Partnerships and Student Pathways
Sanford C. Shugart and David T. Harrison

The Journey Toward a Bachelor’s Degree

The path to a bachelor’s degree has changed dramatically in recent years. The newer generations of undergraduates have a saying: “It’s my movie; I’ll write it any way I want.” And that is just what they are doing. Nonlinear patterns of college attendance, characterized by swirling (i.e., when students attend more than one institution, sometimes simultaneously) have been well documented, as students navigate the higher education landscape in often unanticipated ways (Adelman, 2006). Choosing not to defer work, family, travel, and second careers until after college, students often combine these experiences in myriad ways, making radical directional changes in midprogram. Policy makers are only just recognizing these and other changes as important realities. When the Spellings Commission (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) rolled out its report on higher education, the then Secretary of Education made a point of reminding the audience that the term nontraditional student was obsolete, as fewer than one in five college undergraduates chooses a traditional, linear, full-time, residential college experience. Nontraditional is now the dominant mode of undergraduate education in America. One may argue whether this is an altogether good development, but the discussion is purely academic. This genie isn’t going back in the bottle.

In the new pattern, students work one or more jobs; blend educational experiences from multiple institutions; change course loads from term to term as they manage their priorities and finances; attend online, traditional, and hybrid courses at the same time; and/or stop attending classes for a term or two, then come back to school when life circumstances allow. As a result, our ability to account for their progress toward graduation is often lost. Most importantly, perhaps, the majority of first-year students begin their journey toward a bachelor’s degree in a community college with plans to transfer for their upper-division coursework (Adelman, 2006; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Furchtgott-Roth, Jacobsen, & Mokher, 2009). With this remarkable and complex pattern of student behavior comes a need for much deeper partnerships between and among institutions. Policy makers and educators alike are seeking higher rates of progression and completion, and it seems likely that program designs based on a traditional pattern of student attendance are inadequate to the new reality. New partnerships must go beyond institutional articulation to deeper alignment of people, processes, systems, and measures.

Beyond Articulation

The traditional organizational response to the transfer process has been institutional articulation (i.e., the review of curriculum to create advising documents designed to prevent the loss of academic credit). Whether developed through local initiative or guided by state policies, this time honored approach is inadequate because it is essentially institution-centered, not student-centered (Roksa & Keith, 2008). It assumes the standardization of student experiences at the convenience and design of the institution. In its most advanced forms, it may lead to a measure of curriculum alignment between two institutions or programs to accelerate a student’s progress. But the focus
is still on the agreement, not the student. For example, performance metrics generally reg
number of current agreements but say little about whether they have led to meaningful ch:
graduation patterns. At best, one may have data on the number of students transferring at
grade point average or graduation rate after a specified time has elapsed. Rarely, though, d
information serve to inform meaningful, collaborative changes in the partnership and p
of the two institutions. Further, because students may swirl through several institutions
undergraduate experience, sometimes without a clear plan to graduate from any of them, l
articulation agreements provide only limited guidance to those students.

A more powerful approach focuses on the experience of each student and sees the ins
through the lens of this experience. It is now incumbent upon colleges and universities to
individualized pathways that create a personal roadmap for students based on their life circu
and personal goals. These new pathways to the baccalaureate will need to go beyond simple ;
tion agreements to encompass programs, curricula, and support services tailored to the unqi
of today’s diverse transfer students. An important question in reformatting institutional part
then becomes “What do we want the students to experience?” The succinct answer is that
students to see their program of study, across the partnering institutions, as a coherent, f
supported pathway toward a goal that is meaningful to them. While this seems straight it
is anything but common, even within the boundaries of our colleges and universities.

A better design begins, then, with a focus on what students experience, by choice or by
ment. And the first step is that the student has a plan, a written description of his or her j
of study through the associate and on to the bachelor’s degree. The emphasis is on mandate
because it has become clear, as Bers and Younger point out in chapter 3, community college
“don’t do optional.” With the support of both the partnering institutions, then, the stu
a clearly described pathway that serves to reduce inefficiency in the accumulation of cre
more importantly, provides the motivation to pursue longer-term goals and to see the cor
between incremental steps and ultimate degree achievement. It may even increase the int
the college experience (e.g., higher and more continuous work-loads), which is positively as
with student success (Doyle, 2009).

These pathways for each student also provide a basis for the partnering institutions
their support services toward increasing student success, progression, and graduation. They
focus of student and institutions alike from proximate goals (e.g., course registration for
term) to ultimate goals, from getting into the university to getting out with the desired cr
Students can identify with the pathway and with both institutions from early in their und
ate experience, and the institutions can collaborate on support services from the beginning.
Pathways, then, require end-to-end design, collaboration, and a shared commitment to
success throughout their program of study.

Student Pathways

An essential design element of the multifaceted pathways model is a serious align
curriculum and program outcomes for all of the undergraduate majors that may be av
transferring students, not just a few. The student must see a coherent plan of study from
beginning that carries through the associate degree to the bachelor’s. Further, the stud
know that pursuing this course of study will, assuming acceptable performance, lead to the
outcome. It is not an unconditional promise, but it has to be a promise, not just an improv
hood. If the upper-division program is selective for native students, the transfers have to re
same treatment in the process of application. Without this guarantee, it is not a pathwa
the institutional rules change midstream for the student, blocking the planned and agr
pathway, it will cause the need for additional coursework and frustration at best, and total attrition at worst. The guarantee is much more likely to engage the student's best sustained efforts.

From the institutions' perspectives, pathways connect not only to the students' aspirations but also to meaningful societal goals. For example, creating diversity and opportunity in the professions is a very salient objective in many states where more than 80% of all students of color in higher education are enrolled in community colleges. A transfer pathway may be the only scalable approach to this goal. Other outcomes of thoughtful pathways can include meeting STEM targets and the need for baccalaureate-prepared health professionals or certified teachers. Perhaps all pathways should share the objective of producing more competent graduates and professionals.

In addition to more effectively engaging students, a pathways model enables partnering institutions to align their resources across institutional boundaries. Shared counseling and advising resources can be aimed at first-year students helping them make better decisions and begin their induction into the pathway as a single program, not a pair of articulated programs. Financial aid can be planned for the entire period of study. Faculty partnerships take on new meaning in curriculum design through early introduction of students to the major, opportunities for undergraduate research, and planned experiential education. Registration and transfer processes can be made less duplicative and easier on all concerned. Information systems can be crafted to provide richer end-to-end feedback on student performance that actually leads to collaborative program design and revision. Joint philanthropy in support of pathways can be a fertile new fundraising opportunity. Planning the academic schedule can be made more precise as the pipeline of transfers in the pathway programs becomes much easier to quantify and predict. In the most mature models, facilities can be developed jointly on either campus to house the transfer programs, giving a single-institution feel and a stronger sense of academic community to the participants.

All of these alignments are coalesced around a singular focus on designing pathways for desired student experiences and goals rather than only clarifying which courses do and do not transfer. Instead of merely reducing lost credits, the much more powerful goal is to create an environment of higher student aspirations and planning.

A National Perspective

Increasing the number and percentage of citizens earning bachelor's degrees has been a national priority for decades and has become even more important in the global economy. The workforce in the United States competes with those of other countries on the basis of college-educated workers. The success of higher education to reach and prepare the next generation of students with the required knowledge and skills will determine America's ability to maintain its competitive advantage in the global marketplace, and ultimately its standard of living (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2009).

Access to the bachelor's degree has become an important national imperative. However, a series of factors have converged to make the pathway to the bachelor's degree a difficult one for many students. Demographics, admissions policies and practices of colleges and universities, and escalating costs create significant challenges with regard to increasing access to and attainment of the baccalaureate. New strategies are required to meet this goal.

Demographics

The composition of schools is changing. Fewer high school graduates, more adult learners, and a dramatic change in demographics will define postsecondary students for the next decade and beyond. The rapid expansion of high school graduates that began in the early 1990s has peaked. National
projections suggest that overall output of high school graduates will stabilize, but the difference among states will be dramatic. By 2015, large states such as Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania are expected to produce up to 10% fewer high school graduates, while Arizona, Florida, Georgia, and Texas are projected to produce 20% more (WICHE, 2008).

Over the next decade, almost all of the growth in public high school graduates will be from minority groups. Hispanic students are projected to increase by 54% while White, non-Hispanic graduates are expected to decline by 11%. Other minority groups will have higher graduation rates as the nation and more and more states approach majority-minority status. The next generation of college students will be less affluent and less prepared for college-level work (WICHE, 2008). These changes will have an impact on curriculum and preparation, demand for support services, and the need for affordable higher education options. They will also require new thinking in how institutions reach out to minority students and adults.

Admissions Practices and Financial Considerations

Admission requirements at U.S. public universities have become more competitive over time and have focused on a smaller and smaller segment of the student population. Increasing requirements of standardized test scores and grade point averages at state universities exclude large numbers of students. Census data show that the emphasis on four-year colleges and universities over the past 20 years has focused more on affluent families and well-prepared students than on students from more modest backgrounds. Between 1979 and 2008, the share of bachelor's degrees awarded by age 24 dropped for all quartiles of family income except the top quartile (PEO, 2009).

As public universities have become more selective, costs have continued to rise. Much of the increase in cost has been passed on to families as state governments have cut support of public universities. After adjusting for financial aid, the amount that families pay for college has grown to 432% since 1982 (Soares, 2009).

The Case for Partnerships

If America is going to improve on the number of bachelor's degrees awarded, policies and practices must be developed that encourage deeper collaboration between community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. With their lower cost, open admissions policies, and support systems for students with varied needs, community colleges bring capabilities to the partnerships that universities need to help a diverse group of students earn bachelor's degrees.

While any student could gain an advantage by starting at a community college and transferring to a university to earn a baccalaureate, two groups of students are especially well-served by these partnerships. (a) students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and (b) students who are less prepared academically. The student demographic characteristic most significantly associated with degree completion is socioeconomic status. Family income, parents' highest level of education, prestige rating of parents' occupations, and other related factors play a significant role in determining who succeeds in college (Adelman, 2006). With regard to university enrollment, transfers from two-year colleges are much more likely to come from low-income families than are first-time, first-year students, and transfers from four-year colleges (Bowen et al., 2009).

Only 5% of traditional-age undergraduates enter highly selective colleges, while nearly 80% start in either nonselective four-year colleges or open-door community colleges (Adelman, 2006). Two-year institutions provide an important stepping stone to attainment of a bachelor's degree, particularly for high-achieving, low-income students. More than 80% of low-income students who
strong high school grade point averages attend college, with more than half attending community colleges. Three-quarters of these students who earn associate degrees and transfer go on to earn bachelor’s degrees (Furchtgott-Roth et al., 2009).

The ability of the United States to substantially increase the number and percentage of citizens who earn bachelor’s degrees will be determined by the ability of community colleges and universities to partner in deeper and more strategic ways. To be successful, a focus on multifaceted pathways to degree attainment for the 21st century student, with associated support services, will replace institution-to-institution articulation agreements as the basis of these partnerships.

Case Study: The Central Florida Higher Education Consortium

The shift from articulation to a pathway model is an attempt to achieve serious, even quantum improvements in transfer and graduation, including significant expansion of the transfer pipeline to students less likely to succeed in the more passive model of curriculum articulation. This approach has been put into action in Florida, where a strategic alliance between regional community colleges and a state university has created a partnership of national scale.

Historical Background of the Partnership

The histories of central Florida community colleges and the University of Central Florida (UCF) are intertwined. They were all established in the 1960s and essentially developed together. UCF was primarily a transfer and commuter institution for many years. Its growth was built on transfer students and relationships with community colleges. The Florida Community College System was built on a junior college model in which students were expected to transfer to upper-division institutions as opposed to a workforce model in which students were preparing to go directly to work. This resulted in a statewide articulation process and a common course numbering system that made transfer from a Florida community college to a university easier than transfer in most states. By statute, associate of arts graduates from Florida community colleges were guaranteed admission to a state university. However, neither their choice of university nor their degree program preference was guaranteed.

As UCF matured and the state’s population exploded, the University’s emphasis on graduate studies and research expanded, as did its emphasis on recruiting and supporting first-year students. On-campus housing and other student amenities were added to attract top first-time applicants. UCF transitioned from a commuter school to a statewide destination for talented first-year students. In response to increased demand for entry-level seats, UCF and other state universities became more selective. In 1995, 70% of all first-year applicants to the University of Central Florida, the University of Florida, and Florida State University were admitted with an average SAT of 1188. In 2007, these three universities admitted fewer than 50% of all first-year applicants, and the average SAT score of enrolled first-year students was 1237 (Florida Board of Governors, 2007). This combination of factors caused good students to be denied admission to state universities at a time when Florida was promoting the need to increase the number of bachelor’s degree graduates in the state as an economic development strategy. Higher education leaders in the Orlando area were starting to realize that local access to a bachelor’s degree was at risk. New thinking was required.

A convergence of factors led to unprecedented demand for higher education in Florida beginning in the 1990s. Florida added more than 3.7 million people from 1995 to 2007, many with young families (Office of Economic and Demographic Research, 2008). During this same period, high school graduation rates increased by over 10%, adding thousands of new candidates
into the higher education pool (Florida Department of Education, 2005). In 1997, the Florida Legislature created the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program. The program was designed to keep high-potential Florida high school graduates in state by providing generous scholarship opportunities at state universities. With more and more students staying in state, coupled with overall population growth and increased high school graduation rates, higher education enrollment in Florida exploded (Harrison, 2009). Between 1995 and 2004, enrollment grew by 110,000 students. Florida community colleges grew by 17%, and the State University System grew by 33% (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems, 2005).

Florida Politics

As growth in demand put pressure on Florida's colleges and universities, politics were also having an impact on higher education in the state. Many significant statewide, legislated structural changes to the higher education system were instituted between 1999 and 2008. Perhaps the most far-reaching piece of legislation called for the establishment of the Florida College System enabling community colleges to transition to baccalaureate institutions independently from the state university system and grant bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, and bachelor of applied science degrees in the high-need, high-demand fields, such as teaching, nursing, and workforce-oriented programs. The State Board of Education oversees the Florida College System (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2008).

A Regional Approach

Growth and politics made up the agenda when the presidents and other leaders of Brevard Lake-Sumter, Seminole, and Valencia Community Colleges and the University of Central Florida started an exchange of ideas in 2005. They were concerned that state public policy debates failed to grasp the extraordinary increase in demand occurring in the counties around Orlando. Although Florida's 2+2 articulation agreement (i.e., associate degree graduates are assured of admission to at least one state university) had been a national model, it was now viewed by some policy makers as obsolete.

It was clear to these leaders that the institutions in central Florida would be responsible for absorbing much of Florida's growth in higher education. The Orlando area was growing at a faster rate than any region in the state. They recognized the impressive regional infrastructure they already had. Through its Regional Campus System, UCF had shared facilities on the campuses of Brevard and Lake-Sumter Community Colleges, and a growing presence with Seminole and Valencia. The partnership between these institutions had been strong for decades, producing thousands of bachelor's degree graduates through the 2+2 process. The leaders of these institutions conclude that they could best serve students and families in central Florida by working together rather than in isolation or in competition, and decided to create their own public policy. They agreed that a collaborative regional strategy for higher education designed to expand access, meet the anticipate growth needs, and provide for a world-class workforce in central Florida was possible and would better serve students and families in central Florida than the go-it-alone approach being pursued in other parts of the state. The principles of the regional strategy were outlined in a joint resolution that was approved and signed by all five boards of trustees in September 2005, establishing the Central Florida Higher Education Consortium. Core principles of the Consortium include (a) guaranteed admission to UCF for graduates of Consortium community colleges, (b) expansion of joint-use facilities on community college campuses, (c) extension of financial aid resources to support Consortium 2+2 students through collaborative philanthropy, and (d) development
of a regional infrastructure for workforce development. The Central Florida Higher Education Consortium was announced at a public event in April 2006 (Harrison, 2009).

Implementation

Establishing a written commitment to a regional strategy that was supported by five presidents and boards of trustees was a significant achievement, but it was only the first step. The real work—the work that would affect students—was yet to come. For this to be a different kind of experience for students, the transaction-level details of daily organizational life at each institution would have to change. This would require a level of trust and commitment that few had experienced and some thought impossible. But the training, communication, and ongoing reinforcement with faculty and staff at each institution created a momentum that continues to build. In the first four years of the Consortium partnership, noticeable progress was made in marketing, student services, facilities, and curriculum.

Branding and marketing. One of the first tasks towards implementation was cobranding. The partners sought to establish a brand identity that would incorporate the values of the Central Florida Higher Education Consortium while maintaining the unique identity of each partner. After considering several alternatives, the brand DirectConnect to UCF was agreed upon by all partners. The brand and accompanying campaign captured the value proposition of guaranteed admission and an early, ongoing relationship with UCF advising professionals for community college students choosing this path (Harrison, 2009). In just a few years, DirectConnect to UCF had become a planned pathway to a bachelor’s degree for many students and families.

Guaranteed admission and active advising. Through the Consortium agreement, graduates with an associate degree from one of the participating community colleges are guaranteed admission to UCF. The term guarantee was controversial, but it was a critical aspect of the joint resolution. The basis of the Central Florida Higher Education Consortium is a sustained strategic commitment to the partnership. By guaranteeing admission to these graduates, the University sent a message to its community college partners that their students were a priority and would continue to be in good budget times and bad. The deep budget cuts in 2007 and 2008 for Florida’s state universities proved to be an important test. Even as most universities in the state suspended or dramatically reduced the number of community college transfers, enrollment for new community college transfers at UCF grew by 12% in fall 2008 to over 4,000 and grew an additional 18% in 2009 to more than 4,700.

University admissions, enrollment services, and advising professionals are located on the campuses of Consortium community colleges. Academic advisors at both institutions collaborate to ensure the coursework that students take at the community college prepares them for their chosen course of study at UCF. DirectConnect coordinators on each partner campus do initial academic advising and assist students with admission and financial aid processes (Harrison, 2009).

While guaranteed admission was an important consideration for the Consortium, the strategic emphasis was on developing practices, policies, and procedures that increased the likelihood that transfer students would earn bachelor’s degrees. Through a collaborative advising effort between community college and university advisors, DirectConnect to UCF strives to ensure that students transfer as juniors in their chosen field of study, increasing their chances of earning the bachelor’s degree. For students in the program, the community college partner sends two electronic transcripts to UCF once students have earned 30 and 45 hours of credit, respectively, and these transfer transcripts become part of the student’s community college academic record. A UCF admissions record is also established. This transmission streamlines the transfer process for these students and helps ensure their success when they transfer.
The Central Florida Higher Education Consortium has been successful in helping transfer students earn bachelor's degrees. Of the more than 9,000 bachelor's degrees awarded by the University of Central Florida's 2008-2009 academic year, over half went to community college transfer students. Two-thirds of the University's education and nursing degrees were awarded to community college transfer students, and almost half of the business and engineering degrees. Of the bachelor's degrees awarded at community college transfers, over two-thirds went to transfers from Consortium schools (R. Sun and Archer, 2009).

Facilities and program expansion. Through its Regional Campus System, UCF brings junior and senior-year coursework to community college campuses enabling students to earn a bachelor's degree in their hometown. Florida's first full-service, joint use facility (i.e., UCF and Brevard Community College) celebrated its 25th anniversary in fall 2008. UCF and Lake-Sumter Community College have also partnered on a shared campus. Brevard opened a second campus in 1999, followed by Valencia, and Seminole in 2009-2010, with these last two additions representing an important milestone in delivering on the commitments of the joint resolution of 2005, and expanded access to full degree programs for many more transfers students in central Florida.

Curriculum and articulation. The Consortium partnership created the opportunity for thinking regarding curriculum and articulation. In the spirit of a seamless pathway, instead of offering courses at the bachelor's degree level for the transfer student in two discrete components, partnership enables a four-year view that can be planned and supported. The University of Central Florida has created a number of degree programs with the transfer pathway as the planned core for earning the baccalaureate. In these programs, the transfer student is the rule, not the exception. A description of two such programs follows.

- Bachelor of Applied Science. An example where traditional articulation agreements were insufficient to meet students' needs lies with students earning associate of science (AS) degrees. Responding to workforce pressures in the 1990s, state-level discussions resulted in a series of articulation agreements that made it possible for AS graduates to earn a bachelor's degree from a state university with minimal loss of credit and without the need to earn an associate of arts (AA) degree.

While this process made transfer possible, it did not make it easy. The articulation agreements were within specific disciplines. For example, a student with an AS in criminal justice could transfer into a BS program in criminal justice following a specified path. Similar arrangements were developed for students in nursing, business, information technology, and other fields. The agreements made no allowance for students to transfer to a different but related program, and the treatment of general education and other division requirements differed from program to program. AS transfer students were advised to stay at the community college to earn their AA degree before transferring, discouraged many from pursuing the baccalaureate.

These agreements were narrowly defined and did not incorporate the reality of students' lives. Few students follow a linear path to such degrees. By their very nature, these students are working, gaining industry skills and experiences, and following a career path that may be opportunity and job performance. They rarely transfer into a baccalaureate program immediately after earning their associate degree and typically earn their bachelor's degree on a part-time basis.

In 2005, UCF developed the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree, creating a pathway for all associate of science graduates to earn a bachelor's degree. AS graduates in all fields are accepted into the program, and students choose from among several areas of concentration. Since many AS students transfer with more than 60 credit hours earned...
BAS students are required to earn 42 hours of upper-division credit to earn their bachelor’s degree instead of the 48 required by other programs. For a part-time student, this could accelerate their graduation by a full semester.

Bachelor of Design in Architecture. For years, the Orlando chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) coveted a school of architecture in central Florida. At various times, they had approached universities throughout the state to establish a program in Orlando. As a starting point, AIA partnered with Valencia Community College to establish a first-year-sophomore program that prepared students to transfer to architecture programs at the University of Florida (UF) and other state universities or out-of-state schools. When state budget cuts began in 2007, most state universities immediately cut back on the number of transfer students they accepted, effectively closing the door on this pathway to an architecture degree. Honoring its commitment to its partners in the Central Florida Higher Education Consortium, UCF continued to admit all transfers from partner institutions. Leaders from AIA, Valencia, UCF, and UF began a series of discussions to address the issue. It was agreed that a solution was possible if UCF would develop a bachelor of design in architecture program to be housed at the new shared facility on Valencia’s campus, and UF would establish a presence for their master’s program at a UCF facility in downtown Orlando. Valencia AA graduates and those from other Consortium colleges now have a local option to earn their architecture degree, UCF has its first program in architecture, and UF has an urban design studio for its master’s students. Most importantly, the American Institute of Architects has a school of architecture in Orlando to meet the needs of their profession. This arrangement is an illustrative example of meeting a need through a deep partnership that could not have been met by any institution individually.

Recommendations

While the circumstances of the central Florida Consortium are unique, many of the principles are transferrable to other states and situations. This section summarizes a few principles that may help guide the work of other regional partnerships.

Keep it about students. Partnerships guided by the principle of meeting the needs of the student flourish. Such a focus not only provides obvious benefits to the student, but the individual institutions improve with clear direction and an objective view of the work to be done. Partnerships are often started in times of uncertainty. A clear focus on what is best for the student helps to eliminate uncertainty and provide clarity in the decision-making process.

Don’t let ego interfere. It is easy to be distracted by politics, personal and organizational ambition, or the perceived needs of narrow constituencies. It is not uncommon for leaders to focus on fundraising, the need for expanded facilities, or presumed financial benefit when deciding whether or not to partner, or how deeply to commit to a partnership. While it may be natural for institutions to be protective of resources, geography, academic programs, or donors, enlightened leaders recognize the growth possibilities of strategic alliances. Managed properly, partnerships can be a force multiplier in terms of institutional reach and innovation. Through a strategic alignment of resources, institutions can serve more students, raise more money, and become more indispensable to their region.

Confront the hard facts. Successful partners must be prepared to disclose data, analyze it together, and determine a shared course of action. They also need to agree on the important questions that should be answered and put systems and processes in place to monitor progress. In a successful partnership, each party brings certain strengths to the relationship, as well as gaps in
their institutional portfolio. As such, partnerships create a great opportunity for institutional assessment. By honestly assessing both sides of the capability ledger, it becomes easier to identify natural areas of collaboration and how the partnership can open doors that would not have been possible individually.

**Agree on general principles.** What are the key areas that each partner wants to protect? What are the boundaries? Stating these up front ensures that the collaboration makes sense at a concept level before scoping a specific project.

**But, don’t over-think it.** The best way to work together is to work together. If partners work until all possible scenarios are worked out in a sterile, legalistic way, there will always be a reason not to do it. It is critical that both partners find a project that is mutually important and go work. The important terms of the arrangement will emerge through the course of working together.

**Collaborate in an area of importance to both partners.** This will ensure that the best person from each partner institution will be involved and that accountability for a successful outcome rests with top leaders of the respective organizations. It also will guarantee that the collaboration receives proper resources to succeed.

**Be selective.** Develop a few, deep partnerships instead of multiple, shallow ones. There is not a substantial institutional investment—primarily in time—involved in developing successful collaborative relationships. But once the partnership is firmly established, the trust and understanding that are achieved make it easier for the partners to take on new challenges together. The required level of trust can be achieved with a large number of partners. However, different units within a large organization may have their own group of select partners that follow these principles.

**Conclusion**

American higher education faces a dilemma. The need to produce more bachelor’s degree graduates has never been greater. Yet, the challenges for institutions and barriers for student success continue to mount. For institutions, declining financial surpluses, rising expectations to address workforce needs, the necessity to serve an increasingly diverse group of students, and the pressures of perceived status have an impact on selectivity and access. For students, rising costs, job and family responsibilities, high school preparation, uncertain career paths, and cultural and geographic considerations all play a part in their persistence in earning a degree.

Traditional thinking around curriculum articulation agreements between institutions is insufficient to address the need and meet the challenges. New ideas focused on student pathway required. This new thinking encompasses academic programs and curricula tailored to the unique needs of students, a comprehensive suite of support services that are easily accessible, flexible convenient course scheduling, and adequate student financial resources. Few institutions have the resources or the expertise to bring this new model to scale on their own. Student-centered initiatives, where institutions bring shared goals and complementary skills, may be the best way to regions to meet the needs of students, families, and the community.

The four community colleges and state university that comprise the Central Florida Higher Education Consortium have developed such a partnership that has proven to be productive for their students and their institutions. By creating new student pathways through guaranteed admission, a collaborative advising model, shared program planning, and an expanding regional car system, this consortium and its DirectConnect to UCF model has demonstrated that a strategic alliance among institutions can reach far more students than any partner could do individually.