Best teaching and learning practices are important not only for large universities, but for small colleges. Small colleges may not have the resources to create new software but they certainly have dedicated and innovative faculty who can make great use of open source software created by major universities. Rural colleges also face particular challenges as a result of their geographic isolation which make online learning even more vital to their mission.

**CHALLENGE**

In 2005, a dozen rural colleges in the Midwest with a long history of collaboration were facing substantially increased costs to renew their agreement for Blackboard’s WebCT product. The consortium’s goal was to achieve lower costs through economies of scale while increasing opportunities for collaboration in both academic and administrative areas.

**SOLUTION**

Under the leadership of Martin Ramsay, the group took a new look at their options in the LMS market and discovered Sakai CLE. Longsight began hosting and supporting Sakai for this group, called the “Learning Asset Management Project” or LAMP in April, 2006. More than a dozen institutions and 14,000 active students share this dedicated instance of Sakai CLE. Longsight’s developers leveraged features built into Sakai to brand courses differently for each participating college making it possible for LAMP member institutions to reap the financial benefits of a consortia instance while being able to maintain institutionally specific branding.

Because Sakai is truly open source, enhancements don’t stop there. Student services have been streamlined by integrating each institution’s authentication and SIS systems with LAMP’s instance of Sakai. The Sakai Delegated Access tool, developed by Longsight for Columbia University and contributed to the Sakai community, allows LAMP coordinators on each campus to manage their institution’s courses securely and privately. Third-party tools added to Sakai bring new services to all members cost effectively. For example, the open source web conferencing suite, BigBlueButton which is called the Meetings tool in Sakai, is used extensively throughout LAMP.

**RESULTS**

Faculty and students at LAMP institutions have access to a modern learning framework, designed and sustained by a global community of higher education stakeholders. LAMP schools are now participants and contributors to that community. Sakai CLE provides LAMP students and faculty with a diverse set of tools for virtually any model of teaching and learning. LAMP institutions achieve this important goal at less than one-third of the cost of a proprietary eLearning platform. They have immediate access to expert support and have enjoyed 99.997% uptime over the course of the past eight years.

Each summer, LAMP schools sponsor a regional Sakai workshop where faculty, campus coordinators and even non-members exchange best practices, learn about upgrades, new tools and methods and discuss innovations using Sakai.

In 2008, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation recognized LAMP for taking important steps toward inter- and intra-institutional sharing and collaboration. LAMP won the prestigious Mellon Award for Technology Collaboration for this implementation of Sakai CLE. LAMP continues to serve as a model of cost-containment but additionally, has fostered shared courses and disciplinary content and improved small group collaboration for both academic and
administrative purposes. The LAMP case study has inspired other consortia of small organizations to embrace the same model of sharing a dedicated instance of Sakai so they too have cost-effective access to the best and latest platform for teaching, learning and collaborating.