

Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 3

January 2012

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Willie Redmond

Southeast Missouri State University, wredmond@semo.edu

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Recommended Citation

Redmond, Willie (2012) "Collaboration in Missouri Higher Education: The MACE Initiative," *Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University*. Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.

DOI: 10.58809/ORFO7816

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ts/vol4/iss1/3>

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Collaboration in Missouri Higher Education: The MACE Initiative

Willie Redmond

Southeast Missouri State University

When Missouri Governor Jay Nixon addressed a Higher Education Summit in August, 2010, he warned that, due to the financial challenges faced by the state, future cuts to all state agencies, including higher education, “w[ould] be substantial.” Nixon called upon higher education to adopt an agenda that strengthened Missouri’s higher education system while addressing workforce needs and economic development opportunities of the state. One key element of his proposed agenda was “cooperation and collaboration.” In response, the Missouri Alliance for Collaborative Education (MACE) was initiated to provide a medium through which institutions of higher education in the state of Missouri can collaborate and offer a full range of course offerings in programs that are facing enrollment and/or resource challenges, thereby using more efficiently the state’s increasingly limited resources, and helping prevent the loss of important academic programs.

The MACE initiative began with the *Statewide Workshop on Academic Transformation and Collaboration: Reimagining Higher Education in Missouri*, held in Columbia, Missouri, on October 25-26, 2010. More than 160 attendees from thirteen Missouri universities heard presentations on collaborative programs and began discussions among themselves in break-out sessions, where participants identified their area(s) of need, including the courses they would like to deliver. They then developed a sketch of some structural possibilities, formulated a rough schedule for certain tasks to occur, solicited volunteers to perform them, and established a firm date for the next meeting. At the conclusion of the workshop, several universities signed two “Memorandums of Agreement,” which set into motion collaboration in the disciplines of Economics and Foreign Language. The MACE initiative is *totally voluntary*, and programs that are not currently involved in the project are welcome to initiate inquiries into joining. Not all programs within an institution may choose to participate in each collaborative effort. Likewise, any institution which is currently involved may exit with proper notice.

Core Principles of MACE

The MACE initiative is based upon the concept of collaborative instruction. Collaborative instruction brings multiple benefits to the university, including elimination of non-essential duplication, flexibility

of academic offerings, maximization of scarce resources, and expansion of curricula and overall program quality (Offerman 1997, Stein and Short 2001). However, studies have shown that while considerable progress has been made in bringing together university faculty for *research* efforts, faculty tend to be more resistant to collaboration in *teaching*. Stein and Short (2001) report that “though it is easy to promote collaboration, it is much more difficult to implement even minimal collaboration, much less a true alliance built upon mutual vision support and commitment from all parties.” Resistance may stem from rivalry between participating institutions, differences in cultures, fear of losing decision-making control, increased time commitment for course development, and problems with accreditation standards (Dicenso et al. 2008, Short and Stein 1998). Fortunately, the MACE initiative has encountered very little overt opposition, for reasons that I will discuss later.

The following items are the eight “Core Principles for the Development of MACE Cooperative Academic Programs” that were developed by the chief academic officers of the state universities. Where necessary, I append a brief explanation of the principle.

- 1. Students involved in the cooperative academic programs will pay tuition for the cooperative programs only at their home institution. No tuition or other remuneration will be exchanged between institutions.**
- 2. Students will register for courses at their home institution, although the instructor may be resident at another Missouri institution. No students will be required to transfer credit between institutions as a result of these cooperative agreements.**
These two items are key components of the program in that they provide for streamlined administrative duties. For simplicity, let us denote the institution teaching the course as university “A” and the remote students as from university “B” (and C, D...). Students from “A” obviously register just as they always do. However, under this system, the initial registration is not much different for the students at “B”. A corresponding (dummy) course is simply made available at “B” into which “B” students can register through their usual web registration systems. Of course, for this type of system to work, where students are paying tuition only to their home university, an acceptable sense of reciprocity must be in place. This is certainly an area that will need to be monitored as time passes.
- 3. Sending institutions will develop a simple system allowing students at receiving institutions to have easy access to the technology infrastructure at the sending institution to the extent**

necessary to effectively participate in the course. In general, students at receiving institutions will not be required to enroll in or be admitted to sending institutions.

- 4. Instructors at “teaching” institutions (*the campus where the course respective originates*) will deliver grades to instructors at receiving institutions at the end of each semester. Instructors at receiving institutions will record the grades according to standard practices at the receiving institution.**

These two points further underscore the simplicity of this MACE structure. Usually one person on the campus of the receiving university will act as the contact person for a class that is taught elsewhere. This can obviously be the person who is listed on the dummy course. Minimal duties such as entering final grades and sharing course rosters will be necessary.

- 5. Courses will follow the calendar of the sending institution.**

As one may imagine, this is one of the primary challenges with this system, as academic calendars across universities usually do not perfectly coincide. We have found it easier to adhere to the calendar of the “teaching” institution; however, this creates an initial challenge to communicate the all-important start of semester date to the students. We have mitigated potential problems in this area by embedding a notice in the online schedule of classes, thus alerting the students as they register that this class follows a different schedule (and may start earlier/later than their home university classes). Another issue is that the exam-week of that “teaching” university can occur after that of a partner university and therefore “after” that partner’s registrar-imposed deadline for reporting grades. Therefore, it is imperative that these discrepancies are communicated with the registrars as early as possible, so that accommodations can be made. Lastly, the dates of mid-semester breaks (spring-break and fall-break) tend to vary across universities. However, in these cases they tend to be *adjoining* weeks, so a workable solution to this has been to assign coursework in larger two-week blocks over these intervals, so that students are not required to miss their precious time at the beach! One must also be aware of “ADD” dates of the other universities, as it is very possible that students may need to be added to the roster of the MACE course, after the initial exchange of rosters. (If students go online and “add” a course in the system at their home university, it will not automatically appear in the remote MACE class *nor* will the student have access to the LMS of this class. Hence, proper

communication is *essential* in the first few weeks.)

6. **A committee composed of faculty representatives from each of the participating institutions will determine which courses are offered by each institution and when each course will be offered to the other cooperators. In general, the cooperating institutions will develop a calendar showing course offerings two years in advance.**

This is the first of three items that point out essential areas of which the collaborating group should be aware. A planned course schedule or calendar offers each participating university the opportunity to plan ahead and ensure that they have the necessary resources to meet teaching obligations. This also aids in the advising process for students, as it provides an easy way to look ahead and plan the path through the program. This is important because in some instances a particular course will not be offered in every academic term.

7. **A committee composed of faculty representatives from each of the participating institutions will develop a system to ensure that course quality is maintained, faculty credentials are appropriate, and accreditation standards are upheld.**

While there are several goals that the MACE agreement is designed to achieve, maintaining or even enhancing the quality of academic programs is foremost among them. Given that the “delivery” of instruction is the same as in any other webinar, online, or televised class taught from a single institution, this should be an easy goal to achieve. Likewise faculty credentials and accreditation expectations can be easily exchanged between partners.

8. **A committee composed of faculty representatives from each of the participating institutions will review the syllabi, textbook, and other significant course materials used in these collaborative agreements.**

Timely communication with the “textbook services” department of each institution is essential, so that students are able to acquire their books *before* the MACE course is designated to begin. This is especially relevant for those institutions whose regular term begins AFTER that of the MACE delivered course. In line with the idea of making all student interactions (except actually taking the class) “home-institution-based,” it is suggested the sending university communicates the information on the textbooks to the partner universities, so that students will be able to obtain the textbook from their home university. This final point (along with

the previous two) emphasizes the idea mentioned earlier, that the primary curriculum decision-making will be done by the partners in each respective collaborative program. Obviously, courses not currently in the catalog of a participating university must be added. However, MACE itself does not interfere in this activity, because curricular decisions are made by the same entities that do them for regular classes.

MACE Implementation

The MACE initiative was launched in the spring semester of 2011 with a pilot course, “Methods for Foreign Language Teachers,” as part of the MACE-Foreign Language group, which consisted of the University of Central Missouri (UCM), Missouri Western State University (MWSU), Missouri State University (MSU), and Southeast Missouri State University (SE). Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) subsequently joined in the next year. The pilot course was taught from the University of Central Missouri (UCM) and involved two partners, Missouri Western State University and Southeast Missouri State University. The information on the institutional participants and the number of students in this phase is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - MACE Student Enrollment – Spring 2011				
Foreign Languages				
Methods for Foreign Language Teachers	@UCM	Total: 14	UCM	5
			MWSU	1
			SE	8
Totals				
1 course	1 sending Institution	14 students	3 partners	

After the initial successful implementation, seven MACE courses followed in fall 2011. Table 2 shows a total of seven courses originating from five different institutions were offered, and 232 students from eight universities enrolled in these classes. These courses came from the MACE-Economics group, consisting of the University of Central Missouri (UCM), Northwest Missouri State University (NW), and Southeast Missouri State University (SE), and the MACE-Physics group, composed of the University of Missouri-Columbia (UMC), the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), Lincoln University (LU).

Table 2 - MACE Student Enrollment – Fall 2011				
Economics				
Sports Economics	@UCM	Total: 18	UCM	6
			SE	2
			NW	10
Labor Economics	@NW	Total: 77	UCM	16
			SE	15
			NW	46
International Economics	@SE	Total: 31	UCM	6
			SE	15
			NW	10
Foreign Languages				
German – Special Topics: Media	@UCM	Total: 30	UCM	10
			MSU	10
			SE	10
Intermediate French Composition	@MWSU	Total: 29	UCM	10
			MSU	11
			MWSU	4
			SE	4
Methods for Teaching Foreign Language Teachers	@UCM	Total: 8	UCM	4
			MWSU	4
Physics				
Nanostructures	@MUST	Total: 39	MUST	11
			SE	4
			MSU	3
			UMC	11
			TSU	2
			UMSL	8
Totals: 7 courses	5 sending institutions	232 students	8 partners	

Truman State University (TSU), Southeast Missouri State University (SE), Missouri Southern State University (MSSU), and Missouri State University (MSU). New courses offered included Sports Economics, Labor Economics, International Economics, German Special Topics: Media, Intermediate French Composition, and Nanostructures.

In spring 2012, one other collaborative group was introduced: the MACE-Environmental Science group, which currently consists of Lincoln

University and Southeast Missouri State University. In this phase, as reflected in Table 3, eight courses were offered, originating from five Missouri institutions, taken by 187 students from eight partner universities.

Table 3 - MACE Student Enrollment – Spring 2012				
Economics				
Econometrics	@UCM	Total: 17	UCM	14
			SE	1
			NW	2
Money, Credit & Banking	@NW	Total: 53	UCM	15
			SE	9
			NW	29
Comparative Economics	@SE	Total: 24	UCM	10
			SE	10
			NW	4
Environmental Science				
Environmental Hydrology	@LU	Total: 24	LU	10
			SE	14
Foreign Languages				
Methods for Foreign Lan- guage Teachers	@UCM	Total: 7	UCM	4
			MW	2
			SE	1
Survey of French Literature II	@UCM	Total: 12	UCM	9
			SE	3
Twentieth Century German Literature	@MSU	Total: 20	UCM	5
			MSU	13
			SE	1
			MSSU	1
Physics				
Optics	@SE	Total: 31	MSU	10
			SE	9
			UMSL	12
Totals: 8 course	5 sending institutions	187 students	8 partners	

All but one course were new and included Econometrics; Money, Credit & Banking; Comparative Economics; Environmental Hydrology; Survey

of French Literature II; Twentieth Century German Literature; and Optics.

MACE Results

A crucial feature of the MACE initiative is that each respective program has the freedom to determine specifics of the operations. There are certainly times when qualified professionals are wary of changes to the status quo, especially when there is a sense that others are encroaching upon their territories and imposing their will upon them. However, I am aware of no such response to this initiative. This could be due to the fact that the curricular decision-making is left up to the persons in that program, and there is little sense of some MACE administrative body looking over one's shoulder.

In fact, instead of "resistance," quite the opposite has happened in several areas. The ability to offer a course on one's campus is largely dependent on the projected course enrollment of the class. This is especially true of the "elective" courses. Therefore, it may be true that one has a particular specialization in an area, but that course may never achieve some critical mass of students (let us say ten) on any one campus, to justify teaching that course. However, under this collaborative framework this need not be true. Instead of needing ten students with this particular interest at "Institution A," one has the entire consortium of partner universities from which to attract a critical mass of students to justify the class. Correspondingly, this has created opportunities for faculty to teach courses that they otherwise would have never been able to teach.

Although this initiative has been extremely helpful in the delivery of these "elective" courses, it can turn out to be even more crucial for the "required" courses within a program. One can easily see that the before-mentioned strains on low enrollment programs are even more pronounced when courses within a program are "absolutely" needed by the students. This necessity could arise because of professional certification guidelines, knowledge requirements for board exams, or simply because a certain subset of knowledge is required in a particular field. An excellent example of such a course is the "Methods for Teaching Foreign Languages" course that is offered in the Foreign Languages collaborative group. This course has been offered in each of the three semesters, and this is necessarily so, due to the structured progression that each student must make through the program. Given this, in Tables 1-3 we see enrollments across the participating institutions of "5, 1, 8" in spring 2011; "4, 4" in fall 2011; and "4, 2, 1" in spring 2012. The difficulty that each institution may have had in offering this course independently is quite apparent. Resources are likely not being put to their best use when multiple institutions are offering the

same course, with enrollments as low as we see here.

In the absence of a collaborative agreement, one option would have been simply to offer the course with the low enrollments on each campus (inefficiently using a total of eight instructors). Alternatively, each university would have to wait and offer the class when a larger pool of students were available to take the course (although this could potentially take some students out of their natural progression through the program and thus again resulting in a sub-optimal outcome). However, when these same students are pooled together, as we see in the tables, into classes of 14 in spring 2011, 8 in fall 2011 and 7 in spring 2012 (thus using a total of three instructors) one can see that resources are more efficiently used.

Imbedded in the previous example is an even more important result. Due to the increased opportunity to offer these previously "squeezed out" courses, the breadth of course options for the students has increased. Due to our collaboration with the economics departments at the University of Central Missouri and Northwest Missouri State, we at Southeast Missouri State are able to offer a wider selection of economics electives. For instance, due to the relatively low number of majors in the department, the low-to-moderate demand for the course, and our scarce instructional resources, we have not been able to offer "Labor Economics" for the past 15 years. However, due to this collaborative agreement, Northwest Missouri State is able to offer the class and the Southeast Missouri students and the University of Central Missouri students are able to enroll in it and make a complete class.

This point is even more pronounced when one looks at another fall 2011 offering in the MACE-Economics collaboration. A faculty member at the University of Central Missouri whose research area includes "Sports Economics" has offered a course in that area to the consortium. Before this collaborative agreement, Sports Economics is a course that has *never* been taught on the Southeast Missouri State campus. So here is a prime example where the "shared expertise" resulting from the collaboration increases the breadth of the courses and enhances the quality of the education that we are able to offer our students.

Of course, one possible worry is that these collaborative initiatives are simply a method to reduce the number of faculty needed to deliver these courses. While admittedly this "could" be the case in particular situations, we have not found this to be true. I have already talked about how it has allowed faculty to teach certain courses that they otherwise would not have been able to offer. Also, in the past there was a need for our Economics Department to hire adjunct professors to fill some of our introductory courses. However, now with the collaborative initiative, we can better

cover these classes with full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty who are currently doing research. I believe that this can only add to the experience of our introductory students to have access to an instructor who is more connected to the field.

An additional byproduct of this collaborative agreement is that the greater coverage of elective courses has allowed some faculty an opportunity to remain “fresh” by launching or maintaining teaching positions in our MBA program. The same would be true for other college-level courses that are shared among the three departments at Southeast Missouri State.

Reciprocity Issues

As mentioned earlier, since the MACE system is built upon the idea of no exchanges of tuition, an acceptable sense of reciprocity should prevail. Given that MACE collaborations have been in effect for only two semesters, it is likely too early, with samples too small, to worry too much about how reciprocal the arrangement has been thus far. This is especially true as one should not ignore the “benefits” when assessing the short-term costs that have occurred. However, as for a quick peek at the situation, just so one can be aware of the early trends, the enrollment numbers for the six courses in the MACE-Economics group are presented in Table 4. In the first three numerical rows are the students from each respective university who

Table 4: Total Enrollments from MACE-Economics						
	Fall 2011			Spring 2012		
	SE	NW	UCM	SE	NW	UCM
	International	Labor	Sports	Compara- tive	Money	Econometrics
UCM	6	16	6	10	15	14
NW	10	46	2	4	29	2
SE	15	15	10	10	9	1
Total	31	77	18	24	53	17
Off Campus	*16	*31	*12	*14	*24	*3

are in each of the classes. The “total” row indicates the total number of students in the course, and the “Off Campus” row shows the total number of students in each class *not* from the “teaching” university. It is apparent that there is an imbalance so far in the numbers, as Northwest has taught 55 off campus students, while Southeast has taught 30 off campus students

and UCM has taught 15 students off campus.

We are certainly already aware of reasons behind this, which include the “popularity” of the courses that are offered by the partners and the high enrollment caps that we used in the early semester. Therefore as I said at the outset, this is of no immediate concern to any of the partners as we have corrective actions to remedy the issue. However, this “too-early” “small-sample” result was introduced just to alert those who are involved in this type of system that they would want to monitor the situation long-term.

Conclusions

Institution interested in establishing a MACE-type collaborative agreement should first determine whether there are disciplines for which there is an institutional fit. Generally speaking, interested programs are encouraged to establish communications with other programs currently involved in a collaborative agreement. There will be issues/concerns common to most. If the initial inquiries originate from administrators or other decision-makers, they should be sure to consult directly with the relevant stakeholders (departments, etc.) on the feasibility and the potential for success of such programs. After such programs have been identified, the faculty and administrators should begin to discuss the logistics of how the program can be successful. These may include, but are certainly not limited to the following topics:

- Which schools are going to participate and at what level?
- “Who” is going to teach “which” courses?
- Accreditation issues
- Compensation issues
- Access issues (e.g., online, webinar, ITV)
- Academic calendar issues
- Course content (and syllabus) consistency

Our experiences, so far, indicate that the MACE initiative has made a positive impact on Missouri Higher Education and demonstrates the value of collaboration in the realm of teaching. Students in the programs have certainly benefited from an expanded menu of courses and easier access to required courses. Despite fears to the contrary, the MACE initiative has not led to an immediate reduction of faculty. On the contrary, we have found that it has allowed us to efficiently re-allocate our current resources into more critical areas and in several cases increase the options of courses that are available for the faculty to teach. There are several programs that are getting set to launch new MACE courses. We hope to grow the program so that the benefits can accrue to a wider range of students and the efficiencies

can accrue to a wider set of programs. Given the conclusions from this paper, it is my contention that the current MACE initiative has been a success and that future growth in the program will benefit the participating universities, their students, and the state of Missouri.

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