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Autonomy and Collaboration

A recent white paper devoted to "Understanding Collaboration," a resource paper prepared for the Illinois Board of Higher Education (May 2007) attempts to define collaboration: "The precise meaning of 'collaboration' is elusive, at least in part because the term has been used as a catchall to signify just about any type of inter-organizational or interpersonal relationship" (p. 1). It concludes with the observation that "[c]ollaboration is a process and a structure which organizations use to work together toward goals the partners could not achieve by themselves" (p. 16). While the purpose of this white paper is to help guide P-20 educators on their required true collaborative relationships for No Child Left Behind grant applications and activities, understanding 'collaboration' is instructive in understanding the relationship between autonomy and the kind of partnerships between P-20 educational institutions required for the successful implementation of new educational opportunities, particularly those emphasizing introducing ethics into course content.

Offering a five stage 'continuum' of collaboration, a number of attributes of collaboration are explored and identified as characteristics of autonomy and autonomous decision-making and action. These stages range from fully consultative, which lacks any notion of reciprocity or recognition of the goals of others to fully collaborative, including a full sense of reciprocity and the creation of new, shared goals. Three questions are examined: Are such partnerships desirable? If so, are they, in fact, possible? And, finally, how successful will these partnerships be in infusing ethics into course content?