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The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government

*The public policy research
arm of the State University
of New York*

To Build New Strengths

**The Future of
Clinton Community College,
and of North Country
Community College**

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Introduction

In April 2008, New York State Senator Elizabeth Little asked the State University of New York's System Administration to look at two related issues pertaining to Clinton Community College and North Country Community College, which serve Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties in her district. Those issues were:

- How best to ensure that the colleges deliver the highest-quality educational services and opportunities to the counties' residents; and
- How best to secure the taxpayers' need for a cost-effective community college system in the three counties.

The timing of Senator Little's request was prompted, in part, by the fact that both colleges are in transition. The presidencies at both institutions are open, and both boards of trustees are therefore confronted with especially important decisions about their future directions.

Gail Rogers Rice, an economist who had led North Country Community College for 16 of its 41 years of existence, retired effective July 1st of this year, and a search for a successor is beginning. Meanwhile the Board of Trustees at Clinton Community College has a search committee and a consultant working to find a successor for Maurice Hickey, who resigned as president last October.

While these searches proceed, Frederick Woodward is serving as interim president at Clinton Community College, and Frederick G. Smith stepped in as interim president at North Country Community College effective July 2nd. Neither is a candidate for the permanent position.

In response to Senator Little's request, and at the direction of SUNY interim Chancellor John B. Clark, Dennis Golladay, SUNY vice chancellor for community colleges, asked the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government¹ to conduct an initial study of the situations confronting the two colleges, and to report back on options for change.

Among the options we were asked to review were:

- Ways in which the colleges might collaborate to offer a wider range of educational opportunities;
- Ways in which they might share programs and services in order to achieve economies of scale; and
- The possibility of, at some point, merging the two colleges under a single administration.

One option that neither Senator Little nor anyone else put on the table, it almost goes without saying, was shutting down any of the four campuses operated by the two colleges. As we detail below, closing any one of those campuses would leave a significant share of the tri-county population a drive of up to an hour and a half away from the nearest community college classroom.

For our inquiry, the Rockefeller Institute first examined the economic and demographic situation within which the two colleges operate. We reviewed the degree, certificate, and course offerings of Clinton and North Country community colleges, as well as two other colleges in the SUNY system serving similar

areas. We visited all four campus sites and interviewed more than two dozen administrators, faculty members, local government officials, business leaders, and community college experts in New York and elsewhere (including three who had been involved in mergers between colleges).² We tracked local news media and public commentary, and had informal but useful conversations with students and ordinary citizens in Plattsburgh, Saranac Lake, and Malone. We obtained and reviewed enrollment data, financial and cost-share information, and demographic and economic data about the region.

We were not asked to make recommendations around one specific option. And it would not have been proper for us to do so. Decisions about the future direction of the colleges are legally the responsibility of their own local boards of trustees, working in concert with local elected officials, their legislators, the State University Board of Trustees, and the SUNY System Administration.

We concluded that an *immediate* merger of the two institutions is not possible. But we found a number of other possible options for creating a more effective community college system in the region — one that capitalizes on the assets already in place. These include:

- Making no major structural changes, but relying on new leadership to continue to strengthen each college separately.
- Sharing nonacademic services between the two colleges to achieve economies of scale.
- Collaborating on academic programs, for example by combining forces to offer jointly some new academic programs that are not now available at either college.
- Consolidating the course catalog, registration, and admissions for the two colleges, so that students can move seamlessly from one campus to another as their life circumstances change.
- Making deep collaboration a mandate for new leadership at both colleges — as a way of strengthening programs, managing costs, and testing whether an eventual merger might be the best long-term option.
- Or beginning a determined drive, now, to merge the two institutions, operating all four of their campuses as one college within, say, five years.

This time of change is also a time of great opportunity for the two colleges. To build new strengths.

The Background

No place in New York State stands in greater need of a vibrant, robust, and cost-effective community college system than its great North Country — a sprawling region known to vacationers for grand vistas and great times, but known also for long winters, vast distances, and a tough economy.

The decline of forest products, agriculture, and other traditional industries means that education beyond high school is more important than ever to the region’s people. The region’s low wages and high poverty rates mean that as our most affordable form of higher education, community colleges are an especially critical asset for its population. Yet those vast distances and widely scattered population centers also mean that it’s more difficult to operate, and commute to, community colleges. And a tough economy impacts the tax base, making it a challenge for local governments to support their community colleges. As the need is great, so, too, are the obstacles to success.

In the far northeastern corner of our state, Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties spread across 4,467 square miles — about the size of the entire state of Connecticut. The region stretches south from the Canadian border along Lake Champlain on the east, and west across the High Peaks Wilderness of the Adirondacks to Big Tupper and Mt. Morris. From Rouses Point on the north to Ticonderoga in the south it’s 92 road miles and almost a two-hour drive; from Tupper Lake in the west to Plattsburgh in the east, it’s 71 miles and about an hour and a half.

In this sprawling area live 171,756 people, by 2005 Census estimates. That’s a population density of 38.45 per square mile — only about a quarter of the average for all of Upstate New York. The population in these three counties is, in fact, sparser than in all but 11 states (Alaska, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming).

The region’s economy is clearly challenged. Per capita personal income and average wages per job are both about 14 percent below the Upstate average.³ As reflected in table 1, below, job growth has lagged well behind the five-year national rate of 5.5 percent.⁴ Some 20,000 residents live below the poverty level and more than 14,000 are on food stamps.⁵ The population of young adults is relatively high — potentially a great asset for the region’s future, if it can keep them, but also a factor that adds to the need for higher education services.⁶

Table 1: Demographic and Economic Indicators — Clinton, Essex, and Franklin Counties

	<i>Population, 2005</i>	<i>Persons Per Square Mile</i>	<i>% of Population 15-34</i>	<i>% of Population Below Poverty</i>	<i>Nonfarm Employment, 2007 Annual Average</i>	<i>% Change in Nonfarm Employment, 2002-2007</i>
Clinton County	82,047	78.97	32.0%	12.7%	36,100	+ 0.3%
Essex County	38,676	21.52	26.0%	10.7%	15,400	- 2.5%
Franklin County	51,033	31.29	32.0%	12.7%	19,700	+ 4.8%
Three combined	171,756	38.45	30.1%	12.2%	71,200	+ 0.8%
Upstate New York	6,969,138	152.22	27.5%	11.0%	2,499,600	+ 1.2%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; New York State Department of Labor

The Key Role of Community Colleges

Every one of these indicators means that a good community college system is especially important to residents of the northern Adirondacks and the Champlain region.

A tough economy does not mean there is less need for higher education — quite the contrary. In fact, the state Labor Department's forecast for annual job openings in the North Country, through 2014, is replete with occupations that either require, or would benefit from, education beyond high school. These start with registered nurses (a predicted 160 openings a year), and include teachers, teaching assistants, licensed practical and vocational nurses, corrections officers, accounting clerks, and many others.⁷

Community colleges provide the most affordable entrée to college education, enabling many students to transfer up to four-year schools. They can specialize in the skills young people need for sectors that are growing in their particular region, be those health care or wilderness recreation. They help midcareer residents upgrade skills when they've lost a job or want to move up. They can train workers in drafting or metal-working or whatever specific skills are needed by employers that are locating or hiring in the region. They bring lifelong learning close to home.

In each of those roles, residents of Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties unquestionably need their community colleges.

Today those residents are served by Clinton Community College, sponsored by Clinton County and based outside Plattsburgh, and by North Country Community College, sponsored by Essex and Franklin counties and operating campuses in Saranac Lake, Malone, and Ticonderoga.

As is the case with all 30 community colleges operated under the aegis of the State University of New York, these two are governed and administered by local boards of 10 trustees each appointed by the sponsoring counties and the governor (with one elected student representative on each). The SUNY Board of Trustees and System Administration provide oversight, including final approval of budgets, academic programs, and the appointment of a college president.

Operating funds come from the state (currently \$2,675 per full-time equivalent student); support from the sponsoring counties; charge-backs to other nonsponsor counties whose students attend the college; and student tuition and fees (a portion of which, in turn, comes from financial aid, much of it funded by the state through its Tuition Assistance Program).

Both Clinton and North Country community colleges have reputations for high-quality programs in a number of fields. Each works to develop new programs fine-tuned to the economic needs and job opportunities in its region — ranging from aeronautical services at Clinton, to sports and events management at North Country. Each is a focus of community pride. And over the last five years, adding new programs and refurbishing its satellite campuses, North Country has managed to make itself the fastest-growing of the 30 community colleges in the State University system, in terms of percentage growth in full- and part-time enrollment combined.⁸

Challenges for the Colleges

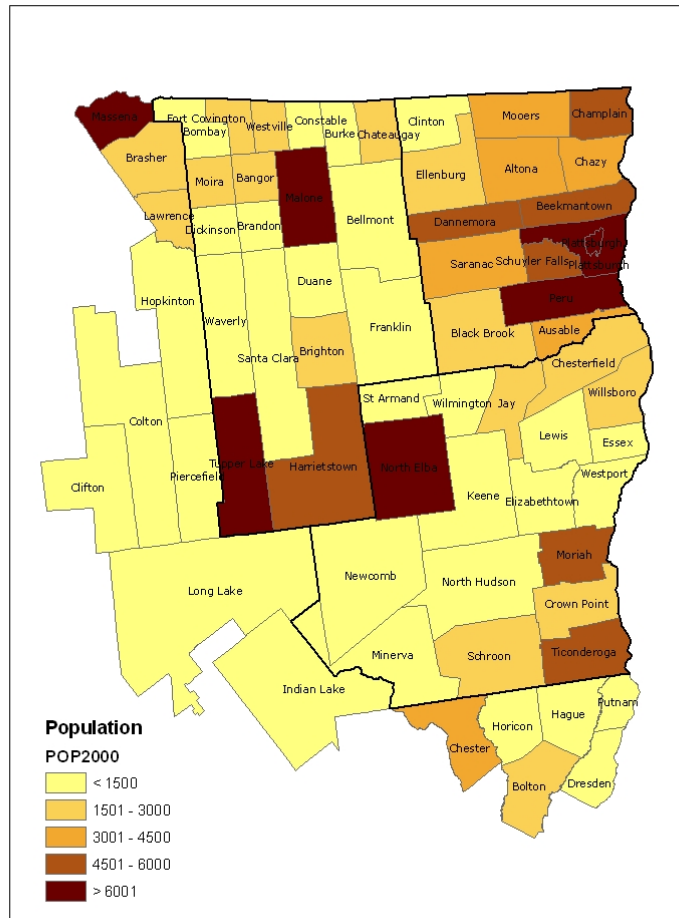
Clinton and North Country are also among the state's smallest community colleges — the second (North Country) and fourth (Clinton) smallest, measured by fall 2007 enrollment.

In part because of their small size, the lists of courses, degrees, certificates, and job-training programs they offer are among the shortest in the 30 SUNY community colleges. Even neighboring Adirondack Community College, sponsored by Warren and Washington counties, offers 21 associate's degrees, compared to 16 at Clinton and 15 at North Country.⁹

Small colleges also face financial challenges. On a per-student basis, these two are among the more expensive of the 30 colleges to operate; they rank 6th (North Country) and 11th (Clinton) in net operating cost per full-time equivalent. The share of each college's budget devoted to administration is over 13 percent, compared to a system-wide average of 8.2 percent¹⁰ — a symptom of the reverse economies of scale involved in maintaining all required functions across such a small base.

These operating costs also mean a cost for the sponsoring counties — though Clinton and North Country are not unusually costly to their sponsors, in comparison to other New York State community colleges. The charges picked up by the sponsoring counties, measured in terms of the sponsor contribution per student who is a county resident, are the 7th (North Country) and 15th (Clinton) highest of the 30 SUNY community colleges.¹¹ Per-capita county property tax revenues in the three counties combined are about 10.3 percent below the Upstate average.¹²

The interplay between the colleges' needs, and the problems and priorities of their sponsoring counties, may also have contributed to what appear to have been governance issues at both colleges in recent years. A plan for a new campus for North Country, which operates out of a rather dilapidated complex in Saranac Lake, was shot down by local opposition. Tensions between trustees and administrations at Clinton, meanwhile, have contributed to rapid turnover in the leadership of that college — with six presidents since 1999.



2000 population densities; Northeastern New York State

Similarities, and Differences

These common issues to one side, there are nonetheless substantial differences between the areas served by the two colleges.

Clinton County has greater population density, has recently experienced some economic growth, and has a significant industrial base in its economy — with attendant needs for job-specific training. Essex and Franklin counties are more sparsely populated, and have economies built around tourism, health care, and government employment.

These are two different media markets with one daily newspaper each — the *Press Republican* published in Plattsburgh, and the *Adirondack Enterprise* published in Saranac Lake (though each circulates into the other's territory). There are old cultural differences as well; locals in Plattsburgh speak of “lake people” (in Clinton) versus “mountain people” (in Essex and Franklin counties).

Most of the three-county region is officially in the Adirondacks, but part isn't. Essex County is entirely within “the blue line” that legally defines the Adirondack Park. But Plattsburgh and other populated areas of Clinton County along Lake Champlain are outside the line. So are Malone (the county seat of Franklin County) and its surrounding towns in the northern edge of the region.

In many ways, however, the three counties comprise one broad economy and region.

The largest business organization, the Plattsburgh North Country Chamber of Commerce, is based in Plattsburgh but serves a territory all the way west to Tupper Lake.

Thousands of people in the region cross county lines every day to go to work or to shop. The 2000 Census found that some 1,345 residents of Essex, and 590 from Franklin, were commuting to Clinton County. Meanwhile 961 were commuting from Clinton to Essex County, and another 900 were commuting from Clinton to Franklin.¹³

They cross county lines to go to community college, too; in the fall of 2007, 56 Clinton County residents had enrolled at North Country Community College, and 246 residents of Essex and Franklin counties were attending Clinton Community College.

Clinton Community College

Founded in 1969, Clinton Community College operates from a picturesque location on a bluff overlooking Lake Champlain, just south of Plattsburgh. Its single campus includes a main building (a nineteenth-century grand hotel that has been thoroughly refurbished for academic use); a three-story, 49,400-square-foot Ronald B. Stafford Center for Arts, Science, and Technology that opened in 1998; an athletic facility; and smaller buildings.



Clinton's main building – once the Hotel Champlain

The campus setting is defined by its splendid view of the lake, and to some extent that is true of the college's service territory, as well. Almost two-thirds of Clinton County's residents live in towns along Champlain — stretching north to Rouses Point, 35 miles and about a 45-minute drive away. The rest of the county's population is found in more sparsely populated towns reaching west to the Franklin County line and south to Essex County, none more than 40 road miles from the campus.

About 77 percent of Clinton's fall 2007 enrolled students are from Clinton County. About half the remainder hail from Essex and Franklin counties; others came from all across New York State, plus 30 from out of state.

Table 2: Key Facts and Figures for Clinton Community College

Full- and part-time enrollment in for-credit courses (fall of 2007):	2,210
.... Five-year change in fall enrollment:	– 3.3%
Share of fall 2007 enrollment that is part-time:	44.6%
.... Five-year change in fall part-time enrollment:	+ 1.4%
Associate's degrees awarded (July 1, 2005, through June 31, 2006):	329
Certificates awarded (July 1, 2005, through June 31, 2006):	4
Net operating costs, budget for 2007-08:	\$12,401,100
Net operating cost per full-time equivalent student (FTE):	\$8,847
.... Compared to the average for all 30 SUNY committee colleges:	0.5% less
Resident tuition for full-time student:	\$3,220
Sponsor (Clinton County) contribution to 2007-08 operating budget:	\$2,167,623
.... Sponsor's contribution per student who is a county resident:	\$2,160
.... Compared to the average for all 30 SUNY committee colleges:	8.3% less
State aid for operating budget:	\$4,179,385

Source: State University System Administration

As has traditionally been the case with community colleges, the largest single draw for Clinton's students is degree programs that will enable them to transfer to four-year colleges. In the most recent student survey,¹⁴ 42 percent of all students — and 65 percent of first-time, full-time students — said transfer was their objective. The administration says 90 percent of those who receive associate's degrees and apply to four-year colleges are admitted and continue their education. For them, Clinton offers associate's degrees in math and science and in humanities and social science, as well as in business administration and related fields. An added draw for these programs is a credit transfer arrangement with the State University College at Plattsburgh, just five miles to the north.

Changing Needs

But a growing number of Clinton students (26 percent in the fall of 2007, up from 21 percent in 2003) say their objective is to earn a degree and then go directly to work in the field for which they have prepared. Others say they have come to upgrade job skills, earn a GED, or for personal enrichment.

The college has responded with a number of degree and certificate programs targeted specifically at career skills, ranging from criminal justice (154 enrolled in the fall of 2007) to nursing (108), computer information systems (51) to human services (77), electronics technology (15), and industrial technology (35). As of the spring 2008 semester, Clinton was offering 27 courses on-line, enabling people who want to take classes on topics ranging from music appreciation to statistics to do so from home, via the Internet.

Clinton Community College has the reputation in the local business community of responding to employer-specific needs for job training programs. Indeed, it is developing new course listings targeted to meet the needs of employers who want a specific skill to be taught — reading blueprints, for example — but who don't have enough of their own staff who need the skill to justify the cost of a special class just for them. Such courses will now be offered to multiple employers, on a scheduled basis, enabling them to pool the cost.

For the past two years, Clinton Community College and North Country Community College have collaborated on a joint program for industry-specific, noncredit courses (so-called "contract courses") serving about 100 firms, primarily manufacturers and health-care employers, across the three-county region. In 2006-07 this program offered 34 different courses and enrolled 697 students.¹⁵

Strategic Direction

The current presidential search holds great stakes for Clinton Community College's future direction. Before his departure, former President Hickey had led the development of a strategic plan with ambitious goals for measuring and improving instructional performance, expanding services to adult learners, expanding marketing within and outside the county, and taking an active role in economic development and business recruitment. Those who are knowledgeable about the thinking of the Board of Trustees have been extremely circumspect, leaving in question the issue of how much support there is for going forward on this plan — and if not for it, then what.

North Country Community College

North Country Community College serves the largest physical territory of any community college in the state, 3,428 square miles in Essex and Franklin counties combined. From this region’s northwest population center, around Malone, to Ticonderoga in the southwest, it’s a drive of about 115 miles through the mountains — at least a two-and-a-half hour trip. Yet in all that territory live only 89,709 people — a density of 26.17 people per square mile, and a population well below the minimum threshold of 100,000 people for community college sponsorship that was the intended standard when the SUNY community college system was formalized in the 1960s.¹⁶



Main building at Saranac Lake – an old hospital tucked into the hillside

Its sprawling, sparsely populated territory largely defines North Country’s operations — its assets and its limitations.

Table 3: Key Facts and Figures for North Country Community College

Full- and part-time enrollment in for-credit courses (fall of 2007):	1,752
.... Five-year change in fall enrollment:	+ 30.1%
Share of fall 2007 enrollment that is part-time:	45.1%
.... Five-year change in fall part-time enrollment:	+ 91.9%
Associate’s degrees awarded (July 1, 2005, through June 31, 2006):	248
Certificates awarded (July 1, 2005, through June 31, 2006):	57
Net operating costs, budget for 2007-08:	\$11,426,700
Net operating cost per full-time equivalent student (FTE):	\$10,112
.... Compared to the average for all 30 SUNY committee colleges:	13.6% more
Resident tuition for full-time student:	\$3,340
Sponsor (Essex + Franklin counties) contribution to 2007-08 operating budget:	\$2,190,000
.... Sponsor’s contribution per student who is a county resident:	\$2,567
.... Compared to the average for 30 SUNY committee colleges:	9.0% more
State aid for operating budget:	\$3,825,880

Sources: State University System Administration; North Country Community College

As with Clinton and other community colleges, the most common course of study being pursued at North Country is an associate's degree in liberal arts, qualifying for transfer to four-year college. As of fall 2006, that was the direction being taken by 31 percent of North Country's students.¹⁷ The college also has cooperative programs with Franklin University in Ohio and with Saint Leo University in Florida, through which students can complete a four-year degree while remaining based in Saranac Lake, taking a combination of on-line and classroom courses.

But as at Clinton and elsewhere, the emphasis at North Country is slowly shifting. In fall 2003, those associate's programs had enrolled 42 percent of the total. Part-time enrollment is growing rapidly, reflecting the students' ties to the workforce (or their *need* to work). So North Country has shifted resources to handle more enrollment in programs that offer the prospect of immediate employment in the region's health-care industry (nursing, radiologic technology, licensed practical nursing, massage therapy, gerontology, community residence aide). Other growing programs are keyed to the occupational needs of the region's small business-based economy — retail business management and computer graphics and design, for example. And capitalizing on the Adirondacks' niche as a Mecca for outdoors recreation and Olympic training, North Country offers degrees in wilderness recreation leadership and in sports and events management.

North Country has also marketed the allure of its Adirondack location to help produce its recent enrollment gains. Almost 80 percent of its fall 2007 headcount came from Essex and Franklin counties, to be sure. But the community college had attracted 80 students from out of state, 116 from St. Lawrence County, nine from Downstate, seven from Saratoga County, and four from Onondaga County.

Great Distances = Multiple Facilities

However, that Adirondack location, with its vast distances and sparse population, has imposed a very real cost on North Country Community College: the need to operate multiple facilities in order to remain within commuting reach of the two counties' widely scattered people.

Less than a quarter of the two counties' combined population (21,960, by 2005 Census estimates) lives in the area stretching from Tupper Lake on the west through Lake Placid and east to the Keene town line — the area roughly centered on North Country's main campus, at Saranac Lake.

Another 21 percent (19,191) live in the northwestern corner of the two-county region, around Malone, which is 45 miles and over a one-hour drive from Saranac Lake (on a nice day). So since 1968, the year North Country was founded, the college has operated a satellite campus in Malone. In 2000, that campus moved from a storefront location to a handsomely refurbished old mill along the Salmon River, now housing biology, computer science, nursing, and distance-learning labs as well as classrooms and a library. The Malone campus accounts for about a quarter of North Country's enrollment.



North Country's Malone campus

In the far opposite corner of the two-county territory, along Essex County's half of the Lake Champlain region, lives the third concentration of potential learners — 13,128 people in the towns of Ticonderoga, Crown Point, Moriah, and Westport, almost 15 percent of the two-county population. Ticonderoga is 73 miles and an hour-and-a-half drive from Saranac Lake (and about the same distance from Clinton's campus in Plattsburgh, for that matter).



The new Ticonderoga campus of North Country Community College

Initially North Country served this area from a storefront in Elizabethtown, the Essex County seat — some 30 miles from Ticonderoga. Later that operation moved to a storefront in Ticonderoga. And in fall 2006, North Country opened a new facility in Ticonderoga,¹⁸ overlooking the village and offering classrooms, a computer lab, a distance learning lab, offices, and student areas. Since the new building has opened, enrollment at Ticonderoga has grown from 83 (fall 2003) to 125 (fall 2006) — though the campus clearly has the capacity to serve more.¹⁹

The satellite campuses are not the only way North Country deals with its huge and sparsely populated service territory. It teaches at least one course in almost every high school in the two counties. The college also offers 21 on-line courses. And it uses video links to share classroom presentations, particularly in nursing, among the three campuses.²⁰

The Saranac Lake Campus

The weak link in the facilities chain for North Country is clearly its main campus in Saranac Lake.

The main building is a ramshackle former hospital, tucked into a hillside on the village's eastern outskirts. Offices and a few classrooms are there. The computer servers are stuffed in a basement room. More classrooms, faculty offices, and the cafeteria are in two, 40-year-old, one-story buildings on the other side of the hill. The library, a somewhat attractive facility, is in between at the top of the hill. Down the hill at an angle are the athletic center and playing field. Parking is tight; service roads are dubious.



Library at North Country's Saranac Lake campus

The whole campus cries out for renovation; but the steep and rocky site gives the impression of being a location in which construction would be very expensive. Yet closing up shop in Saranac Lake and abandoning the Tri-Lakes region is clearly not a viable option. That would leave one-quarter of the two counties' population an inordinate commuting distance away from the nearest alternative community college classrooms — at least an hour to Malone, an hour and a half to Ticonderoga, or an hour and a quarter to Plattsburgh.

Early in 2007, North Country's administration and Board of Trustees unveiled the concept of opening a new campus outside of town, on a former lab site along the commercial corridor between Lake Placid

and Saranac Lake. That site, they argued, had much-needed infrastructure already in place, and would be easier to build on, easier to service, and easier for many students to reach.

This idea, which apparently took much of the community by surprise, set off a political firestorm. The plan was characterized as “moving to Lake Placid” (and indeed some supporters of the college liked that description, thinking that Lake Placid has a certain cachet that might make it easier to attract students and staff). Opponents argued that the move would damage commerce in Saranac Lake, and raise commuting costs for students who live there.²¹ There were arguments that the commercial corridor was already getting overdeveloped. The final nail in the coffin was a resolution adopted by the Franklin County legislature last May, promising to consider any renovation plan put forward by the college, but declaring that it will “only consider a multi-year plan that keeps (NCCC) in its current Saranac Lake location.”

North Country’s administration has begun work on possible plans for renovation at the existing site, and held the first public hearing on a potential new master plan on April 29th of this year, in Saranac Lake.

Comparative Analysis

In efforts directed at institutional renewal — whether in education, government, business, or the not-for-profit sector — a standard technique is to compare your own organization to counterparts, or competitors. Having reviewed Clinton and North Country community colleges individually, we are ready to turn to this tool.

Pursuing our assignment to look both for potential enhancements in educational opportunity, and for potential cost-efficiencies, we compared Clinton and North Country to each other, of course. But we also looked for a couple of other possible comparisons, to see what we might learn from other Upstate community colleges that face at least somewhat similar circumstances.

Our first counterpart college fell readily to hand — Adirondack Community College. Its sponsorship territory, Warren and Washington counties, is immediately to the south of our study region.

As the table below illustrates, Adirondack’s territory shares some economic and demographic characteristics with Clinton, Essex, and Franklin. And its enrollment is close to the total of the enrollments of Clinton and North Country, combined — a useful fact, as we try to understand what the opportunity cost might be of the small scale of these two colleges.

Table 4: Background Data on the Sponsorship Territories of Clinton, North Country, and Adirondack Community Colleges

	<i>Population, 2005</i>	<i>Pop. Per Sq. Mile</i>	<i>% on Food Stamps</i>	<i>Average Wages Per Job, 2005</i>	<i>Wages vs. Upstate Average</i>	<i>Enrollment, Fall '07</i>
Clinton (1 county)	82,047	78.97	9.2%	\$32,513	– 14.4%	2,120
North Country (2 counties)	89,709	26.17	7.5%	29,969	– 21.9%	1,739
.... <i>As if combined</i>	<i>171,756</i>	<i>38.45</i>	<i>8.3%</i>	<i>31,222</i>	<i>– 17.8%</i>	<i>3,859</i>
Adirondack (2 counties)	128,572	75.48	6.7%	31,969	– 15.9%	3,408

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; State University System Administration

Comparing Educational Offerings

How, then, do the educational opportunities offered to these populations by their community colleges compare? A partial answer is in table 5, on the following page.

The table shows two things. First, as the largest of the three community colleges, Adirondack offers more degree and certificate programs. But second, and also important, Clinton and North Country each have programs that the other does not.

Table 5: Degrees and Certificate Offerings, Compared

Clinton CC	North Country CC	Adirondack CC
Degree Programs (16)	Degree Programs (15)	Degree Programs (21)
Business Accounting Business Administration Business Information Technology Business IT – Accounting Emphasis Computer Information Systems Criminal Justice Human Services Forest Technology Industrial Technology Math & Science Individual Studies – Arts Individual Studies – Science Humanities & Social Science (concentrations available in American History, Mass Media, or Political Science) Nursing Humanities & Social Science – Nursing, 3-year study option Medical Laboratory Technology	Business Administration Office Technology Computer Graphics & Design Sports and Events Management Wilderness recreation leadership Retail Business Management Criminal Justice Human Services Chemical Dependency Counseling Math & science Humanities & social sciences Individual Studies Nursing Radiologic Technology Massage Therapy	Business Administration Accounting Marketing Adventure Sports: Leadership and Management Business Information Technology Computer Science Information Systems Networking Criminal Justice – Police Criminal Justice – Substance Abuse Services Science Liberal Arts – Science Liberal Arts – Arts Food Service Hospitality and Tourism Management Music Radio-Television Broadcasting Electrical Technology Mechanical Technology Nursing Radiologic Technician
Certificate Programs (10)	Certificate Programs (5)	Certificate Programs (11)
Alcohol/Substance Abuse Counseling Computer Support Direct Support Specialist Early Childcare Care & Development Financial Services General Studies Information Processing Legal Administrative Assistant Medical Administrative Assistant Payroll	Office Technology Computer Graphics & Design Practical Nursing: Adult Community Residence Aide Gerontology	Business Information Technology Adventure Sports: Leadership and Management Commercial Cooking Communication and Media Arts Desktop Support Specialist Drafting Early Childhood Studies Forest Technology 1+1 Precision Machining Radio Broadcasting Veterinary Science Technology 1+1

Sources: Web sites of the three colleges, current as of April 2008. Compilation by the Rockefeller Institute.

This comparison is not offered in order to criticize any of the colleges involved. Careful thought and planning have gone into the decisions at each college with respect to what it should, and can, offer. Instead, the point is to offer a comparison that will show what the situation looks like from the point of view of the residents of each county. The simple fact is that from the resident and student point of view,

more opportunities would be better than fewer. It doesn't seem far-fetched to think that residents of Clinton, Essex, and Franklin might benefit if there were a way to provide them close-to-home programs in, say, mechanical technology, broadcasting, or veterinary science technology — like those at Adirondack Community College. Similarly, residents of Clinton County might like access to something like North Country's program in radiologic technology. Residents of Essex and Franklin counties might like access to something like Clinton's program in medical laboratory technology, or its program in early childcare.

The issue isn't: Can we blame someone for not making these opportunities available? It is: Can we come up with a way to expand upon what's offered now?

That question is driven home even more forcefully when we pull in a second comparison — with Jamestown Community College, which serves Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties in the far southwestern corner of New York State. Jamestown's fall 2007 enrollment was 3,361, in the ballpark with Adirondack, and somewhat less than the combined enrollments of Clinton and North Country.

Jamestown's service territory is as far as you can get from Plattsburgh, and still be in New York State. But despite the distance, there are many similarities. Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties are, in fact, even poorer than Clinton, Essex, and Franklin. Average wages per job in the two-county Southern Tier region are about 24 percent below the Upstate average (as compared to about 18 percent for Clinton, Essex, and Franklin combined, and about 16 percent for Warren and Washington counties, per table 4 above). The percentage of the population on food stamps in Cattaraugus and Chautauqua is higher (10.3 percent) than in the North Country.

Jamestown Community College's territory in the Southern Tier covers 2,321 square miles. The population density is about 91 people per square mile — slightly more than in Clinton, Warren, and Washington counties, well above Essex and Franklin, but still well below the Upstate average. It's 52 miles and at least an hour-and-a-quarter drive to Jamestown from Franklinville in Cattaraugus County. Like North Country, Jamestown must operate multiple campuses to serve this vast territory — a second main campus in Olean, plus satellite centers in Dunkirk and in Warren, PA, just across the state line.

Yet Jamestown is able to offer a range of programs that would surely be the envy of Clinton, North Country, and Adirondack alike — choices that incontrovertibly show that young, upwardly striving residents of Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties have access to close-to-home college programs that outstrip what's available to their counterparts at the opposite end of the state.

Table 6: Some Academic Comparisons

	Enrollment, Fall 2007	Degree Programs	Certificate Programs	Courses ²² Per Semester	Sections Per Semester
Clinton Community College	2,120	16	10	≈ 180	≈ 400
North Country Community College	1,739	15	5	≈ 160	≈ 325
Adirondack Community College	3,408	21	11	≈ 325	≈ 680
Jamestown Community College	3,361	33	18	≈ 370	≈ 900

Sources: SUNY System Administration; college websites; college institutional research offices

The extra offerings at Jamestown include degree programs in occupational therapy, piloting, welding, engineering science, and public safety-fire science — none of them available at any of the three northern community colleges. There are also certificate programs in fields like computer-aided design, digital audio production, multimedia production, web design, welding — also unavailable at the three other colleges.

Having reviewed the offerings of all four colleges, our central observation is simply that both Clinton Community College and North Country Community College offer fewer choices and fewer opportunities than do two colleges that operate under roughly similar circumstances, but that have enrollments closer to the combined total of Clinton and North Country.

There's no blame in that — but no denying it, either.

On its face this suggests that a larger enrollment gives a college the critical mass needed to offer more courses and more programs. A class that can be offered if it will enroll, say, 17 or 18 students may simply not be viable when only six or eight students are going to sign up. That consideration, in turn, suggests that if Clinton and North Country could somehow combine or collaborate in ways that would pool their potential student bodies into a larger critical mass, then they might be able to create more educational opportunities for the residents of all three counties.

But as the comparison between Adirondack and Jamestown suggests, there is more going on here than the mere interplay between enrollment numbers and class offerings. Jamestown has the most robust offerings of the four. How has that come about?

Part of the answer, in the view of educational and community leaders we interviewed in the Southern Tier, is simply that Jamestown has been in operation a lot longer. The college was founded in 1950 — more than a quarter of a century before the other three. It has had more years to develop the infrastructure, employer relationships, and part-time faculty needed to offer more courses and programs. And it has put those years to good use.

But another part of the answer, these leaders suggest, is that Jamestown has a governance structure that differs from most of the community colleges in the state.

Jamestown Community College was originally operated by the city of Jamestown, in Chautauqua County. Though it gradually expanded east into Cattaraugus County, it remained under the city's sponsorship for a number of years even after the SUNY community college system began to develop across the rest of the state in the 1960s and 70s. When Jamestown leaders later decided to join the SUNY system, they concluded that some problems had developed with the prevailing governance system for most of the rest of the colleges, and they worked with the SUNY Board of Trustees and the Legislature to develop a different approach.

Most of the SUNY community colleges — including Clinton, North Country, and Adirondack — operate under a “sponsorship” model, a joint relationship between the state and the county or counties that agree to help support the costs of the college. Boards of trustees consist of residents of the sponsoring counties, a majority appointed by the sponsoring counties. (The others are appointed by the governor,

with one elected student representative.) Importantly, the legislature(s) of the sponsoring county or counties must approve the community college’s budget — the entire budget, not just their share of it.

Jamestown (along with neighboring Corning Community College, another late entrant to the SUNY system) was instead established under a different governance model, referred to as a “regional community college.” As with the sponsorship model, the Board of Trustees consists of residents of the sponsoring counties, a majority of them appointed by the county governments. However, the Board of Trustees develops and approves the institution’s budget. The county legislatures have no direct role in budgeting. The state pays its share of that budget (sponsored and regional community colleges get state aid on the same basis), and simply bills the counties for their share. Provided the counties’ share per student grows no faster than inflation, they have no choice but to pay the bill.

As will be discussed below, this loss of county financial control does not seem to have led to runaway higher costs. Educators familiar with operations at Jamestown say, however, that the new governance structure *has* led to planning and decision-making that focus on program development and educational needs, rather than on line-by-line discussions with legislators about annual budgets — something administrators at community colleges around the state complain is all too common.

For these reasons, the Association of Presidents of Public Community Colleges in New York State has urged that the regional model be adopted for all community colleges in the SUNY system. Certainly, Jamestown’s governance has not seen anything like the presidential turnover that has characterized Clinton in recent years — or the facilities dispute that broke out for North Country last year.

Cost Comparisons

Having considered what multicollege comparisons might tell us about the potential for improving educational opportunities at Clinton and North Country, we turn now to the second issue in our mandate — the potential, if any, for improving the cost-effectiveness of the colleges.

Table 7: Budgeted Operating Costs for 2007-08, Compared

	Clinton Community College		North Country Community College		<i>Clinton and North Country, Totaled Together</i>		Adirondack Community College	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Total operating costs	\$12,887		\$12,401		\$25,288		\$22,082	
Instruction and departmental research	6,379	49.5%	4,002	32.3%	10,381	41.1%	10,244	46.4%
Libraries	489	3.8%	404	3.3%	893	3.5%	799	3.6%
Other academic support	318	2.5%	552	4.5%	871	3.4%	2,199	10.0%
Academic total	7,187	55.8%	4,959	40.0%	12,145	48.0%	13,242	60.0%
Student services	1,212	9.4%	1,933	15.6%	3,145	12.4%	2,050	9.3%
General administration	1,707	13.2%	1,700	13.7%	3,407	13.5%	2,570	11.6%
General institutional services	1,392	10.8%	1,367	11.0%	2,759	10.9%	1,783	8.1%
Maintenance and operation of plant	1,368	10.6%	2,227	18.0%	3,595	14.2%	2,437	11.0%

Source: SUNY System Administration. All \$ figures in 1,000s

Analysts looking for indicators that poor economies of scale may be forcing smaller operations to spend more than counterpart, larger operations will often look at what is commonly called the “tooth-to-tail” ratio — how much of an organization’s budget is spent on direct delivery of its products and services, versus overhead.

For the SUNY community colleges as a whole, the average share of their total budget spent on academic services — instruction, departmental research, libraries, and other academic support — is 56.8 percent, according to 2007-08 budget figures compiled by the State University System Administration.

As table 7, above, illustrates, Adirondack Community College does a bit better than that — 60 percent of its budget is allocated to academic services. But the smaller Clinton and North Country colleges, taken together, are able to spend only 48 percent of their budgets on academic services.

Absent a detailed operational review of the campuses, it is not possible to calculate what that difference might mean in dollar terms. Straight-line comparisons with other campuses are not enough. Among other things, and for the reasons detailed above, Clinton and North Country between them are operating, and need to operate, four campuses (compared to two for Adirondack: Queensbury and Wilton). For North Country, with three of the four, extra campuses inevitably mean extra overhead. Moreover, these comparative budget data may not do a perfect job of making hard-and-fast demarcations between spending categories; a service or office that one college classifies as academic may fall under “student services” at another, for example.

Still, this gap points to the possibility, at least, that savings might be realized if Clinton and North Country were somehow able to collaborate on some of their nonacademic operations, and thereby achieve economies of scale.

A similar inference emerges from an examination of the deployment of what is of course the colleges’ main budget investment — their personnel.

Table 8: Staffing Ratios

	Clinton Community College	North Country Community College	<i>Clinton and North Country, Totaled Together</i>	Adirondack Community College
Full-time nonfaculty employees fall '06	80	69	149	113
Part-time nonfaculty employees fall '06	28	3	31	11
Ratio, nonfaculty employees to students	1 : 20.1	1 : 22.7	1 : 21.1	1 : 29.1
Full-time faculty, fall '06	53	51	104	100
Part-time faculty, fall '06	78	76	154	155
Ratio, faculty to students	1 : 16.6	1 : 12.9	1 : 14.8	1 : 14.1

Source: SUNY System Administration data; compilation by Rockefeller Institute

As table 8 above shows, with combined enrollments that closely match Adirondack Community College, Clinton and North Country are also closely matched to Adirondack in terms of faculty employment. As of

fall 2006, they had 104 full-time faculty members and 154 part-time faculty between them, compared to 100 full-time and 155 part-time at Adirondack.

But they show more *nonfaculty* employees, when considered on a combined basis. They have a total of 36 more full-time nonfaculty staff, and 20 more part-time, than Adirondack Community College. Again it must be stipulated that we think it unlikely that any form of combination or collaboration could bring staffing levels for Clinton and North Country to full parity with Adirondack. The core fact of four campuses, if nothing else, argues against that. But the idea that *no* savings are possible would seem equally unlikely.

Finding any savings, let alone significant ones, would require a sustained, good-faith effort by the colleges and their trustees. In the search for cost-effectiveness, the importance of a good governance system should not be discounted — which brings us back to comparisons with Jamestown Community College, and its regional college governance model.

A natural worry of the counties sponsoring community colleges would be that if they lose direct approval rights over the community college budget, this could quickly result in runaway costs for students and taxpayers alike. Interestingly, however, the example of Jamestown suggests otherwise — as illustrated in the table below. Jamestown costs less for its students, and its sponsoring counties, than either Clinton or North Country. And even with many more program and course offerings, its costs are close to Adirondack's.

Table 9: Key Budget Comparisons, Clinton-North Country-Adirondack-Jamestown

	Clinton Community College	North Country Community College	Adirondack Community College	Jamestown Community College
Net operating costs, 2007-08 budget	\$12,401,000	\$11,426,700	\$20,502,200	\$25,926,200
Net operating cost per full-time equivalent student	\$8,847	\$10,112	\$8,204	\$8,350
Resident tuition for full-time student	\$3,220	\$3,340	\$3,130	\$3,350
Sponsors' contribution per student who is a county resident	\$2,160	\$2,567	\$1,921	\$2,163

Source: SUNY System Administration

Options for Building Strength

Our review of the educational opportunities provided by, and the costs of, the system now serving the residents of Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties has led to three broad conclusions:

- It is *clear* that more robust educational offerings would be in the interest of the people of the three counties.
- It seems *probable* that some means of pooling the populations and resources of the regions could expand those educational opportunities.
- And it seems *possible* that a more collaborative operation of some sort could combine or share at least some nonacademic costs, saving money for taxpayers and students, and freeing up resources for expanded programs.

What are the options for getting there, from here?

Let It Be?

The strong view of the leadership of both Clinton Community College and North Country Community College, as conveyed to us in our interviews and in correspondence, is that each offers programs well calibrated to meet the needs of residents and employers in their respective territories. They believe that the basic demographic and geographic realities confronting the two colleges argue strongly against a wholesale merger, or across-the-board consolidations of academic or operational functions.

Operating four campuses, and providing face-to-face services for students at each, inevitably limits the economies of scale that can be achieved, they contend. And they warn that pooling two student bodies to produce one larger one may not really open up many opportunities to operate classes that can't now be offered, because distance factors will still be a major impediment.

The two administrations also believe that they already collaborate effectively when and where it is appropriate — for example in their workforce development training programs. They note, as well, that students in the three counties are free to, and do, enroll in the other community college when a particular program that's offered at only one of the colleges seems to best fit their needs. They contend that once new presidents are in place, each college can be counted on individually to proceed in the direction of building stronger programs and meeting the needs of its territory in the most cost-effective manner possible under the circumstances.

“North Country and Clinton do collaborate, understand what the other college is doing and provide regional support to one another in terms of programs of study, study access to our colleges, and the transfer of courses between our colleges,” writes Interim President Woodward. “Clinton will continue to develop new programs of study. The college has served its residents well for 40 years and will continue to do so for decades ahead.” (Interim President Woodward's full letter is appended to this report.)

President Rice wrote shortly before her retirement: “Suggestions that merging North Country and Clinton through some magical process will alleviate the special travel and related geographic realities

miss the point. North Country serves this area admirably well and fulfills the obligations to serve its unique community as it should. Simply adding more will not change the nature of serving the Adirondacks. The originators designed the college to meet these needs. A merger will diminish the efficiency of that design.” (A letter from W. John Friedlander, chair of North Country’s Board of Trustees, is also appended to this report.)

Based as they are on real-world experience, these views cannot be lightly dismissed.

On the other hand, three college presidents whom we interviewed (two present and one retired), all of whom had been involved in college mergers, said that an effective consolidation effort can eventually overcome such objections. They argued that some sort of collaboration was desirable and achievable, given time and willpower. And two of the three volunteered the opinion that Clinton and North Country are below the minimum size needed to be efficient and effective. Still, as a comparison, 14 of the 58 community colleges in the North Carolina system, which is highly regarded, are smaller than either Clinton or North Country.²³

An Immediate Merger?

However, even those who have had favorable experience with mergers at other colleges state unequivocally that it cannot possibly be achieved in the short term. A full merger of the two institutions would require these steps, among others — each one time-consuming on its own, and each one carrying the potential to increase the time required to achieve some of the others in its wake:

- Merging the two academic programs would require rewriting the curriculum for almost every course, under a meticulous process of faculty governance.
- Almost every degree and certificate program would need to be revised. And every newly revised degree and certificate program would have to be approved by the State University and by the Board of Regents.
- A “new” college created by a merger could not simply inherit the accreditations of the two former colleges. It would have to go through an entire new accreditation process on its own.
- Newly defined courses and newly defined degrees will require review and approval by the federal agencies that determine what courses of study qualify for student financial aid.
- Bargaining units at the two colleges would have to be realigned, new union designations would have to be voted upon, and new contracts negotiated. (And if new contracts “average up” differences in existing pay scales, they could be costly.)
- A whole host of systems and processes, from the student database to the billing offices, would have to be pulled into a single new entity.

None of these steps is impossible. Other colleges have done them all, and reputedly emerged the stronger for it. But they would take time. And the very scale of the undertaking suggests that all of the responsible parties — the boards of trustees, the counties, and the State University — need to be very sure that the results will be worth the agony.

Merger, Eventually?

Though an immediate merger is not feasible, a merger engineered over five years or so might be a possibility. If there were a consensus that consolidating academic programs would be the surest way to expand educational opportunities in the three counties — and the straightest route to achieving economies of scale in administration — then an eventual merger might well be the *best* option.

There is no such consensus to date, however. Conversations we had with faculty and other supporters of the two institutions clearly indicated that the idea has already met strong resistance. Though in transition, both current administrations find little merit in the idea.

And an outright merger would have an impact beyond the colleges themselves. Both Clinton and North Country are important sources of community identity and pride. When North Country faces Clinton in basketball, it leads the sports section of the *Adirondack Enterprise*. The community stake in such a key piece of its identity can't be surrendered lightly.

Still, establishing the goal now of an eventual merger would set a clear course, concentrate the best minds at both institutions on how to get it done, and perhaps provide a basis for rallying the broader community around a better future for their community college system.

It might also provide an opportunity to embrace the regional community college governance model that has proven so effective for Jamestown. Adopting that model for Clinton and North Country would ultimately require a new statute, approved by the Legislature and signed into law by the governor. If developed through the model used for Jamestown, the process would start with resolutions from both current boards of trustees, resolutions from all three county legislatures, approval by the State University Board of Trustees, and approval by the state Education Department and the Board of Regents, before being submitted to the state Legislature.

Collaboration, Now?

The mid-point option, in a sense, would be for both colleges to undertake a drive to collaborate more intensely, and soon. It might be possible to achieve many of the potential advantages of a merger without going the full step. Alternatively, a determined effort now at greater collaboration might help clarify within a few years whether an eventual merger would, or would not, be desirable and workable.

The collaboration option needs to be examined both in terms of how it could be used to improve educational opportunities, by expanding and/or consolidating the catalog of courses, and its potential for achieving cost savings by consolidating some operations.

Cost Efficiencies

To save on costs, the two colleges might, for example, negotiate shared services agreements, consolidating such things as their “back-office” operations — perhaps admissions, registration, billing, financial aid administration, purchasing, personnel administration, computer networks, student academic records, and the like. Alternatively, the colleges might be able to outsource one or more such functions to another college, or to private vendors. Increasingly these kinds of functions at colleges are

performed on-line, rather than face-to-face — and if they can be performed on-line, they can be performed anywhere.

Similarly, an in-depth examination of maintenance resources and buildings-and-grounds operations might find opportunities for combined services. Perhaps personnel responsible for, say, painting, paving, or nonemergency repairs could be moved among the four campuses as needed.

Restructuring these services to reduce overhead would take time, but phasing in changes over a period of years could prove advantageous — it would afford the opportunity to make any attendant personnel reductions through attrition and retirements, rather than through layoffs.

Educational Opportunities

Collaborating on the academic program, meanwhile, would seem to have at least some potential for enhancing the educational opportunities and experiences provided to the students. From the point of view of students from the three counties, there is no reason it would not be desirable to have ready access to all the programs and courses now offered by both institutions — and the sooner, the better. And for students living in the wide-ranging territory of the three counties, the more seamlessly this could be made to work, the better. For example, could not the two colleges allow each other's students direct, no-hassle access to classes and programs at either college?

Take the case of a hypothetical young woman who is graduating from high school in Elizabethtown, plans to go to community college next year, and needs to help pay her own way. Initially she applies to North Country Community College, since Elizabethtown is in Essex County. But then she finds that the best part-time job she can get is in Plattsburgh, about 50 minutes away — the same distance as Saranac Lake, but in the opposite direction. She wants to put her school commute and her work commute together, so she'd like to take classes at Clinton Community College. Right now that means re-applying and re-enrolling. Wouldn't it be easier if she could simply register for a semester of classes at Clinton? And then suppose next summer she gets a job at home, at the new Lowe's that's opening in Elizabethtown. She has friends who commute to class in Saranac Lake, and if she carools with them they can all save on gas. Wouldn't it be easier if she could then simply register for a semester of classes at North Country? Or register for some classes at Clinton on days she needs to be in Plattsburgh, and for classes in Saranac Lake on days she can ride with her friends?

This example is hypothetical but highly plausible. And it would be easy to think of other examples of situations in which a seamless process of a shared catalog, common registration, and common programs among the four campuses would be advantageous to students. A combined pool of students would also offer at least the possibility of adding new courses. So why not?

Leading for New Strengths

No process of collaboration or merger can be dictated or operated from Albany. It will be done at and by the two colleges, if at all. With presidential searches under way at both institutions, that means this issue has to be raised quickly in the search and selection process, if there is to be any hope of engineering such thorough-going change. The development of any implementation plans for full-scale

collaboration would require hands-on leadership at the campuses, backed up by the hard work and best thinking of faculty and staff.

In our interviews we were warned on both campuses that any uncertainty over the institutions' futures would undermine the effort to find effective new leadership. That's a valid concern. But there is another side to it. A mission of engineering a major, breakthrough transformation of the two colleges might well attract more impassioned, focused, and effective candidates than would a job that is oriented toward steady management of the status quo.

How might the responsibility for change be incorporated into the mandate of the new presidents, and where would it be vested?

If the two college's trustees and their allies at the State University want to take the occasion of these open presidencies to drive the two institutions toward broader educational opportunities and greater economies of scale, then two possible ways of handling their presidential searches come to mind. Either could be pursued whether the decision was to push for an eventual merger, or simply to engineer a program of deep collaboration — or to try collaboration first and consider a merger later.

- One option is to make a collaboration project a key mandate in the search for both new presidents, one for Clinton and one for North Country, and to recruit two outstanding new presidents to fulfill it. One effective new president at each campus, working together, could rally the faculty and staff of each institution, and the broader community, behind such a project.
- A more unconventional approach might be to hire the same individual to serve as president of both colleges, with a mandate to bring them into close collaboration. Clearly that would bring greater executive focus to the task — and hiring a single president might make it possible to offer the kind of salary that would interest a broader pool of outstanding candidates. But it would risk one (or even both) institutions feeling that they thereby have acquired second-class status, and have lost local control and local focus. And a unitary presidency might tip the scales too heavily towards an outright merger as the eventual outcome — when it might turn out in time that deeper collaboration between two independent institutions is the better course.

The Opportunity

Whichever of all the above options might ultimately prove most desirable, the responsibility for deciding on a new direction rests, first and foremost, with the two colleges' own boards of trustees.

It is a daunting challenge for them. But equally daunting is the realization that if they do not even consider the possibility of pursuing a new direction, five or 10 years from now the people of Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties may look back and feel that a great opportunity was lost.

An opportunity to build new strengths.

Endnotes

¹ The Rockefeller Institute is the public policy research arm of the State University. It focuses on state policy matters across multiple states, on a wide range of topics — health care, urban and social policy, education reform, higher education, disaster relief — involved in our federal system of government. An emerging focus is state government policies around the nation with respect to community colleges — which now enroll 40 percent of all postsecondary students in the country. The Institute also works on matters specific to New York State, however, publishing various books and papers on New York State government, maintaining the annual *New York State Statistical Yearbook*, and conducting special studies like this one at the request of various arms of New York State government.

² To ensure candor about an inquiry that was controversial right from the outset, the interviews were all conducted on a background basis — not for quotation or attribution.

³ 2005 data, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Compilations by the Rockefeller Institute. In this report's calculations we use the traditional definition of Upstate: all of New York State except for New York City, Nassau, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester counties.

⁴ New York State Department of Labor, establishment data survey, annual averages for 2002 to 2007.

⁵ Poverty rate for 2000 from the U.S. Census Bureau; 2006 figures on food stamps from the New York State Department of Family Assistance, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 age cohort estimates by county.

⁷ See <http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workforceindustrydata/apps.asp?reg=nys&app=demand>

⁸ http://www.suny.edu/About_suny/fastfacts/index.cfm. fall enrollment data, 2002-2007.

⁹ Based on latest listings at the institutions' web sites. Clinton shows 19 degree programs, but three are subsets of an A.A. in Humanities and Social Sciences.

¹⁰ State University System Administration, Office of Financial Analysis. Total net operating cost under their 2007-08 budgets are \$10,112 per FTE for North Country, and \$8,847 for Clinton — compared to an average of \$8,897.

¹¹ The SUNY Office of Financial Analysis calculates North Country's sponsor cost per student who is a resident at \$2,567, and Clinton's at \$2,160, under their 2007-08 budgets. The Rockefeller Institute calculates the system average at \$2,355, excluding the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, which is classified as a community college but has per-student costs about double the state average and sponsor costs of three times the state average.

¹² Office of the State Comptroller, Division of Municipal Affairs, data for fiscal year 2006. Sales tax receipts per capita are also below the Upstate average in Clinton (-13.3%) and Franklin (-14.2%) counties. Essex County's per-capita sales tax receipts are 52.8% above the Upstate average, because of commerce in the tourist center of Lake Placid. Essex County's per-capita property tax receipts are also 7.2% above the Upstate average, because of taxes from the state government, which is the major landholder in the county.

¹³ Data available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/commuting.html#NY>.

¹⁴ *Clinton Community College Five-Year Student Profile, Fall 2003 – Fall 2007*.

¹⁵ Data from State University System Administration.

¹⁶ Clinton County, with 82,047 people, is of course also below this standard.

¹⁷ North Country Community College Institutional Profile, 2006-2007 Academic Year.

¹⁸ It should be noted that both the Malone and Ticonderoga campuses were built by the NCCC Foundation, Inc., under a lease agreement with the college. Capital construction projects undertaken by community colleges themselves require local funding to match a 50 percent share from the state. This state share does not vary with local need — unlike the state’s formula for funding construction for elementary and secondary schools. President Rice points out that “When comparing community college costs, it is important to include county costs not reflected in community college operating expenses. Almost all community colleges receive support from their counties through capital bonding thereby assuming college debt.... North Country’s sponsors have no capital debt at present. North Country is the only community college whose counties are not paying on a Capital Construction Plan.”

¹⁹ *North Country Community College Institutional Profile, 2006-2007 Academic Year.*

²⁰ For both Clinton and North Country, the limited availability of broadband connections in the North Country is an impediment to expanded use of this kind of technology. The state has set a goal of full broadband deployment by 2013, which would enhance the colleges’ options considerably.

²¹ The county line runs through Saranac Lake, and most of the village is in Franklin County — though the existing campus is just over the line in Essex County. The contemplated new site would have been a few miles into Essex County.

²² For purposes of this table, a course is defined as a for-credit offering of a particular subject, for example, Biology 101. Various courses are offered at each college in more than one section, often at different locations and/or schedules, each semester. Because course and section numbers fluctuate from semester to semester and year to year, this table shows approximations based on the colleges’ own counts of their courses and sections for the spring 2007 semester. The numbers include both on-line and on-site classes.

²³ http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/Statistical_Reports/collegeYear2007-2008/fall/fa0708.htm



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July 25, 2008

Dennis Golladay
Systems Administration
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Dear Dennis:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the report for Senator Little. It has indeed been a frustrating and nerve racking experience for the college and its constituents as innuendo, speculation and comment have been articulated in the press and at public events. The way the process began behind closed doors with the college's learning about the study from people "on the street" did not set the stage for a rational, calm approach to a subject that should be reviewed when conditions are right. Clinton, for example, officially learned of this study a full week after members of our local community alerted us to the study's existence.

I am pleased this report has been completed. It is an appropriate time to review campuses when the leadership changes. However, the information must be truly comparative and the result left to the facts. After this review, I believe the report shares the positive story of Clinton Community College. A story that denotes a campus that is well run, offering programs of study for its residents that are timely and necessary, providing workforce training for its business and industry sector and a college who's cost per full time equivalent student is less than the average for all the community colleges statewide. It also shows a college that spends more per FTE on instruction (where money should be spent assisting students) than the three colleges it is compared with. It shows a campus that is on the move with new programs of study, outreach to its wider community providing access, affordability and the opportunity for four-year education through articulated transfer programs. It is also a college that is funded in accordance with State legislation by its sponsor Clinton County, but not by the State of New York.

The following comments concerning this report are written from the standpoint of Clinton Community College which is my responsibility. I have specifically and intentionally not attempted to compare my remarks with North Country Community College which will also respond to this report. I lack certain specifics concerning North Country which limits my ability to comment and any comment I did make would be pure speculation. Thus, these comments concern Clinton Community College. I have attempted to categorize my comments with topical headings.

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Comparative Data:

The report presents a number of comments comparing institutions namely Adirondack, Clinton, Jamestown and North Country. It uses Jamestown, a college under a separate funding mechanism from the State as one comparative entity and Adirondack Community College as the other. Unfortunately, the report while attempting to make a comparative case fails to offer information on Adirondack or Jamestown such as that found on page 7 and 9 of the report for Clinton and North Country respectively. This leaves the reader without important comparative data, creates speculation that may be inaccurate and causes the reader to dig deeply to find what comparative data there is. I, therefore, have compared Clinton to Jamestown, with its separate funding mechanism and out of state enrollment, far less than to Adirondack, a campus more similar in nature and operation.

Without comparative data on all the colleges, it is a “grab bag” of information never knowing if the findings are truly related. For example the use of “upstate” when comparing Clinton, Essex and Franklin Counties to the remainder of the State with the exception of New York City, Long Island, Westchester and Rockland Counties misleads the reader and skews the data.-endnote #7.

Cost:

The report (on pg. 3) speaks to “a tough economy impacts the tax base making it more difficult for local governments to support their community colleges.” If this is true in Clinton County, it is even truer in the majority of other counties in New York State. Clinton County is a county that has seen growth and has an increasingly strong economic base created by the American/Canadian monetary exchange and the impact of new business coming to the area. This growth is noted on page 6 of the report.

The Clinton County Legislature has always been a very proactive and positive sponsor of Clinton Community College and I have been given no indication this will change, in fact, during the most recent budget discussion (June 08) the County officials spoke highly of the college and the relationship of the county and college. County officials have indicated they will maintain the annual appropriation according to State regulations.

To share this relationship I offer another example found in the report. The sponsor (county) contribution per student is one number that can be found in the document when looking for comparisons. It shows Clinton and Adirondack costs are similar. This is the case throughout the report. Clinton fares extremely well in comparison with both comparative colleges and leads one to wonder why this report was written. Another example is in the endnote #12 (the end notes is where much of the real data is found) at the end of the report. Clinton’s cost per full-time equivalent student (FTE) is less than the average

for the 30 community colleges in the State indicating the cost to our county is responsible and reasonable in comparison.

The report indicates (pg 5) “measured in terms of the sponsor contribution per student who is a county resident Clinton is 15th highest of the 30 SUNY colleges.” (Endnote #12) This is exactly in the middle of the number of community colleges and is an important factor when one considers Clinton is one of the smaller community colleges.

There is the discussion of operating costs and “operating costs mean a cost burden for the sponsoring county.” The report again attempts to state Clinton is more expensive than other colleges and in some way by combining the two colleges will be less costly. (It would be significantly more costly to Clinton County.) Again, a review of the endnotes (#11) is important. The average cost per FTE (full-time equivalent student-how colleges are funded) for Clinton is below the stated average among the 30 community colleges.

There is yet another comparison-the amount spent on academics (instruction). This is where a college should be spending it resources. Endnote #25 shares that Clinton spends more on instruction than either Adirondack or Jamestown. It is a chart from a 2006-2007 State University of New York report (most recent data) that shares the following:

Spending on Instruction: (actual percentage amounts of a college’s budget spent) The following does not include libraries or other academics where things such as computers, mainframes, varied library costs and the like are funded and are different on each campus. This is instruction.

College	% of total budget spent on instruction	Per FTE
Adirondack	45.6%	\$3859
Clinton	48.1%	\$4141
Jamestown	45.1%	\$3772

*source: 2006-07 SUNY Annual Report Summary

Enrollment:

There are statements made concerning County populations. A comparison is made of Adirondack CC and indicates it is sponsored by Washington and Warren Counties. It shows the population and enrollment for comparative purposes when it is clearly understood nearly one-third of Adirondack students come from other areas namely Saratoga County which does not have a community college and is proximate to Adirondack CC. For comparative purposes the Saratoga County population should be

deleted from the Adirondack enrollment numbers. If one takes the percentage of students from other areas (largely Saratoga County) out of the Adirondack enrollment and uses

Warren and Washington population numbers, Adirondack's enrollment is comparable to Clinton's and Clinton County has a population of 50,000 less people than Warren and Washington Counties according to table 4, page 13. Thus by population, Clinton CC serves more of its residents than Adirondack.

Likewise, Jamestown CC's enrollment numbers are skewed by students from Pennsylvania where the college has a campus and additional students from Ohio.

Programs of Study:

The report also makes reference to the types of programs of study that should be or could be offered if the colleges (Clinton and North Country) were to work more closely together. The report goes on to list programs of study such as mechanical technology, veterinary science and broadcasting as programs.

Colleges develop programs of study based on "need" not wish or inclination. The programs listed above have not been shown on any needs assessment for Clinton or are they programs that would serve a significant need in the area. The college does offer a program in Industrial Technology that is similar to Mechanical Technology. In the creation of new programs of study, Clinton CC does regular needs assessments and develops programs based on demonstrated need. For example, there is the recent development of the Wind Energy Turbine Technology program to meet the needs of a new and rapidly expanding business.

Another area of the report deals with the comparative number of programs of study at the colleges. "First, as the largest of the three community colleges, Adirondack offers more degrees and certificate programs." As stated above, colleges create programs based on needs assessments and they deactivate programs in similar fashion. To present a number as the end all as this report attempts to do is very misleading to anyone reading the report. The report notes that Adirondack has 21 degree programs and Clinton has 16. However, endnote #10 indicates Clinton has 19 programs, but three are subsets of Humanities and Social Science. Regardless, Clinton Community College has recently (Board of Trustees meeting of May 27 as reported in the Plattsburgh Press Republican on May 22) approved four programs. And, there are two additional programs that will be readied for approval in the early fall. If numbers are what matters than Clinton will exceed in number those of Adirondack. What is important is not the number of programs as the report attempts to promote, it is service to the communities served by the college. Is the college meeting the needs of its service area ought to be the point of examination, not numbers.

Then in Table 6 there is the attempt to indicate Adirondack and Jamestown offer more opportunity for students than does Clinton. The report states “Having reviewed the offerings of all four colleges our central observation is simply that both Clinton Community College and North Country Community College offer fewer choices and fewer opportunities than do the two colleges that operate under roughly similar circumstances, but that have enrollments closer to the combined total of Clinton and North Country.” “There is no blame in that-but no denying it, either.” YES, THERE IS REASON TO DENY IT. There are two reasons. One is that stated above concerning serving one’s population and creating programs of study for this service and not just to create programs so there are numbers of programs. And second, if one reviews the data in the table you find Clinton offers the same opportunity for classes as either comparative college based on enrollment.

The stated need for programs of study (pg.4) such as registered nurses, teachers, licensed practical nurses, corrections officers and accounting clerks again misleads the reader. Each of these programs exists in our County and is offered to its residents. All but one of these programs is at Clinton Community College.

Workforce Training:

The college works directly with a host of local/regional businesses to offer workforce training. The report states “They could train workers...” This is an area where Clinton spends a great deal of time and attention and in fact has recently restructured its operations to be even more involved. Clinton has locations both on and off the campus for the training of the local workforce in both degree and non-degree efforts. Several businesses have training centers on the campus and others sponsor certain laboratory functions. This outreach effort is significant and well respected.

Staffing:

Table 8 – Staffing Ratio – The chart makes a very broad assumption indicating the faculty student ratio at Adirondack is the ratio community colleges across the state should have. There is no agreement on this by professional educators and it depends on union contracts, released time for individuals to do other tasks on a campus etc. This is simply a chart that shows a difference among four campuses.

The report states if the colleges were combined there would be less need for non-teaching staff. This is again a very broad assumption and is based on the thought that each college has scores of people doing the same tasks. While it might be possible to reduce in a few areas, these colleges are supported for the needs of their residents and do not have staff sitting around. The notion that for example the Clinton paint crew could be used at North

Page six

Country shows a lack of understanding of these campuses. Neither campus has a paint crew or any other crew. All staff such as this is generalists doing many functions.

If one reviews the number of faculty noted in the table stating Adirondack has 1000 more students than Clinton, they will also see Adirondack has nearly twice the faculty. Why?

Budget:

Table 9- Key Budget Comparisons – As one reviews these numbers several things should be kept in mind. First, Clinton Community Colleges costs are below the State average of the 30 Community Colleges. Second, the budget numbers used include students from out of the area (largely Saratoga County for Adirondack) and out of state enrollment (PA and Ohio) for Jamestown. Out-of-state students pay a different tuition, thus increasing revenue. Jamestown is also funded very differently by State statute. Jamestown and the State created a funding mechanism when it moved from being an independent college to being part of the State system. Third and perhaps most importantly, the numbers used in this table are 2007-08 budgeted numbers and not final annual report numbers. This data will change. And last, Clinton using these numbers is very similar in cost to Adirondack and Jamestown, the comparative colleges.

Trustees:

A comment is made concerning the thinking of the Board of Trustees related to the development and implementation of the college's strategic plan. The Board has been and continues to be interested in moving this college forward. They are a dedicated, informed and interested body of volunteers giving of their time and energy freely. There has never been a discussion of the strategic plan, that I am aware of that has been anything but positive. A statement such as this leads the reader to believe otherwise and that is unfortunate and does not relay the true spirit of this Board of Trustees.

“Tensions between the Board of Trustees and administrations at Clinton, meanwhile, have contributed to rapid turnover in the leadership of the institution.” Understanding the facts concerning this statement leads one to different conclusions. Clinton is well led by the Trustees, they understand their role and the role of the administration and each is kept separate as appropriate in the leadership of the campus.(Endnote #14.)

Other Colleges:

The reports states that other Presidents were contacted and interviewed concerning the combining of campuses. Yet, there is no indication in the report who the Presidents are or the colleges that collaborated making it difficult to make judgment on the findings.

The readers of this report will draw their own conclusions. I hope the data provided in this response is helpful in bringing clarity to a report that in many ways was hastily prepared (3 weeks). This is not to point fingers, but to express concern that a study of such importance would be given such a short timeline. I will let each reader make their own determinations of the objectivity of this report.

The report fails to discuss in any detail two of the most important factors in any study of these two campuses – geography and State funding. Clinton Community College at its closest point to North Country Community College is 60+ miles. That is from the door of one President to the door of the other. The roads to all locations are rural in large part, heavy with snow in the winter and traveling can be difficult at any time of year. The recent increase in the cost of gasoline has and will increasingly have an impact on how far students are willing to travel.

The funding process from the State of New York for its community colleges is in legislation. However, the State has failed year after year to fund the community colleges appropriately. Clinton is short annually nearly 1M in state funding. Think how this report and these colleges might be different if funding to the colleges was as stated in legislation.

It must be noted in this report that North Country and Clinton do collaborate, understand what the other college is doing and provide regional support to one another in terms of programs of study, student access to our colleges, and the transfer of courses between our colleges. This will continue into the future. The notion that somehow a “magic pot-of-gold” or increased opportunities for students beyond those opportunities already existing and accessible for students has not been shared in this study.

Clinton will continue to develop new programs of study for the residents of its service area. These programs will be accessible, affordable and of high quality. Workforce training will continue and expand in the months ahead. New locations for training, additional staffing and expanded workforce training opportunities for local business, industry and municipalities have been or are being added. The college has served its residents well for 40 years and will continue to do so for decades ahead.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frederick W. Woodward', written in a cursive style.

Frederick W. Woodward
Interim President

NORTH COUNTRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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June 26, 2008

To the SUNY/Rockefeller Institute
Study Committee on the North Country/Clinton Merger:

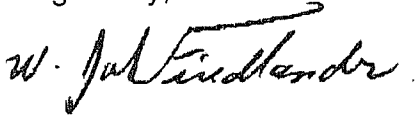
As Chair of the North Country Community College Board of Trustees, on behalf of our Board members and other concerned parties, I write to express grave misgivings and disappointment with the nature, process and content of the purported merger study between North Country and Clinton Community College, it being initiated by State Senator Betty Little and reportedly supported by State University of New York Vice Chancellor for Community Colleges, Dennis Golladay.

Although only drafts (two) were forwarded to NCCC for review, and the final public piece was not share with NCCC, this expensive study appears (at least in draft) to be of limited use and questionable value. While bizarre and unlike comparisons and peculiar analogies may be "attention getters", they are not helpful when a serious subject is at hand. Why would a researcher attempt to draw comparisons (if not directed by some undisclosed preconceived goal) between North Country Community College located in the heart of the Adirondack Park to Jamestown Community College located at the highly populated, urban NY-Pennsylvania border? Or, make comparison to Adirondack Community College situated in the heart of the City of Glens Falls? Where else is the term "mountain people vs. lake people" found? But, most egregious, why was so much misleading and/or erroneous data offered? A close reading by an informed person raises other more significant questions about the true purpose for this so-called study.

The so-called study was precipitously provided to the press with no indications of resulting costs. The investigation by the researcher was limited to three weeks. The conclusions appear to be based on little actual knowledge or experience with rural education. If it was not so disappointing and misleading, the study might be viewed as a rather strange but humorous parody. Unfortunately, it is not amusing or really informative. It is a waste of scarce financial resources that, had it been performed seriously and directed to a true educational improvement purpose, might have been helpful to all. The only apparent useful outcome is the redundant expressions of recommendation that North Country and Clinton find practical ways to cooperate, a process that has been and is already ongoing by both Colleges for years.

This waste of assets is deeply disturbing. Indeed, as an individual who has spent the better part of a lifetime in education, it is my opinion that a merger would be disastrous to both North Country Community College and Clinton Community College, and to the communities and students they serve.

Regretfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. John Friedlander". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent flourish at the end.

W. John Friedlander, Chair
Board of Trustees of North Country Community College

WJF:g

cc: Dr. John B. Clark, Interim Chancellor
Dr. Dennis Golladay, Vice Chancellor for Community Colleges
Dr. Frederick Woodward, Interim President, Clinton Community College
Senator Elizabeth O'C. Little