

Expanding Our Breadth Through a Historic New Alliance

by

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Students often make the final decision on which college to attend based on three criteria: **prestige**, **program**, and **price**. Regarding **prestige**, nearly all of last year's admitted students who chose not to attend Olin College went instead to Ivy League universities or MIT—the most highly ranked engineering school in the US. Not one of them chose another undergraduate institution. Since prestige depends largely on reputation and name recognition among the general public, the potential for substantial growth of the reputation of Olin College in the next few years would seem limited. Regarding **price**, Olin College has gone to extraordinary lengths to be competitive on price through the full tuition scholarship program. However, this one-size-fits-all scholarship does not pay for room and board and other expenses (unless the student can demonstrate need), and is not as attractive as a number of other selective scholarships at top universities (e.g., Robertson Scholarship at Duke University, etc.) that our admission candidates are often offered. In addition, the current financial crisis has raised questions about the sustainability of our current full tuition scholarship, reducing the potential for improvement in our price.

Regarding **program**, Olin College offers three B.S. degrees, all of which are in engineering. While our current academic program is widely recognized as very innovative and attractive, Olin was conceived as a specialty school and as such it is difficult to find another competitive college or university with a narrower range of program offerings. This can present a significant disadvantage in competing for extremely talented students with broad interests. Such students, at 18 years of age, are often undecided on whether to pursue engineering, or entrepreneurship, or medicine, or business, or law, or some other career. At comprehensive research universities the opportunities to explore such broad interests appear to students to be much greater, resulting in a significant competitive disadvantage for Olin College.

Our neighbor institutions also present themselves to prospective students as “specialty” schools to some degree. For example, Babson College offers only B.S. degrees in business and Wellesley College offers a women-only learning environment with no on-campus professional schools. Babson was also conceived as a specialty school with a narrow range of degree offerings. At Wellesley, the choice of a women-only learning environment can be a more important determining factor than the breadth of academic program for some women admission candidates. However, when taken together as an ensemble of adjacent colleges they could provide prospective students with a substantially expanded breadth of academic programs that would rival many comprehensive universities while each retains the very distinctive learning environment of a selective undergraduate institution which is their current hallmark.

Furthermore, the complementarity and lack of overlap in mission and focus of these three institutions combined with their adjacency present a compelling opportunity for forming an expanded alliance that could lead to new program opportunities on all three campuses. In addition, similar opportunities for the enrichment of co-curricular and student life programming as well as the potential for administrative cost sharing and mutual sharing of best-practices presents a significant opportunity.

Of course, these three institutions have long maintained cooperative agreements that allow students to cross-register for individual courses on the other two campuses at no cost, on a space-available basis. But the potential for a much more substantive alliance could potentially transform the three institutions into a form of “virtual university” over time.

Last summer the presidents of the three institutions first discussed this concept which then led to substantive discussions among the senior staff and Trustees on all three campuses. The timing of this discussion was fortunate since both Wellesley College and Babson College welcomed new presidents to their campuses within twelve months of the first discussions. In addition, the rapid development of the global financial crisis last fall affected all of us and provided a degree of urgency to the notion of sharing resources and forming a closer partnership.

Recently these discussions led to the development of a **Joint Statement** by the three presidents calling the faculty and staff of the three institutions to work together toward developing an expanded level of alliance that could one day lead to various new joint academic programs. A copy of the Joint Statement is attached to this white paper. We believe this new alliance will lead to historic and potentially transformative changes in the relationships between these three institutions. In addition, it has the potential to establish an important new model for academic partnerships in Massachusetts that one day might become as successful as the Claremont Colleges in California or the Five Colleges of Western Massachusetts.

However, it is important to recognize that the development of new academic programs must be initiated and approved by the faculty of the three colleges acting both individually and collectively. It cannot be independently imposed through any administrative action. Therefore, we are signaling the beginning of a conversation and a process involving our respective faculties and senior campus leaders and not the conclusion of a binding covenant of any kind.

These new developments and their context raise several questions that would benefit from the discussion of the President's Council. We plan to focus the upcoming President's Council meeting on these strategic questions:

1. How important do you believe this new alliance should be in prioritizing our efforts for the next several years?
2. What potential challenges and risks do you foresee in attempting to elevate this alliance to the level envisioned here?
3. What other suggestions do you have that might help Olin College remain competitive for the exceptional students we need as we face concerns about the sustainability of our full tuition scholarship?

***** D R A F T *****

Joint Statement on Collaboration

Babson College, Olin College, and Wellesley College share a commitment to liberal arts and undergraduate education. Their geographic proximity and complementary curricula provide opportunities to exploit the synergies inherent in their location and mission. Recognizing the benefits to all parties of our ever-increasing collaboration, the presidents of Babson College, Olin College, and Wellesley College are committed to deepening these relationships. To this end, we would like the faculty, staff, and students to take steps to promote and facilitate long-term forms of cooperation among all three institutions.

Current Levels of Collaboration

Fortunately, we have a good foundation from which to begin the deepening of these relationships. Some examples of the current areas of cooperation include:

- **Cross registration of students from any one of the colleges on a “space available” basis in courses on the campus of any of the other colleges, at no cost.**
- **Courses offered by faculty from one college on the campus of another, at no cost.** (Examples include introductory accounting and law courses offered by faculty from Babson College on the campus of Wellesley College; courses in anthropology, immunology, mathematical modeling, human genetics, and introductory engineering offered by Olin College faculty on the campus of Wellesley College; etc.)
- **Jointly appointed faculty members on two or more campuses.** (Examples include faculty in science and in technology entrepreneurship jointly appointed between Babson and Olin Colleges.)
- **Joint academic degree and certificate programs.** (Examples include the MS in Management degree with concentration in Technology Entrepreneurship offered by Babson College for Olin students; the Certificate in Engineering Studies program offered by Olin College for students from Babson and Wellesley Colleges.)
- **Jointly offered academic courses on two or more campuses.** (Examples include Issues in Leadership & Ethics taught by the presidents of all three colleges for seniors from all three colleges; a course in product design involving both faculty and students from Babson, Olin, and RISD; a class in new technology ventures involving both faculty and students from Babson and Olin; etc.)
- **Intercampus Curricular and Research Initiatives.** (Example includes a new initiative on global sustainability launched by faculty at Babson, Olin and Wellesley Colleges; a new curricular initiative on “design for business” launched by faculty from Olin and Babson Colleges; etc.)
- **Open membership and participation in a variety of student activities and programs across all three campuses, at no cost.** (Examples include drama

ensembles involving students from all three campuses; music and dance ensembles involving students from Babson and Olin; participation by Olin students in Babson's Blank Center programs as well as participation by Babson students in Olin's Foundry programs; programs offered for students on all three campuses by the Women's Leadership Center at Babson College and the Wellesley Centers for Women.)

- **Intercampus services to foster cooperation.** (Examples include the shuttle service between all three campuses.)

Areas for Possible Future Expansion of Cooperation

These efforts provide a good foundation for us to build upon and expand to other areas of mutual benefit. We hope that we will move on initiatives that give our students more curricular choices, our faculty a chance to undertake joint research and curricular projects, our Centers to cooperate on conferences and programs, and our organizations to utilize economies of scale and scope on shared services such as landscaping and food services. For example, some future areas to explore together are:

- **Expansion of academic program collaborations.** (Examples include increasing the opportunities for students to cross register at neighboring campuses; increasing the number and breadth of integrated certificate, degree, and major concentration programs across institutions; support for joint student and faculty research, and student internships; jointly hosting national and international programs to teach faculty new pedagogies; etc.)
- **Joint sponsorship of visitors, speakers, and conferences.** (Examples include jointly hosted visits by visiting fellows from academia, business, and industry; jointly sponsored workshops, forums, and high-profile speaker series for academic, business, political and industry leaders; etc.)
- **Expansion of business and service collaborations.** (Examples include using economies of scale in joint purchasing of supplies and services; initiation of joint intra and intercampus projects to enhance the sustainable practices of campuses and business operations; etc.)
- **Joint outreach programs.** (Examples include joint outreach to the regional and state community, especially to small business and non-profit organizations, experts, and advisors; joint outreach to the K-12 community, especially to teachers; etc.)

We recognize that further cooperative efforts can succeed only if there is a supportive infrastructure behind the efforts. Often things such as registration systems, transfer of credits, calendars, different operating procedures, rules, and regulations create impediments to greater cooperation. It is particularly important that in these financially challenging times, we try to actively remove these impediments. We therefore hope that the faculty, staff and students of our three institutions will actively seek out opportunities to work together rather than separately.