynamic and contextual and go against structure, norms and often policy of higher education

# Questions?

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