

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

International

[Home](#) [News](#) [International](#)



January 6, 2011

Consortium Wants to Help Universities Get a Clearer Picture of Their Global Partnerships

By Karin Fischer

Few institutions have effective mechanisms for tallying and monitoring their international activities and agreements, leaving them with an incomplete picture of their own global engagement. Many cannot answer such basic questions as: What partnerships does the university have in certain regions of the world? How many faculty members are abroad, and where?

The inability to fully describe their overseas activities means universities often can't make the most of their relationships abroad.

Now a new [international consortium](#) is being formed to develop an open-source software platform and common data standards for tracking and mapping universities' global activities.

The UCosmic Consortium builds on an online international-data-management system created in 2006 at the [University of Cincinnati](#), under the then-vice provost for international affairs, Mitch Leventhal. Cincinnati will help manage the new association in partnership with the State University of New York system, where Mr. Leventhal is now vice chancellor for global affairs.

The data-management system has proven useful to Cincinnati by allowing departments to pool resources for graduate-student recruitment to focus on strong international feeder institutions and by helping the university develop a strategy for working in sub-Saharan Africa through quickly identifying existing projects and partnerships in the region, among other ways.

Initial consortium members include the College Board, Lehigh University, Australia's Griffith University, and [Manipal Education](#), an India-based international-education company with campuses in Nepal, Dubai, and Malaysia, among other countries.

Having a comprehensive view of institutional global activities will be "invaluable" to the College Board's member colleges, said James Montoya, the organization's vice president for higher education.

The group is open to universities, associations, foundations,

government agencies, and independent information-technology consultants worldwide. Mr. Leventhal will serve as its executive director.

It will provide a forum for members to establish what information to collect and for programmers to work together to share computer code and create software that can be easily adapted at multiple institutions. (The prototype in use at Cincinnati cannot be used at other universities because it was customized to the Ohio institution's needs and technology requirements.)

As the consortium evolves, it will test new software against members' requirements and maintain open-source code libraries. It will also sponsor annual conferences and a set of networking resources designed to accelerate development and deployment.

The code will be available for download at no cost to any institution. But universities that join the group will be able to have input into the key data to be gathered and the establishment of information and processing standards, Mr. Leventhal said in a telephone interview.

Mr. Leventhal hopes that roughly 20 universities and organizations will sign on in the consortium's first year to spread the costs of development. A number of U.S. universities had previously expressed interest in adopting UCosmic, although Mr. Leventhal conceded that budget constraints could dampen participation.

But to his surprise, several of the initial consortium members are overseas, such as Manipal, which signed on after Mr. Leventhal mentioned UCosmic in a recent conversation with Anand Sudarshan, its chief executive.

Duleep C. Deosthale, vice president for international education at the growing international-education company, says collecting universal data points could help potential collaborators identify common ground and ease global agreements. "It could help us get a sense of where institutions are, where they are going, and how to better connect," he said.

Compiling data in a form that can be widely shared and aggregated also could facilitate a more coordinated and sophisticated national strategy for international education, in the United States and elsewhere, Mr. Leventhal said.

Copyright 2011. All rights reserved.

The Chronicle of Higher Education 1255 Twenty-Third St, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037