



The Power of 12

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Lexington, KY – Strength in numbers means that alone we cannot accomplish nearly as much as we can if we partner with others before attempting difficult tasks. Such is the case with the new Bluegrass Consortium of Higher Education (BCHE). It's 12 colleges and universities working in concert to improve the educational and economic life of central Kentuckians.

The nonprofit consortium came out of meetings of Bluegrass Tomorrow, another nonprofit that seeks to enhance the quality of life in the Bluegrass region through partnerships. The presidents of 12 central Kentucky regionally accredited colleges and universities got things rolling.

The 12 schools are: Asbury University, Berea College, Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Centre College, Eastern Kentucky University, Georgetown College, Midway College, Morehead State University, Kentucky State University, Sullivan University, Transylvania University and the University of Kentucky.

“One of the key discussion points in these meetings in Kentucky was that the only time they (the participants) got together was to discuss what they wanted out of Frankfort or Washington – meaning legislation,” recalled Rob Rumpke, president and CEO of Bluegrass Tomorrow. “Never did we get together to discuss how to advance the region both educationally and economically.”

That revelation turned into a presidents' roundtable, which eventually called for the creation of this kind of a consortium.

More specifically, the purpose of the consortium is to explore collaborative opportunities that address lifelong learning, college readiness, economic and workforce needs and the advancement of the central Kentucky region.

One of those who pushed hard for the development of the consortium was Eastern Kentucky University president Doug Whitlock.

“Dr. Augusta Julian, president of Bluegrass Community and Technical College, and I sit on the Bluegrass Tomorrow board, and we had a conversation and said the area could be served by having a consortium of the public and private four-year and two-year

institutions,” Whitlock said.

Initial goals and objectives for BCHE were laid out last year during roundtable meetings and research conducted by Bluegrass Tomorrow and the Bluegrass Area Development District, as well as from surveys of university presidents and university academic officers.

“President Bill Crouch at Georgetown College recommended an Oxford University Center model in the Bluegrass, where colleges and universities would share faculty, academic programs, arts facilities, purchasing powers and all kinds of programs and scenarios,” Rumpke explained. “That’s the model that’s out there in the distance and that we want to work toward.”

Among the goals of the consortium is a university-center sharing model, to include faculty exchange, academic program/course sharing and transfer of credits.

“If students needed a class to graduate or to enhance their program and it wasn’t something their home institution offered, maybe the student could commute to another school, because we’re all close together, or we could do something for them with distance learning,” Whitlock said.

With so many local schools having similar facilities, services, arts programs and resources, departments and centers, it makes sense to share them, along with libraries and collections, according to the consortium.

“We did a survey of what could be attained; student success was first and foremost, (and) also professional development programs for department chairs,” Whitlock said. “Also, ways to share and leverage our cultural activities, like with the Norton Center at Centre College in Danville or with the new Center for the Arts at ECU.”