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The University of Michigan has received a three-year grant from Atlantic Philanthropies to explore the manner in which information technology is reshaping the boundaries in higher education: among institutions, disciplines, levels of education, and between higher education and society. Atlantic has also funded a parallel three-year study to be conducted by the National Academies that will be focused on stimulating a national dialog on these issues.

The impact of digital technology on higher education is expected to be profound, rapid, and likely discontinuous because of the manner in which it transforms the way we create, manage, and transfer knowledge; because of its exponential rate of evolution; and because of the way it erodes or eliminates conventional constraints such as geographical location, time, and monopoly. The Michigan project addresses the impact of information technology on higher education by: 1) establishing and guiding several leadership groups aimed at identifying issues and developing action agendas (e.g., national associations, state or regional alliances, cross-disciplinary groups, foundations); 2) building knowledge resources to support these groups (e.g., web portals, collaboration spaces, workshop experiences, intellectual frameworks) and 3) using these leadership groups to develop a series of strategic technology roadmaps for various constituencies of higher education (e.g., colleges and universities, national organizations, and stakeholders such as state and federal government).

One of the important components of this project is to explore how better to coordinate the various elements of higher education—e.g., research universities, regional public universities, independent colleges, virtual (electronic) universities. As the first step, we are interested in building a network of college and university leaders at the state or regional level to explore how best to address the differing challenges and opportunities faced by institutions both through the development of strategies, new frameworks for cooperation and collaboration among institutions of different types (the current UMichigan-Oberlin-Kalamazoo initiative being one example), and guidance for policies at the state, federal, and perhaps international level.

In particular, we wish to explore possible interest on the part of independent colleges in Michigan (and eventually more broadly in the Great Lakes area) in participating in such a strategic process, utilizing the unique resources of the University of Michigan and Internet2 as potential infrastructure. It would be our intent to host an early workshop of interested participants at the University's Media Union this fall as the first step in this effort.