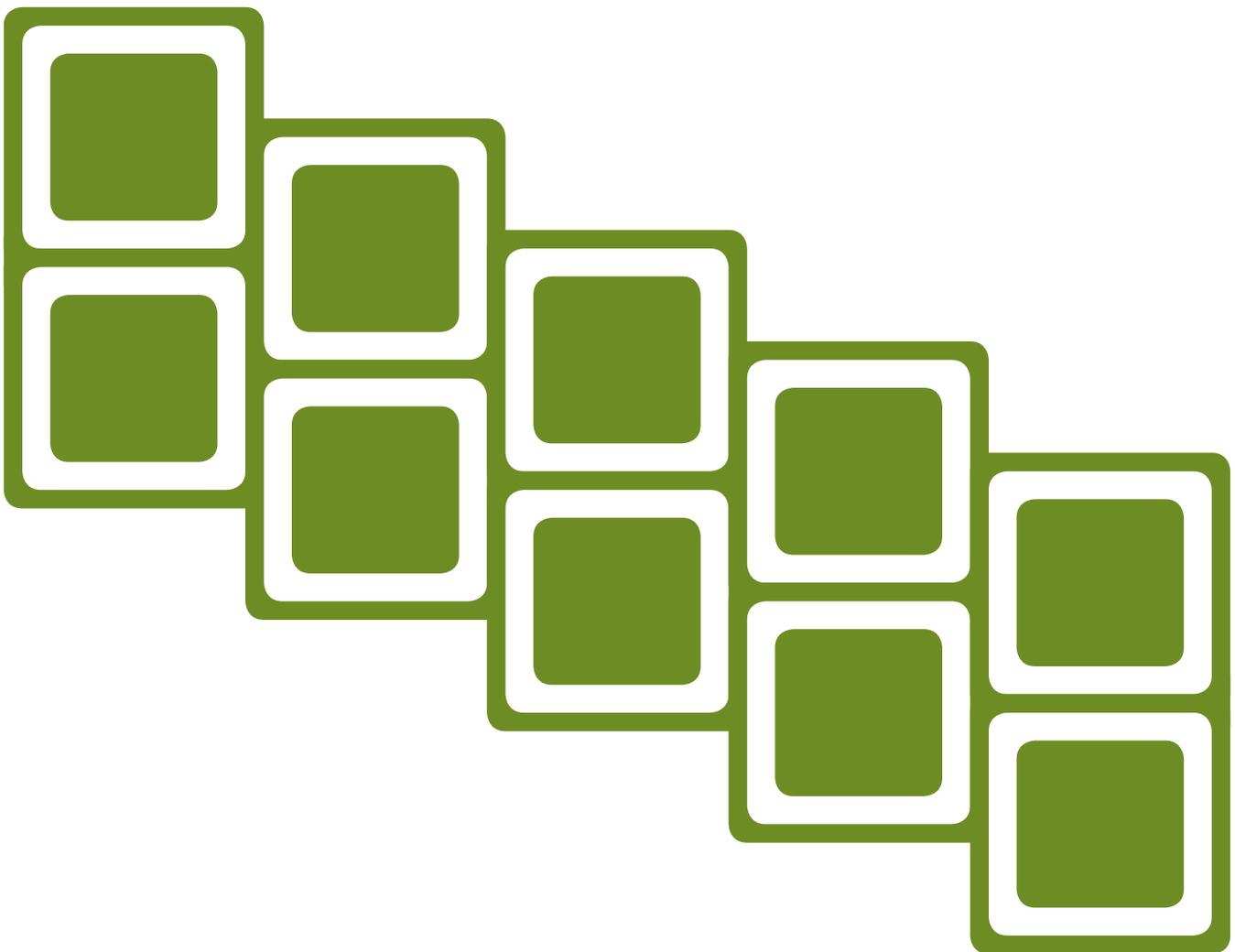


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The Case for Better Integration of CE Units and the Rest of Campus

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Note:

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It's important for Continuing Education leaders to be aligned with the major processes of the rest of campus to ensure better integration of their units with the main campus.

"We're different from the rest of campus!"

I've said this before, and often hear my continuing education (CE) colleagues say it. The rationale for doing so could be

- to maintain some independence from the campus and keep officials from "interfering";
- to highlight we're the business/entrepreneurial arm of the campus;
- to illustrate that, since we make money, we should be treated differently;
- to show we operate differently and you don't understand us. Leave us alone.

Have you ever made those comments? Well, we've all probably said similar things in the comfort and company of other CE colleagues. Our motives might be reflective of the moment or an emotional reaction, but often these comments can keep the CE unit from being seen and considered as respected, contributing, and important members of the overall campus community. After all, we live and work under the broad umbrella of the university/college and its brand and reputation. Last fall I was asked to present a session on this topic at the 40th anniversary of the Continuing Education Association of New York's annual conference. I'd like to make some suggestions on how the CE unit could be more integrated with the rest of campus and share some specific actions that might be appropriate.

1 <http://www.evollution.com/opinions/the-case-for-better-integration-of-ce-units-and-the-rest-of-campus/>

First, and most importantly, is for CE professionals like ourselves to help solve our bosses' problems and not contribute to them. Most of us report to someone in the provost's or president's office—or the provosts or presidents themselves. They're busy people with a lot of important issues on their plate. They need us to make their professional lives easier, resolve issues before they land in their office, understand the "big picture" of the campus, and not be part of the problem. We must have a good understanding of their day-to-day and strategic issues and what they see as important. The rating factors from *U.S. News & World Report* are good topics to consider:

- Academic reputation
- Undergraduate graduation and retention rates
- Faculty issues
- Student recruitment (quality)
- Budget concerns
- Alumni/development activities

Part of our efforts should focus on ways to effectively address these topics and, in turn, contribute to the campus' success. We should also be focusing on "making the boss look good"—and not just that individual, but the campus as a whole. Positive press and good results from CE activities go a long way to enhance the campus' overall reputation and the boss's impression of our efforts.

We must ensure our unit's mission is included as part of the overall campus strategic plan or stated in various planning statements. This is certainly an indicator of the level of integration the CE unit has with the campus. Inclusion in the strategic plan can serve as a vehicle to effectively demonstrate the value of the CE mission/purpose and its positive impact on students who enter the campus through our doors. The CE unit must be seen to be supporting the overall campus mission/strategy.

Many of our CE units have support functions similar to those on the main campus: registrar, admissions, advising, distance education, finance/budget, etc. With such functions under the direct supervision of the CE unit, our adult students often receive services and assistance that are more reflective of their needs. However, we must assure these are closely aligned with the campus and that we fully adhere to their policies and procedures both in spirit and in action. This is important since there's but one brand: the university/college.

There's a lot happening on any campus, and with officials focused on their specific part of the mission, this can often lead to the development of silos across the institution. Of course, activities we don't know about could be hurting the CE unit and its mission. We must be wired into the campus's information circuit, both official and unofficial. This applies to all of the CE unit's staff—each individual needs to be engaged and should participate in various campus functions and activities in order to understand and appreciate the tenor of the campus and its functions, academically and politically. Be visible. Such insights enable the CE unit to better understand campus concerns and focus its energy to address issues and/or anticipate coming changes.

The CE unit needs to collect, analyze, format, interpret and disseminate data regarding its results to the campus' senior leadership in terms that they appreciate and understand. For example,

many of us focus data collection on completed credit hours while the rest of campus often regards enrollments as the basic measure. We need to present the results of successful programming that meets student needs in forms that will resonate with the institution's leadership. Net revenue is always important, but demographic information and overall trend analysis will assist senior management to better appreciate and value the CE unit's results, contributions to the campus' overall mission, and ability to meet strategic goals.

In order to have our colleagues better understand and appreciate our contributions to the campus' mission, we should be more aware of how we interact with the rest of campus. A cavalier CE unit attitude will cause alienation while proactive efforts to be part of the campus will create more opportunities for overall success for the university/college, as well as the CE unit, and a better sense of collegiality.

Of course, I also believe there are times when we need to celebrate and emphasize the difference between CE units and main campuses. Due to our focus on adult students, our approach and attention may occasionally need to be unique in order to address their different needs as compared to traditional/residential students.

Biography

Bill McClure is the executive director of Continuing & Professional Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is responsible for a wide variety of academic programs, credit and non-credit, graduate and under-graduate, face-to-face and online, offered throughout the year, including summer session. He is a past president the North American Association of Summer Sessions.