

Consortium Dreams:

A Study of
Worcester Students' Hopes for
Inter-College Connections

By President's Honors Seminar,

Spring 2016



WORCESTER
STATE
UNIVERSITY

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FOREWORD

This study is the end result of the President’s Honors Seminar, an honors class at Worcester State University in which students work closely with a professor on a real-world research project. That project is determined in consultation with the university president and is aimed at providing useful and timely information that helps him do his job.

In Spring 2016, the seminar explored what Worcester’s college students want from a robust consortium relationship among the 10+ institutions of higher learning in and around the city.

Constituted as a research team, students and their professor examined existing consortium models, and, based on this research, created an online survey for Worcester students that asked about a wide variety of consortium possibilities. The team analyzed the survey results and its findings are presented here.

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As befits this sort of project, the research team accrued many debts its members would like to acknowledge here. Without this help, this project and report would not have been possible.

Research team members would like to thank the following members of the Worcester State University community: Barry M. Maloney, President; Lois Wims, PhD, Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs; Carl Herrin, Assistant to the President; Karen Woods Weierman, PhD, Honors Program Director; and Mary Flibbert, secretary of the Honors Program and Department of Urban Studies.

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Finally, the research team wishes to acknowledge the Department of Urban Studies and especially the Vincent “Jake” Powers CityLab, the department’s research institute, for use of its staff and resources. And as always, I recognize my department colleagues for their support, encouragement, and assistance along the way.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a Spring 2016 survey designed to provide data about what Worcester's college students want from a consortium of local higher education institutions. Inquiring about academics, service availability, programs, transportation, shared spaces, and a universal student ID, the research team gained insight into the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for a consortium. The team presents its work here as a way to enrich future discussion.

In total, 639 participants took the survey. The response was especially good from Worcester State University and the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Approximately 2/3 of the respondents were female (68%), and just under 3/4 were between 18 and 25 years old (73%). Most respondents identified Worcester (25%) or Massachusetts but outside Worcester (64%) as their permanent address. Slightly more than 3/4 identified as white (76%).

For a fuller discussion of the study's methodology and respondent profile, see the "Methodology" section elsewhere in this report.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Academics:

- Only a small percentage of respondents have taken classes through the consortium. The vast majority of students have not, and of that group, many express interest in doing so but are hampered by a variety of obstacles.
- Obstacles — particularly access to information, timing of classes, and lack of adequate transportation services — prevent students from taking advantage of the academic opportunities of the consortium both on-campus and off-campus in the Worcester community.
- Respondents voiced a lack of understanding (and sometimes frustration borne from confusion) about what the consortium offers and how to access it. Students often reported they were unaware that any consortium existed, while others said they were told of it only briefly.

Service Availability:

- Respondents reported that inter-campus services such as access to WiFi, library access, transportation, and social networks were wanting, which in turn dissuaded cross-campus contact.

- Respondents recognized that capitalizing on service- and programmatic-centered opportunities, especially those that possessed a social dimension, can enrich college life in Worcester and fill academic, social, and professional gaps by maximizing the collective resources of the colleges and universities.

Programs:

- Respondents expressed great interest in guest lectures, performances, and social events that were open to students from all campuses.
- Inter-campus groups/activities such as cultural organizations, activist groups, recreational sports, and game/hobby groups also received high ratings. These activities were often tied to service-related questions and spoke to student desires for more interaction with each other across campuses.
- Although school/work schedules affected respondents' participation in programs and clubs, they reported the most significant obstacles to their participation in programs at campuses other than their own were: lack of information about them, lack of adequate transportation, and costs.

Transportation:

- Transportation was a major issue for Worcester college students that emerged in students' comments in every survey section.
- The majority of respondents said they depended on their automobiles to survive in Worcester, and further reported that they had few practicable options besides cars.
- The majority of on-campus students in particular want access to public and alternative transportation, and the idea of an inter-campus shuttle and/or improvements to both the WRTA and city bicycle routes/lanes were frequently noted.

Universal Student ID and Shared Space

- There was considerable interest in the development of a Universal Student ID that students can use at different campuses for a variety of reasons: cross-registration, library borrowing, program access, and service use.
- Respondents were intrigued by the possibility of a shared space (or spaces) for all university students for programs/events, meeting space, and research services.

CONSORTIA MODELS

Simply put, higher education consortia are partnerships or associations between two or more schools for specific purposes. Through such associations, schools often share academic resources, offer joint programs and experiences, enhance student experiences, and use their collective nature to maximize administrative resources and increase purchasing power.



One example of a successful higher education consortium is

the Five Colleges Consortium in Western Massachusetts, also called Five Colleges, Incorporated.

Founded in 1965, it is one of the oldest consortia in the country. The five member institutions, which are within 10 miles of each other, are:

- Amherst College
- Hampshire College
- Mount Holyoke College
- Smith College
- University of Massachusetts-Amherst

This consortium “promotes and administers long-term forms of cooperation that benefit faculty and staff members and students.” Among its specific goals are: “shared use of educational and cultural resources and facilities” (including a joint library system, cross registration, and open theater auditions); “joint departments and programs,” and “inter-campus transportation.”

The overarching mission of the Five Colleges is academic and administrative collaboration, particularly as it “facilitates intellectual communities and broad curricular and co-curricular offerings affording learning, research, performance, and social opportunities.” Its institutions offer a robust centralized library catalog and interlibrary loan program, allow students take classes at other schools, and encourage participation in groups and organizations that span individual institutions.

An estimated 5,000 undergraduates annually cross-register for courses across the five campuses. A central calendar of events links the activities of each campus, and students can arrange to use campus meal plans at other consortium schools. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, operated by UMass Transit, offers a fare-free bus system which runs from campus-to-campus and across the region. UMass students have the opportunity to work as drivers for the cross-campus bus.



Founded in 1925, the Consortium of the Claremont Colleges is a higher education consortium located in Claremont, California.

Its seven member colleges are:

- Pomona College
- Scripps College
- Claremont McKenna College
- Harvey Mudd College
- Pitzer College
- Claremont Graduate University
- Keck Graduate Institute of Applied Life Sciences

Unlike the Five Colleges, Claremont College campuses are close neighbors and within walking distance of each other. The organizing idea behind this association came from European universities in which smaller, specialized programs with personal touches (colleges) pool resources among a larger collective (university).

According to its webpage, the Claremont Consortium is a “nationally recognized educational model for academic support, student support, and institutional support services.” Shared services among the Claremont Colleges include a central library, ethnic centers, a central bookstore, information technology, and risk management. It offers an extensive, cross-campus website with program information and links to each member college, as well as a master calendar of educational, cultural, and social events by type to keep faculty, students, and staff informed.



Established in 1995, the Boston Consortium For

Higher Education is another local example of a strong consortium. Comprised of eleven colleges, mainly from the Boston area, its member institutions are:

- Babson College
- Bentley University
- Berklee College of Music
- Boston College
- Boston University
- Brandeis University
- College of the Holy Cross
- Emerson College
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Northeastern University
- Olin College

- Suffolk University
- Tufts University
- Wellesley College
- Wheaton College

The mission of the Boston Consortium is to collect data, create collaborative projects, build a leveraged scale, be entrepreneurial, and act as a learning tool. The Boston Consortium is focused primarily on creating well-rounded and more effective leaders by providing the opportunity to collaborate with students and faculty from other campuses on complex problems that society faces today. It aims to provide students with skill sets based around making positive change. The collaborative projects in which students engage serve as testing grounds on which they use their learning to impact the world outside of the consortium.

Unlike the Claremont Colleges, the Boston Consortium institutions are much more spread out geographically, and many individual schools are considerably larger than the Claremont Consortium. Still, pooling resources are important in both.



Also located in Boston are the Colleges of the Fenway. Like the Claremont University colleges, its six member institutions are relatively small schools that are close neighbors:

- Emmanuel College
- Massachusetts College of Art and Design
- MCPHS University
- Simmons College
- Wentworth Institute of Technology
- Wheelock College

On the academic side, the consortium's purpose is to "enhance the student and faculty environments" of the individual institutions. At the same time, its administrative agenda is to "slow down the escalating costs of higher education through the sharing of resources, the ending of costly duplication, and the advantages of joint purchasing."

Students in the consortium may cross-register for courses, utilize a Fenway Card ID and cash card, play intermural sports, and join inter-campus arts programs and ensembles. There is also a robust, publicly-assessable consortium website that allows advisors access to information, lists savings for members at hotels, museums, and the Hubway, and communicates job/internship possibilities.



Worcester-area colleges have had two different

consortia over time. The first, the Colleges of the Worcester Consortium (COWC), formed in the late-1960s to cooperatively further its members individual missions and advance higher education in the region. Programs connected K-12 students to the colleges, and offered transportation among campuses.

By 2013, the COWC restructured into two organizations, the Massachusetts Education and Career Opportunities Inc. (MassEdCO) and the Higher Education Consortium of Central Massachusetts (HECCMA).

HECCMA encompasses thirteen area institutions.

- Anna Maria College
- Assumption College
- Becker College
- Clark University
- College of the Holy Cross
- MCPHS University
- Nichols College
- Quinsigamond Community College
- Worcester State University
- Worcester Polytechnic Institute
- Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University
- UMass Medical School

Its goal is to promote academic collaboration, professional development, and to "position Worcester and the region as a premiere destination for undergraduate and graduate students as well as university faculty and staff."

The consortium's core priorities are "1. promoting Worcester and Central Massachusetts... 2. cross-registration, 3. cost effectiveness, [and] 4. promoting collaboration and community among member institutions."

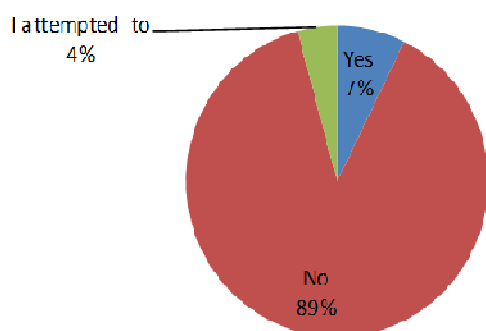
For more information on these consortia see:

<https://www.fivecolleges.edu/>
<http://www.claremont.edu/>
<http://www.cuc.claremont.edu/aboutcuc/>
<http://www.boston-consortium.org/>
<http://www.colleges-fenway.org/>
<http://www.heccma.org/>

ACADEMICS

A major purpose of the survey was to explore what academic opportunities students wanted from Worcester's consortium schools. Consortia often seek to provide richer academic experiences for their students by facilitating course registration across member institutions and offering academic programs that span campuses. The survey posed questions regarding students' views on these traditional consortium experiences, and asked what other academic opportunities they want. Comment boxes provided space for elaboration.

Have You Taken A Class Through HECCMA?



TAKING CLASSES

Among the first questions asked of respondents was, "Have you ever taken a course through the consortium?" Of the 546 students who answered this question, only 7.3% said they had.

This relatively small number often related positive experiences. For example, a sophomore nursing student at WSU wrote, the consortium "allows a much broader college perspective with two very different school cultures along with an amazing career opportunity." A UMass student said, "the availability of all the schools and the courses they provided made taking my pre-requisites easy and manageable." As an Assumption student put it, "The signup process was very easy, and the staff at both my school and the host school were very helpful in getting me any extra information I needed in order to complete the process, as well as answer any questions I had."

Comments from those who took a class through the consortium generally indicate satisfaction, but there were also important critical comments. A WSU biotechnology student noted "class times are different" and said he was "unable to get specific help/tutoring" at the host school. A UMass graduate chemistry student reported two different experiences:

The anatomy class I took was good, but I was unable to get into microbiology and then somehow got off a wait-

list, never notified, and was billed. It turned out to be a huge pain.

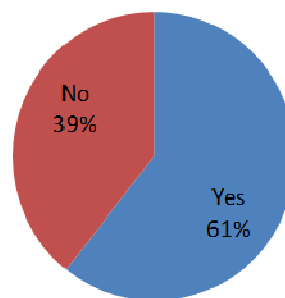
Another Assumption student commented it was "stressful not knowing if you'll get into a class."

There were similar comments from the 4% who had unsuccessfully attempted to take classes through the consortium. A common observation among this group were scheduling difficulties. An Assumption biology major wrote, "I wanted to take a class at WPI but because their terms are different, the timing didn't coincide with my schedule." A Clark student similarly said about a class at WPI, "the timing did not work out."

More common still from those unsuccessful in taking a class was their lack of knowledge about the system. As a biomedical science grad student at UMass succinctly put it: "I don't know what my options are." A WPI marketing & innovation graduate student echoed the same feeling: "I'm willing to take classes via the consortium, but I didn't know how it works." A public health student from WSU claimed, "I had a lot of trouble finding classes at other schools and didn't know who to ask, so I eventually gave up." Similarly, an occupational therapy student at WSU wrote,

[it is] hard to figure out how to sign up for the classes, or to find the course that you are looking for in particular. There is no easy way to search what other colleges offer that could expand our college education.

If no, are you interested in taking classes through the consortium?



Overall, the majority of respondents (88.5%) reported they had not taken courses at a Worcester college beyond their home campus. Perhaps even more significant is that among this group, more than 60% said they were interested in taking classes at another consortium institution. This suggests students would like to take advantage of the consortium, but at present they have not, often because, as a WSU senior suggested, "very few people, to me, seem to even know that there is a Consortium between the other colleges and universities in Worcester."

OTHER ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

Trying to understand more about the academic opportunities Worcester students want, the research team asked respondents what “academic-related experiences” were the most enticing and necessary for them.

Their top three choices are:

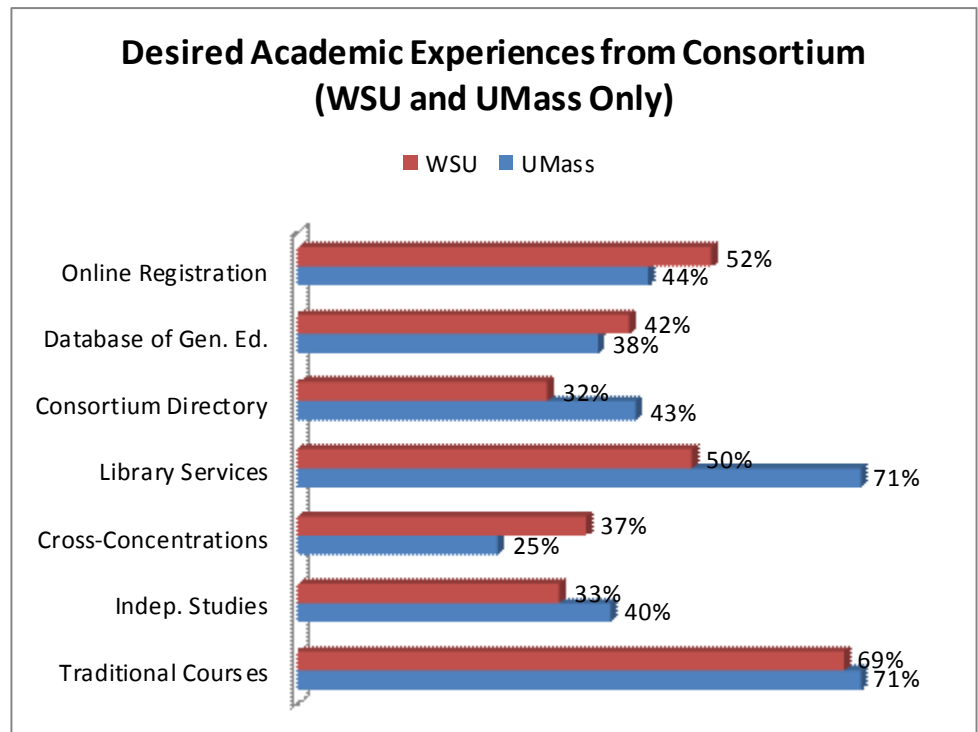
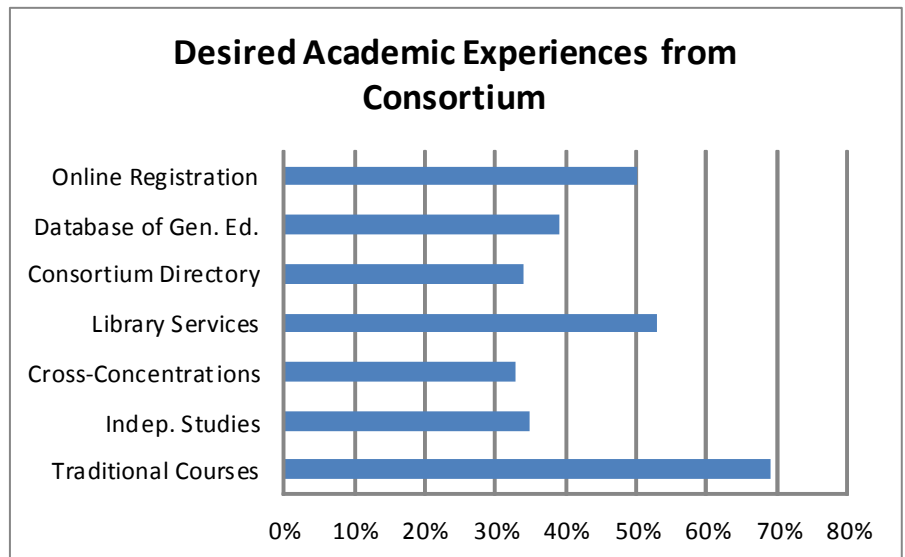
- *Traditional Courses* (69.2%), which was explained as “enrolling in traditional courses at other colleges,”
- *Library Resources* (53.3%), or “borrowing items from other college libraries,” and
- *Online Registration* (49.7%), or “using an online registration system for all consortium campuses.”

The bottom three are:

- *Indep. Studies* (35.5%), explained as “enrolling in independent studies with faculty from other colleges,”
- *Consortium Directory* (34.4%), or “accessing a multi-campus directory of faculty with links to individual pages/departments,” and
- *Cross-Concentrations* (33.2%), or “enrolling in academic concentrations that span campuses.”

Looking at only the responses from UMass and WSU students, populations that responded in particularly high numbers, the general contours understandably follow the more general outcomes: *Traditional Courses*, *Library Services*, and *Online Registration* ranked high while *Indep. Studies*, *Consortium Directory*, and *Cross-Concentrations* ranked low.

A noteworthy difference, though, is observable in the degree to which the students favored some experiences. UMass students indicate that they desired *Library Services* and *Consortium Directory* more than WSU students, while WSU students desired more *Cross-Concentrations*.



Finally, respondents were allowed to offer open response feedback about academic experiences they wanted to see available from the consortium. This served as something of a “Suggestion Box.” Among the suggestions related to academic experiences offered were:

- Research collaboration with faculty across colleges
- Access to libraries and wireless internet across Worcester campuses
- Enrolling in online courses at other colleges
- Attending academic conferences at area schools

SERVICE AVAILABILITY

The second major section of the survey focused on determining what services students would like to use from campus-to-campus among consortium schools. Different from academics and programs/events, service availability refers primarily to facility access and usage, and methods of networking.

The areas that intrigued respondents the most are:

- *WiFi* (access to wireless internet service while on other campuses), which 62.7% said they were “definitely interested in,” and
- *Inter-campus Transportation*, which 50.8% marked as definitely interested.

Combining responses of those who are “definitely interested” with those who “might be interested” generated some intriguing results. Respondents overwhelmingly said they were interested in:

- *WiFi* (86%)
- *Libraries* (84.6%)
- *Inter-campus Transportation* (75.2%)
- *Networking* (73.1%), or “hosting consortium networking/career fairs”
- *Gyms* (72.2%)

On the other hand, *Campus Jobs* and *Copying/Printing Services* ranked the least interesting among the combined responses.

The research team also asked why respondents want to utilize these services at campuses other than their

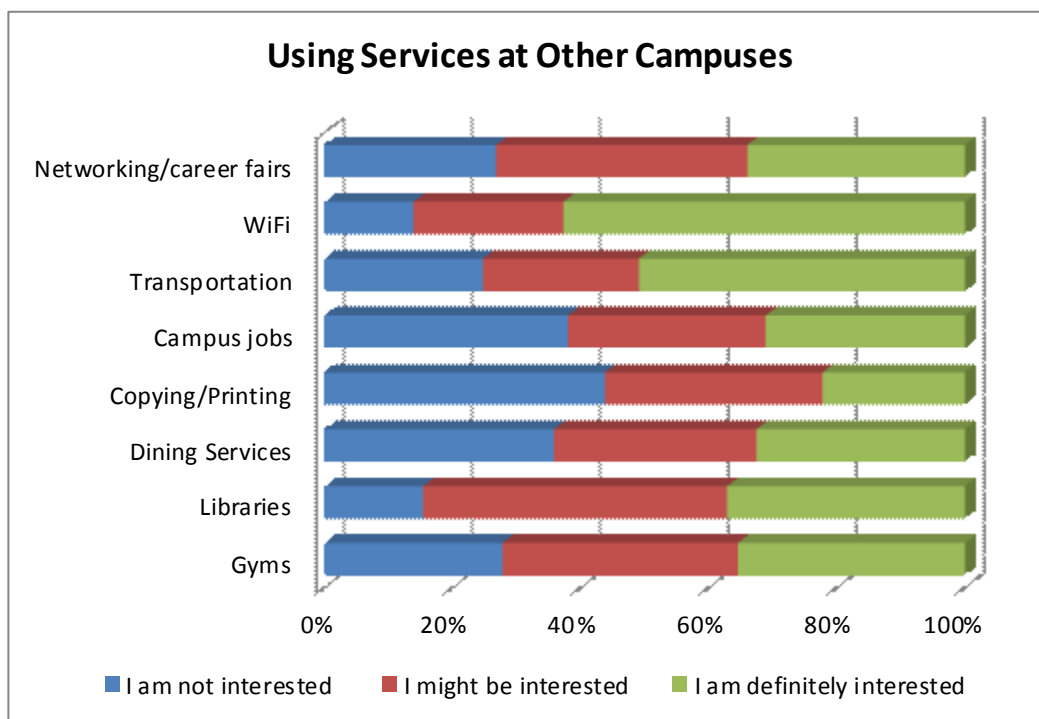
own. Those results were also telling:

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) claimed the facilities are better at other campuses.
- 54% stated that using services at other campuses allows them to connect with students from different schools, which supports the idea that students want social opportunities as well as academic ones within a consortium.
- 26% said it was more convenient to be able to use the services of other consortium colleges than those of their home campus..

The point is, while asking about the types of services students wanted from campus-to-campus, they had a practical approach exemplified by their desire for access to better and more convenient services based on their school, home, and work lives. Yet, a second story clearly emerged in the research: respondents wanted to be able to meet with and connect to counterparts at other campuses, in social and professional environments as much as in academic ones.

SERVICES FOR SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING

The desire to network across campuses emerged in multiple areas of the survey. Respondents made linkages between services on their campuses and others that crossed institutional, disciplinary, age, and demographic lines. This often pushed into programming, the next section, but respondents first began to voice these ide-



as when they were prompted to consider campus services.

Importantly, some respondents saw prohibitive obstacles that had to be meaningfully addressed before inter-campus service and program initiatives could take root. A senior psychology major from WSU put her finger on a problem when she wrote,

there is a subtle dissuasion from using other campus' facilities, as it is incredibly difficult to gather information on other campus' activities/opportunities, organize transportation, as well as the association of using these other resources from other schools with disloyalty to the main campus.

An Assumption student, also a psychology major, echoed these sentiments as well: "Even though the schools in Worcester are in a consortium, they are all concerned with their own agendas so it makes it difficult for any student to know what is available to them." A WSU criminal justice student claimed, "Every time I go to different schools I'm treated as a foreigner. No schools including WSU are... open to people outside of [the] home school. It's honestly sad to see."

Overcoming such hurdles requires a number of initiatives and developments. A Clark geography student thought, as a start, it will need "better transportation and advertising." Similarly, a UMass MD student said it would require "better communication of events via social media/advertising." A WSU education graduate student went a little further writing, "we need a central location that brings together listings of resources and gives clear directions on how to access them."

Working out obstacles, some respondents noted, will require significant work, but it will ultimately be worth the effort because the consortium has many opportunities to connect students academically and socially. Basic networking ideas ranged from "dances and



stuff to meet people," to clubs, "speaker events, and other events where students from all schools are invited." A UMass doctoral student in biomedical services wanted to see "Cross-campus community events." Another UMass grad student thought it "would be great to allow students to use indoor basketball courts across the different campuses and have a common schedule that shows when the courts would be free and when there would be practices or games." Still another, offering a number of suggestions, called for

discounts to student[s] within the network for arts and crafts; access to LGBTQIA support groups, access to student mental health support groups, establishing an event that brings students from all of these schools, so that you can establish a network with students from other campuses.

In short, respondents often saw meaningful interpersonal and intellectual connections as possible through the consortium. As a WSU first year psychology student noted, developing connections has much to do with forming inter-college bonds: "visiting and using services from different institutions would help create friendship and explore new things. Arranging inter-game competitions would enhance friendship." An immunology grad student at UMass saw the potential for deep intellectual relationships forming among consortium students:

I think we could make mentoring programs to help undergraduate students in other colleges. Mentoring can include: - Offering some help to students who are struggling in a particular class -Offering some undergraduate students to shadow us or work with us in the lab to have a more clear idea how it would be to pursue a PhD program -Offering informational interviews to undergrad students who may benefit to listen from our experience.

While discussing service sharing, a WSU junior perhaps best summed up the consortium ideal this way: "we lack a lot of things at all the different consortium schools but if we were to combine as ONE, the amount of things we lack could be supported by the other schools." For her, a consortium seemed to begin with taking courses at another school.



PROGRAMS

The third major section of the survey explored cross-campus programs and events. It provided ways to rank different types of programs (e.g. performances, guest speakers, social events, films, art shows, workshops, trips, and inter-college recreational sports and gaming tournaments) while asking both about possible inter-campus opportunities and obstacles that get in the way.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

The types of events in which the greatest number of respondents said they were “definitely interested” were:

- *speakers/lectures* (44.6%)
- *networking events* (42.2%), which included social events, mixers, dances, and events that bring together students from different campuses
- *performances* (41.2%), which included plays, concerts, and recitals.

Respondents said they were “not interested” in:

- *inter-college gaming tournaments* (45.6%)
- *art shows* (31.0%)
- *inter-college recreational sports* (30.4%)

It should be highlighted, though, that while 30% said they were not interested in inter-collegial sports, 70% still reported they were “definitely interested” or “might be interested” in it.

In other words, combining the responses of those who were “definitely interested” with those who

“might be interested” in programs yields a more comprehensive ranking of program interest.

- *speakers/lectures* (90.9%)
- *performances* (87.3%)
- *networking* (82.8%)
- *workshops* (82.0%)

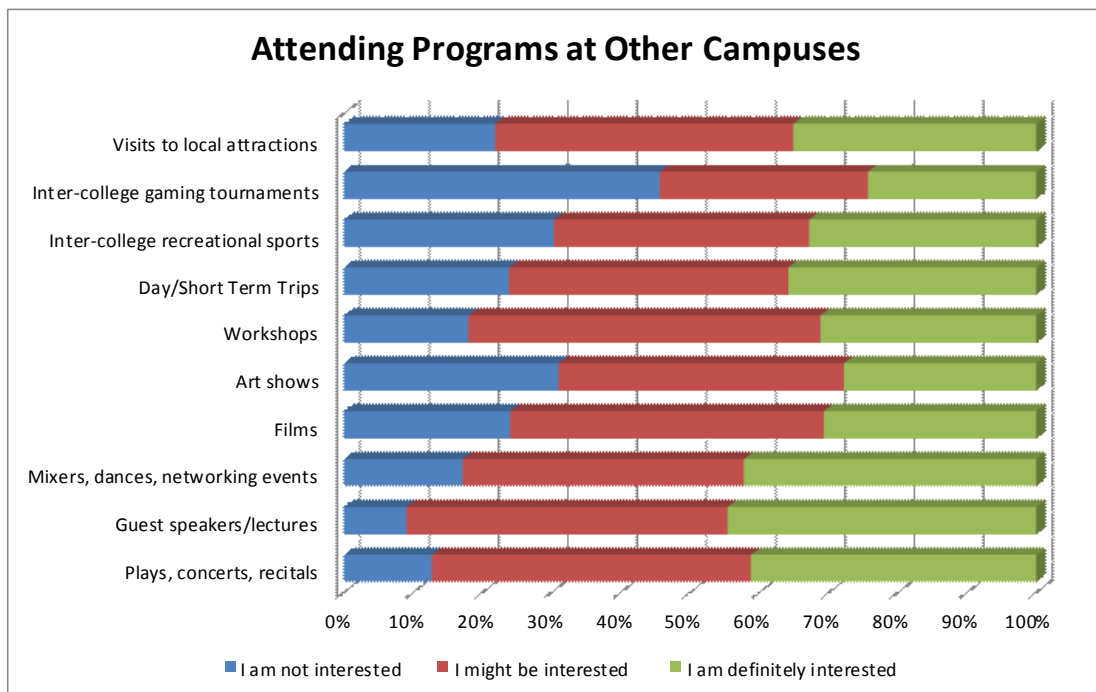
These numbers are certainly compelling. But more targeted research would benefit our understanding of exactly what constitutes appealing programs/events among Worcester’s the student population.

CROSS-CAMPUS GROUPS & CLUBS

The research team asked about cross-campus clubs and organizations. Interestingly, *recreational sports*, which had not placed among the top spots in programs and events in another question, claimed the largest portion (53%) of positive responses when respondents were asked “which groups or clubs that span campuses would you be interested in joining?”

The wording was slightly more inclusive here, asking about groups that “span campuses” rather than occur on “other campuses.” Also, the survey used more descriptive language in parenthetical statements on this question than it did earlier — *Recreational Sports* was accompanied by “(e.g. inter-college basketball, soccer, etc.)” when asked this second time.

When asked what groups/clubs that span campuses were most interesting, respondents ranked traditional groups such as *Student Government* lowest. They had



greater interest in social, intellectual, and cultural groups including recreational sports, games and hobby groups, interest groups, and activist organizations.

Open response areas yielded interesting feedback. Respondents made specific mention of music ensembles and performing groups (marching bands, color guards, and dance groups), religious life (particularly Christian ministry), discipline-focused clubs and activities (nursing, arts & humanities groups, culinary club, science clubs), and community service clubs. All of which is to say there is notable interest in cross-campus programming and groups, and more research in this area is wanting.

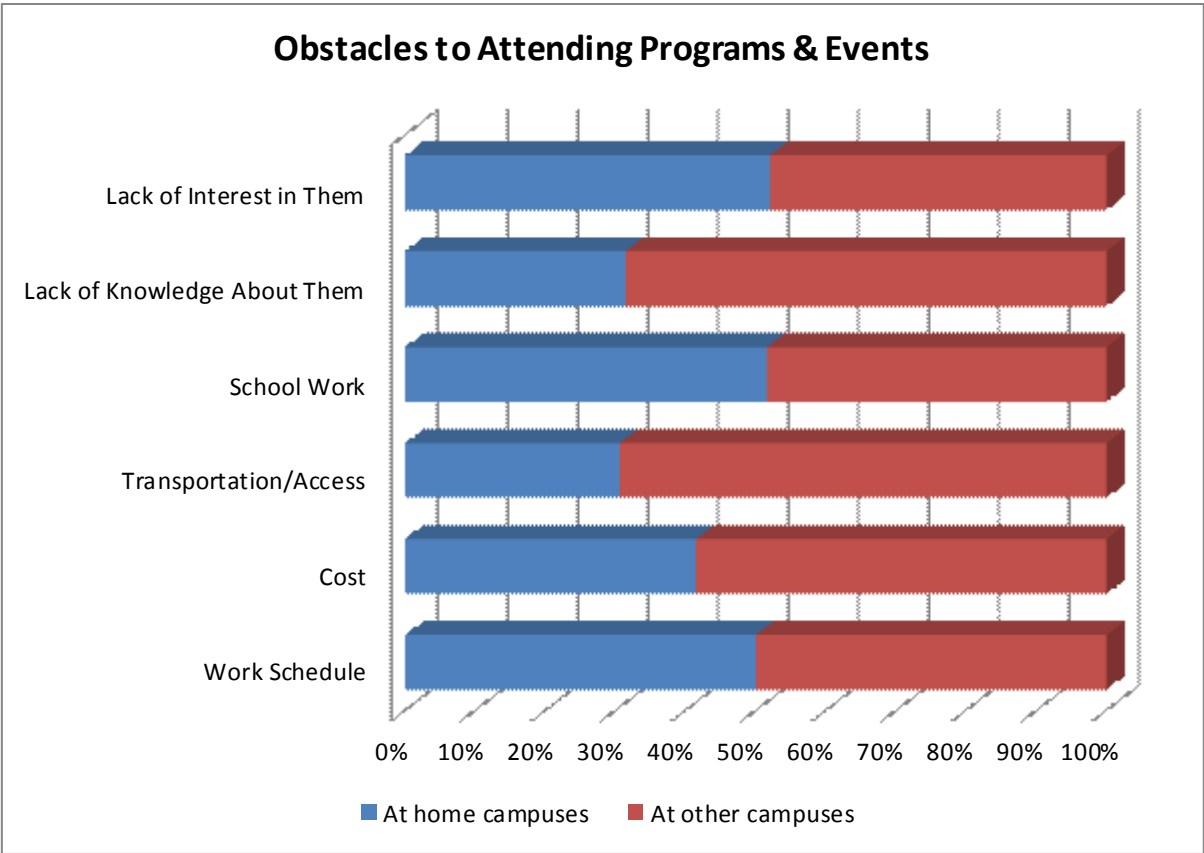
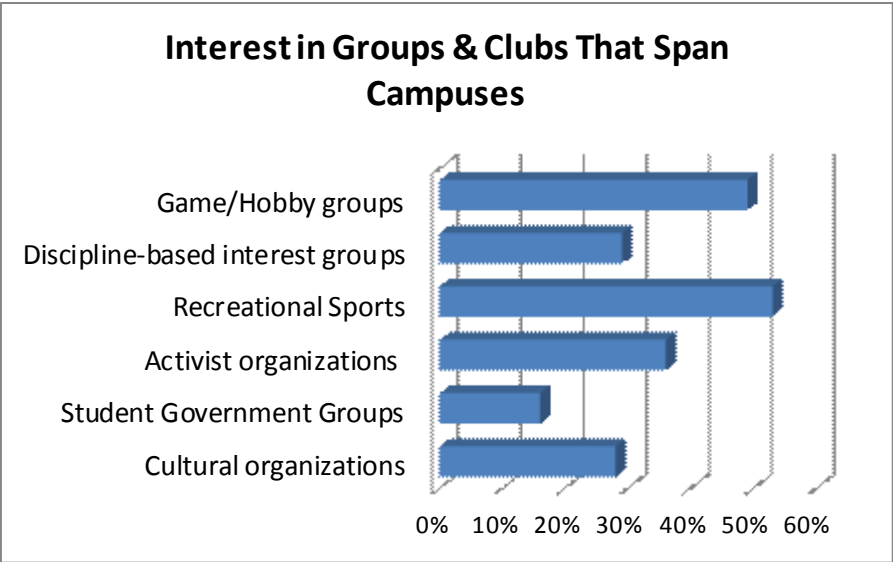
OBSTACLES

On the other hand, respondents saw obstacles impeding cross-campus program and group/club formation. The most common at home campuses were homework (51.6%) and work schedules (50%). But, the main impediments noted that interfered with inter-campus attendance of programs and events are:

- Lack of transportation (69.39%)

- Lack of knowledge about the activities at other campuses (68.58%)
- Cost (58.52%)

Unlike school and work schedules, these variables can be addressed more easily and directly by better coordination among the consortium and member institutions.



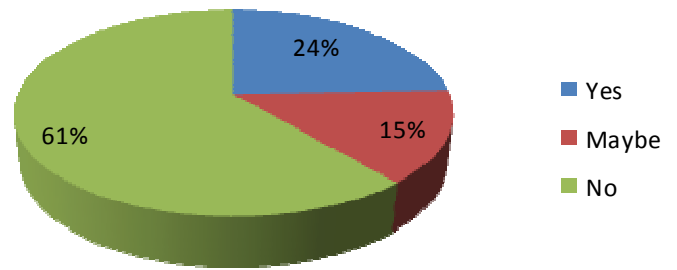
TRANSPORTATION

Transportation was raised as an issue in nearly every survey section, especially in the programs section. Because beta tests suggested as much, the final survey contained an entire section on transportation to better understand what issues animated college students. Even then, transportation remained a major and recurrent theme throughout the survey. Indeed, respondents frequently said transportation is a major obstacle preventing them from accessing classes, services, and programs on other campuses. Therefore, it is a major issue for the consortium if inter-campus exchange is a priority.

Sometimes respondents expressed themselves simply. As a WSU criminal justice student put it, “provide transportation between the different campuses.” A Clark political science major suggested: “bring back a dependable, full-funded shuttle or some sort of transportation other than a taxi. A bus would be great.” Others offered similar perspectives that were often variations on two themes: “Free shuttle service throughout consortium” and “Shuttles should go from one school to another.”

More frequently, respondents thoughtfully linked transportation opportunities with student (and institutional) benefits. A first year WSU geography major wrote, “offering transportation between campuses, ... would encourage students to not only just stay at the home campuses. This could help expand their social and educational horizons.” Another WSU student, a sophomore business major, suggested “a bus that goes from campus to campus [would] help students meet new students with different backgrounds.”

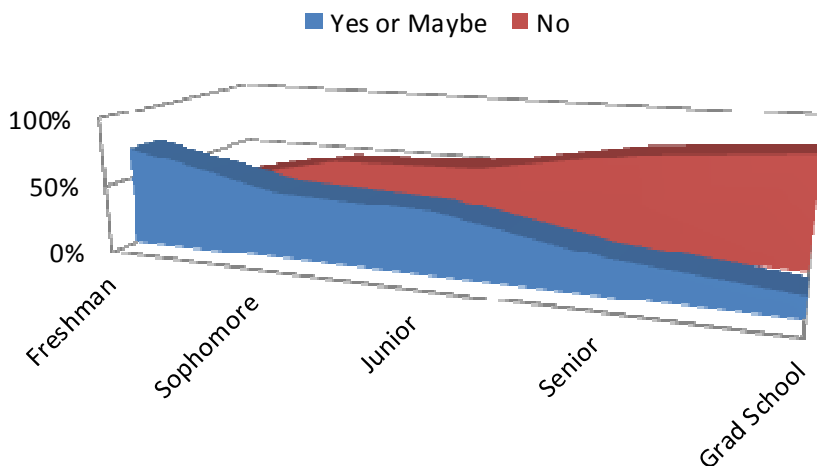
Is Getting Around Worcester a Concern?



At first glance, the data does not indicate transportation is much of an issue. When asked if getting around the city were a concern, most respondents said “no,” because they have their own transportation. In fact, just under a quarter of respondents said getting around the city was a problem, and another 14% said it might be “if there were a reason to leave campus.”

However, analyzing the responses more deeply suggests a few important points. For instance, combining the “yes” and “maybe” answers — which comprise more than a third of the responses (39%) — while sorting by class year shows the concern about transportation is skewed to younger students. This makes sense given that having “their own transportation” most often meant a reliance on cars. Yet, getting these students off campus early as customers, diners, and cultural purveyors helps city organizations and businesses while simultaneously enriching students’ scholastic experiences. Finding ways to address transportation concerns, therefore, is important.

Is Getting Around Worcester A Concern?
(by class year)



Remember, also, that survey respondents were overwhelmingly from WSU and UMass, two schools with predominately commuter populations. It would be interesting to see responses from other Worcester-area students.

When asked what mode of transportation they used to navigate the city, 88.1% of respondents said a car “often” or “very often.” Such auto-dependence has significant impact on the city because it translates into increased need for parking, more traffic, and greater road wear and tear. All of this, of course, has fiscal, political, and social consequences.

Respondents frequently noted that

a lack of adequate transportation options was also an obstacle to inter-college activities. Explaining why he did not take classes through the consortium despite an interest in doing so, for example, a junior communication student from WSU wrote, “It was difficult without having a car to get to the WPI campus, so I did not do it.” A junior at Clark had a similar story: “I attempted to take Philosophy courses at Holy Cross when I first came to Clark, but found that there were no resources to transport to other schools in the consortium.”

In fact, public transportation is a virtual non-factor in the lives of most respondents. Only 10.9% say they use the bus “very often” or “often” while 89.1% reply they do not use the bus often or at all. In fact, respondents report that they use Ubers and taxis more frequently than the WRTA, and they walked 6 times more (67.7%) than took busses.

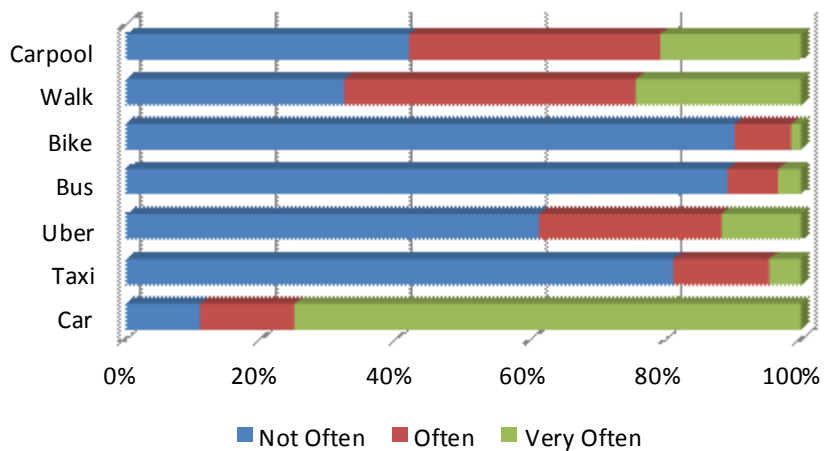
As with elsewhere in the survey, the open response areas allowed for some meaningful feedback and suggestions. Comments generally fell into a few broad categories: parking, consortium shuttle, improved WRTA service, and road improvements for bike access.

Parking

Parking shows up in the survey as an issue for students on campuses, and it simultaneously emerges as a problem that works against the cross-college programming and academic exchange that students say they want. Many respondents who spoke of this referred to inadequate parking on both their home campuses and on other campuses, not in the city generally. The problem frequently voiced, however, is that traveling from campus-to-campus by car, their most frequently-used mode of transportation, requires places to park at destination points -- without them, students will simply not make that trek.

Another issue associated with parking that emerged was what appeared to students as a hidden financial disincentive to taking classes through the consortium. Some respondents noted that they pay to park on their home campuses, and did not think it right to pay to park at another just to take a class there. Solutions most frequently came in generalized ways: “make sure that free parking is available.” Other times, respondents offered more targeted approaches: “have shared

Frequency of Transportation Mode Use



parking space allowing students to park on campuses without getting a ticket.” All spoke to the same basic idea, though.

Consortium Shuttle

Respondents from Assumption, Clark, Holy Cross, UMass, and WSU all spoke on behalf of a frequently-scheduled and reliable shuttle service linking the colleges to each other and to various points in the city. One respondent wrote, “a consortium shuttle would be ideal” and many others wrote variations of this or of “bring back the shuttle.”

Importantly, there was little distinction made about who should operate the shuttle — that is, the city, the colleges, or the WRTA — so long as there was some shuttle service available. An Assumption student’s comment sounded reminiscent of the way things run under the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority in the Amherst area, although he made mention of schools outside Massachusetts:

Consortium shuttles would be a great addition! However, the shuttles would need to run often, preferably 24/7. I know of many other schools outside Massachusetts that have similar systems and they work just fine (even get students to drive the shuttles - a campus job opportunity).

It is also relevant to point out that some comments spoke directly to the importance of this mode of transportation among those who lacked access to cars. A senior public health major at WSU noted, “For those that do not have access to a car, the Consortium shuttle would work very well if it was available to all campuses in Worcester.” But even those with cars on-campus said shuttles between the colleges and strategic points in the city would be useful. As another WSU

student wrote, getting to her car is difficult and this creates additional problems: “I can never get anywhere on time because of this [and] it harms my workplace, family, and academics over time. Having a free shuttle like we used to will be helpful.”

Improved WRTA Service

Many respondents, particularly those from Clark, UMass, WSU, and WPI, claimed the WRTA system is insufficient for college students. On one hand, students cited information problems; on the other, they voiced more serious concerns that it does not run frequently enough, late enough, or directly to colleges and other areas of interest for them to use it.

To the first issue, as a WPI student saw it, students wanted to “have more availability and access to information about the services available.” Another WPI student suggested that someone “build an app for the transportation schedule [so] that students will know which route is available when.” Such technology exists, but that students are unaware of it suggests a need for better communication of existing systems most likely through the consortium or its member schools directly.

To that more serious level of concerns, through, respondents offered suggestions about building a better system. One biomedical science graduate student from UMass wrote that she wants to see “more frequent routes between areas of Worcester; better accessibility to all campuses; connection to major transit points

(train station, campuses, downtown area, etc.)” Many respondents agreed with aspects of this comment — there was none that disagreed. Better routes that got students where they wanted to go without having to change at a central hub was also a common thread.

Importantly, some of the comments spoke to considerably more than getting from campus-to-campus because they wanted a system that went beyond taking students to schools and improved their quality of in Worcester. As a first year occupational therapy student from WSU wrote, she hoped for “busses that can travel between campuses and make stops at various locations of importance such as pharmacies and grocery stores.”

Improved Pathways and Roads for Bicycle Traffic

Respondents often commented on the condition of streets and sidewalks for bicycle and pedestrian traffic, and the need for bicycle lanes and paths to increase transportation alternatives. Basic suggestions include making sure sidewalks are cleared after snowstorms for better walkability, fixing potholes, addressing areas of scarred pavement and uneven walkways, and clearing marked streets and lanes to promote bicycle (and automobile) awareness. In fact, suggestions were often in-tune with many non-student Worcester residents.

One WSU student put many of these concerns into a larger context while imploring college and city leaders to take on stronger leadership roles. It is quoted at length because of its optimism and thoughtfulness:

The Worcester colleges could be (should be) leading the way in terms of transportation and forward-thinking for the city (but we're not). Imagine a dedicated bike lane from WSU to WPI to Assumption College. Imagine a biodiesel powered bus that moves students from satellite parking locations to each campus. Imagine coordinated trips by train to Boston for mixed-college groups attending conferences and lectures at MIT. When I arrive at campus, I see hundreds of cars, 90% holding a single occupant, fighting for spaces, with very little being done by the college[s] to offer viable alternatives that students will actually consider.

The tenor of this comment is also important to highlight because much of the survey feedback, while critical, was also constructive. This was especially the case in the transportation section. In other words, most comments were not complaints. They were suggestions from users of systems who want to help improve them for the benefit of both the colleges and the city.



UNIVERSAL CAMPUS ID and SHARED SPACE

A pair of ideas that emerged from pre-survey research and beta-testing were a universal Worcester student ID card and a shared college/university space.

Universal Worcester Student ID

The universal ID is simply an identification card available to all students in a consortium school that has the ability to layer onto it different access amenities as they come available. At a campus level, for example, these include the ability to store money for food, bookstores, etc. They would also include access to buildings (dorms, gyms), library resources, and whatever purposes existing school IDs fulfill.

Research into other consortia nationwide suggests this could be a beginning only. Library checkout and resource use, gym access, food service, means to verify student status at consortium schools, program admission, and printing across campuses as well as college-based transportation services and cross-registration could be explored under a universal ID idea.

On a city-wide level, these IDs could be used as bus passes, and discount/reward cards at local businesses and cultural organizations. In the past, Clark University has taken a step in this direction by integrating its ID with the city's Woo Card, now called the WooPass.

When asked if they supported the idea of a univer-

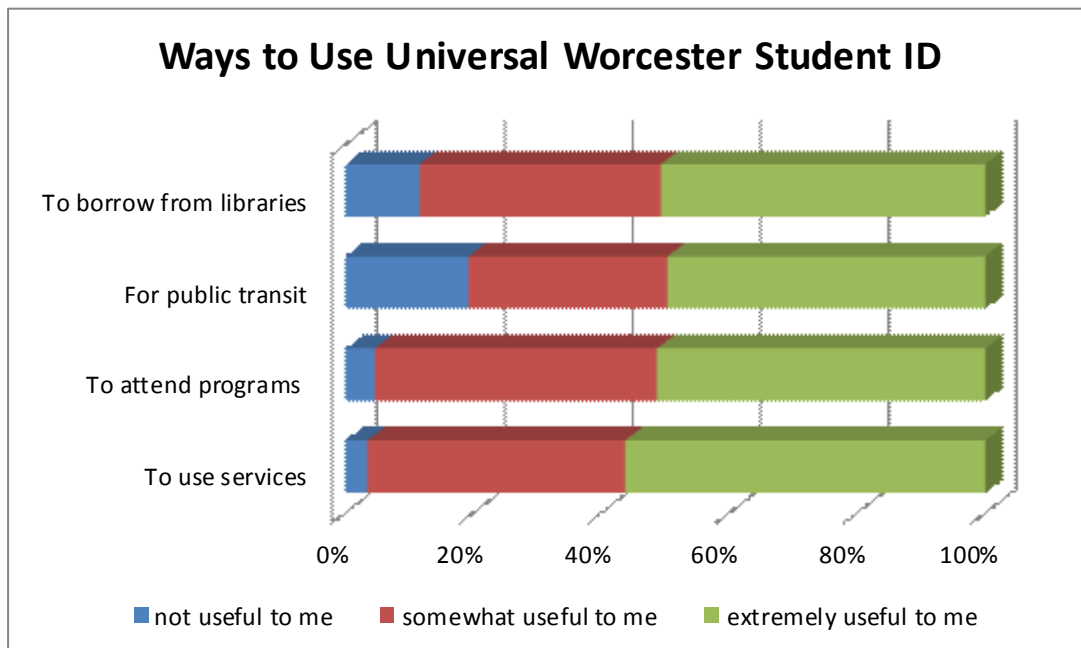
sal Worcester student ID, 92% of respondents believed there would be significant benefits to the arrangement. Trying to pinpoint where on visiting campuses it would be most useful, the research team found some agreement (over 50%) among those saying it would be "extremely useful" in these contexts:

- 56.3% said they would use it to utilize services (gyms, fields, performing spaces, art studios, etc.)
- 50.7% would use it to access other libraries
- 51.3% would use it to attend programs and events at other colleges
- 49.9% would use it to travel on public transportation between campuses

Adding those who said the ID would be "somewhat useful" pushed the general agreement number to over 80% for services and 95% for programs.

Open-ended comments also communicated strong support for a universal Worcester student ID. It was important for many to use this ID as a way to access courses, gyms, dining/vending services, programs/events, transportation, and libraries at other consortium schools. As a WSU biotech major wrote, "the ID can be used to purchase food/beverages at other campuses as well as get from one college to another via bus (WRTA) service. Printing and renting library materials at other campuses would be great."

Many commented about how such a program could create better opportunities, access, and connectedness



for students across the campuses. A UMass medicine student captured the essence of a consortium when explaining what appealed to him about a universal Worcester student ID: “there are facilities that larger campuses have that the medical school does not, like a larger gym and recreational facilities.”

But responses were more than simple facility requests. Another UMass student noted, “I would like to take advantage of the numerous resources, including brain power, and experts from fields that UMass doesn't have.” Similarly, a WSU student pointed out, “There are amazing professors at other campuses, too!” A student from Assumption noted she would like to see a universal ID and a strong consortium, “just to take advantage of a wider array of resources” while a Clark student noted it would be helpful to “break up study routine[s] by studying at libraries on different campuses.”

Some respondents spoke even more comprehensively about a universal ID and the importance of connecting local businesses, especially restaurants and venues, to college students through discounts, points/rewards systems, and access to programs in cultural institutions.

The impact of this use from the student perspective is important as well. A universal Worcester student ID deployed as above could help city residents and college students alike identify as being part of a real college town. As a junior psychology major from WSU of-

fered: “having an ID for discounts, showing that you are a part of the consortium will be helpful, [and] make us come together as a college city.”

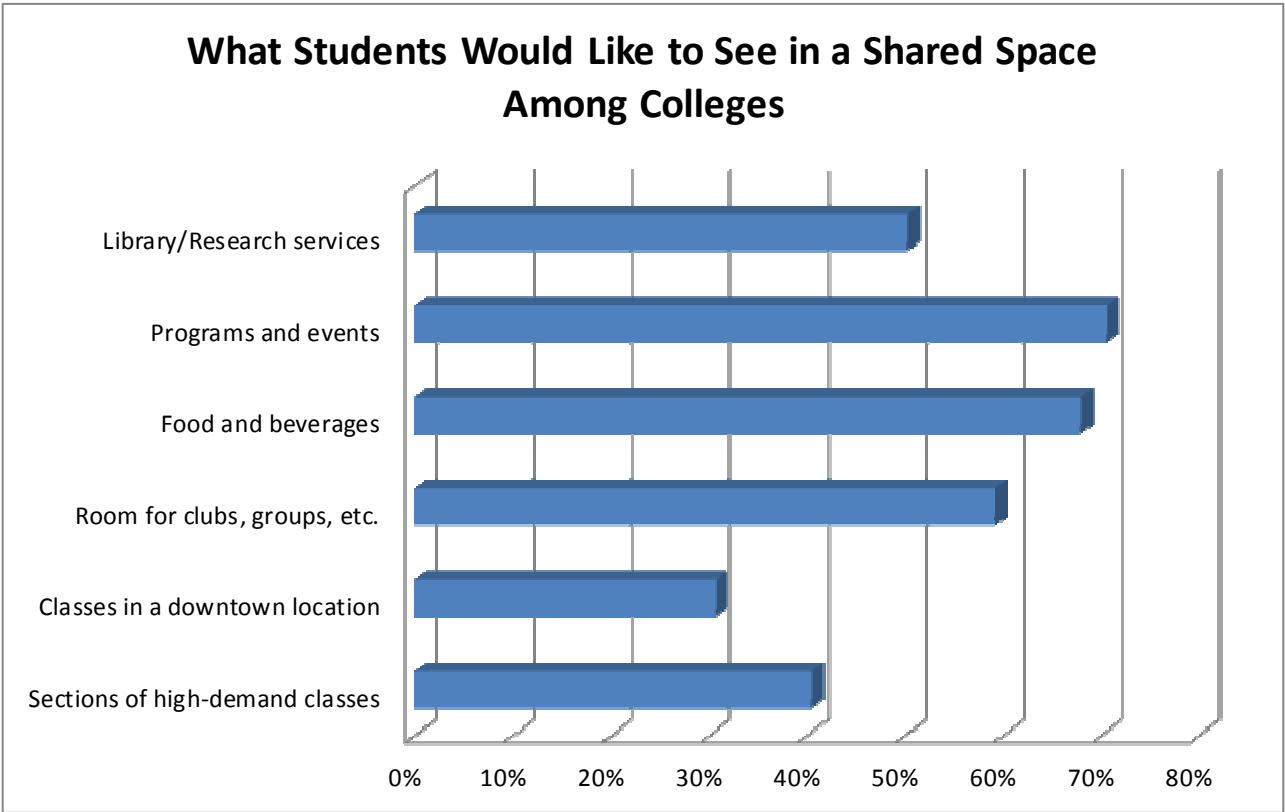
Shared College & University Space

The survey also asked whether students are interested in utilizing shared spaces apart from any existing campus space to meet students from other colleges, do homework, learn about the community and different cultures, attend programs and events, or just relax and grab a snack. Among respondents, 74% were interested in shared space for a variety of reasons.

Although a specific location for the shared space was not noted in the survey, more than half of respondents nevertheless wanted shared spaces:

- for programs and events (71%)
- with access to food & beverages (68%)
- to meet with clubs and for activities (59%)
- equipped with/close to research services (50%)

There would be many details to work out, but respondents noted it was worth exploring. A senior from WSU summed it up this way: “There is very little cross-pollination among the majority of students. Holding ‘all college’ seminars and activities that span the boundaries would be a great first step. “



METHODOLOGY

The research instrument for this study is an online survey created with Qualtrics survey software at Worcester State University. The study was reviewed and authorized by the WSU Human Subject Research Board.

Divided into five main sections, the survey asked what students across Worcester colleges want from a consortium of local colleges and universities. The target population was students 18 years and older who were enrolled in one of the consortium colleges: Anna Maria College, Assumption College, Becker University, Clark University, MCPHS University, Nichols College, Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Worcester State University. The research team incentivized participation by offering a \$100 gift card in a random drawing to a survey participants.

The first approach to engage participants was through the Provosts, Deans, and Student Government Associations of each of school. The research team reached out to representatives from each school and asked them to forward the survey to their students. This approach met with limited success. While some schools were helpful in this endeavor, some were difficult to reach, and others elected not to be involved.

Meanwhile, the research team was also turning to social media to disperse the survey to Worcester's college students. Because college students are frequently on social media, it was assumed that more students would receive the survey and participate in it. The team created a Facebook post from the WSU Department of Urban Studies' page and shared it with organizations on the different campuses that also had Facebook pages to help spread the word. The research team asked that these groups share it with their networks as well. Social media proved to be a good avenue for reaching participants.

In the end, 639 individuals started the survey. A total of 565 people passed the qualifying questions and completed the survey. Worcester State University and the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where university administrations and organizations were particularly helpful in spreading the word, accounted for 53% and 28% of participants, respectively. The remaining 19% of students were from the schools, all of which have smaller populations than WSU except Quinsigamond Community College. The chart on the right shows the percentage of students participating by school and approximates how much of each student body participated based on publicly assessable enrollment numbers.

Many students surveyed were in graduate school (31%). The other 69% were distributed among undergraduates with sophomores as the largest group (21%), followed by first years (18%), juniors (16%), and seniors (14%). The high percentage of graduate students is in part due to the high number of respondents from UMass Med and WSU.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents live off-campus. These results also reflect the high number of respondents from UMass Med, which has no dormitories, and WSU, to which approximately 60% of students commute. Nearly all participants (96%) were full-time students.

Most (64%) claimed their permanent address was in *Massachusetts, but outside Worcester*. Another 23% said their permanent address was Worcester. Beyond that, 7% said they lived in New England, 3% from outside New England, and 2% were international students.

Most were between the ages of 18 - 20 (41%) or 21-25 (32%); two participants were over the age of 66. Other age ranges were represented as follows: 26-35 (23%), 36-50 (2%), and 51-65 (1%).

Most respondents were female (68%). One respondent each identified as *non-binary/queer* and *agender*. The remaining 31.8% identified as male.

Most respondents said they were White (74%), followed by Asian (12%), Black/African American (6%), Latino (6%), American Indian/Alaska Native (1%), and (3%) were from two or more races.

<i>College or University</i>	<i>% survey respondents</i>	<i>approx. % of student body</i>
Anna Maria College	0.1%	0.1%
Assumption College	0.2%	0.5%
Becker College	0.7%	0.2%
Clark University	4.1%	0.7%
College of the Holy Cross	1.6%	0.3%
MCPHS University	2.1%	0.8%
Nichols College	1.1%	0.5%
Quinsigamond Comm. College	1.4%	0.1%
UMass/Med	28.5%	13.9%
Worcester Polytechnic Institute	4.8%	0.5%
Worcester State University	53.8%	4.5%

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

This survey was a significant first step in determining what students want from a consortium of Worcester-area higher education institutions.

Perhaps the most pressing general issue for the consortium is raising awareness of both its existence and how to capitalize on the consortium arrangement. This is especially true for taking courses, the primary purpose of many consortia. As explained by an occupational therapy major at WSU, “The option of taking a course at another school in Worcester was mentioned at my accepted student day, and then I never heard about it again. When I initially heard about it no one explained how to do it or who to talk to, just that it was possible. ...I would have definitely utilized this if I knew more about it and was reminded about it.”

Similar sentiments were echoed by students from other schools. A marketing & innovation grad student from WPI wrote, “I’m willing to take classes via the consortium, but I don’t know how it works.” A UMass biomedical science grad student claimed, “I don’t know what my options are.” In fact, more than half of survey respondents (54%) said they had not heard of a consortium before the survey, and those who said they had (40%) do not necessarily know how to use it.

According to various suggestions from the survey, this knowledge gap about the consortium could be bridged by flyers and brochures, posters, emails, outreach to admissions and advising staff, and particularly to student affairs staff and the college faculties.

More specific to the topics covered in the survey, results show a strong student interest in improving academic-related connections. These include:

- Access to faculties on all campuses
- Creation of a central course database

- Online registration for all consortium campuses
- Better library catalog and research integration

Survey respondents also express interest in improving services and programming across campuses. Results show that students would like the consortium to provide ways to interact with peers from other consortium colleges. Specifically, students would like to see:

- Wi-Fi across campuses, which would increase cross-campus usage
- Opportunities for social interactions
- Cross-campus programming: guest speakers, performances, social events, etc.
- Inter-campus clubs, recreational sports, games and hobby groups
- A central event calendar

In addition, students want an easy way to access facilities at other campuses. One potential idea is a universal ID issued to all Worcester students. Students would like this card to allow them access to:

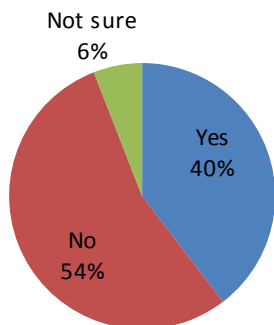
- Services
- Libraries and gyms
- Cross campus programs
- Dining services

Respondents also express interest in a central physical space for consortium students. This shared space would have food, classrooms, and social events.

Transportation is a significant issue for the survey respondents. Some suggestions to improve transportation include:

- Consortium shuttle among campuses
- More responsive, comprehensive, and timely WRTA service
- Improved road conditions
- More zip cars

Before this survey, had you heard of a Worcester Consortium?



As the majority of respondents were students from WSU and UMass, to gain a more complete understanding of what Worcester students want from the consortium, attempts should be made to repeat the survey at other schools. It could also be instructive to survey faculty and staff gain a different perspective on the consortium.

Finally, this study suggests that it is advisable to establish a regular dialog or conversation with students to gather information about their needs beyond home campuses and engage them about the possibilities of dynamic consortium arrangements.