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INTERSTATE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: ARE WE READY?

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ABSTRACT: During the past 15 years, Utah State University and other institutions have vigorously investigated the possibility of sharing educational resources across state lines. This concept, while very important to higher education's future, has not been fully realized . The most obvious barriers have been lack of financial resources and working models. This paper outlines models and procedures that could benefit institutions in the development of cooperative degrees.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the United States has been very stable. However, during the past 10 years it has come under attack on many political fronts. These attacks have questioned tenure, faculty workload, outcome assessment, and access. The last time the appropriateness of higher education was questioned so thoroughly was 136 years ago when higher education was opened to the "common people" through the Land-Grant College Act. All issues, including access, were not addressed in the year of 1862 nor will the higher education issues of today be answered in 1998. However, if we in higher education don't address the issues equally as well as the Land-Grant College movement did, I would predict that we will stand by and watch as another type of higher education replaces the system that is so very dear to our hearts. If we dig in our heels, saying the only way to get a quality education is to attend one of our campuses as a full-time student and be evaluated, mentored, and placed as we have done for the past 100 years, and as the Ivy League institutions did in the 1800's, we too may shrink to few in number.

The purpose of this paper is not to provide answers to all the issues facing higher education but to address the issue of access and its relationship to dwindling state and federal resources provided to state institutions of higher education.

Student "access" is a term that recognizes the same problem that existed in 1862. At that time the access issue was that only the "rich and elite" were afforded the opportunity to attend college. Today, while "common people" attend college, we have come to understand that higher education must be available to most individuals at convenient times and places throughout their "life spans."

Our nation's future depends in large part on our ability to educate virtually our total population. Thomas Jefferson maintained that, "Man is basically good-- he is educable. He can be responsible, make his own decisions, run his own government and decide the major issues affecting his life." An educated nation can and should maintain a high quality of economic and social life for its people.

Providing access to more people at convenient times and places is a very troubling issue for those of us in higher education because we know all too well that we are educating more people with fewer resources each year. This must have been the feeling of the early land-grant administrators who had almost no resources and were mandated to enroll all who could benefit from education.

FINANCIAL STRESSES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

For the past 15 years, social and economic conditions in most states have caused state legislatures to rethink funding mechanisms for higher education. Higher education institutions have watched their legislative support dwindle from 20% of the overall state budgets to, in some cases, as low as 4½% of total state appropriations. This shift has been caused notably by a decaying infrastructure, such as roads and state buildings. Many universities have a substantial backlog of deferred repairs.

Over the next four years, for example, Utah will spend $1.6 billion to overhaul the I-15 freeway system, the primary north-south artery through the state. Also of concern to higher education is the drastic increase in funding for social programs that are either receiving less federal funding or exhibit a drastic increase in need. Examples include a substantial increase in the number of correctional facilities being built and social service assistance for individuals and families at or below the poverty level. Utah is projecting a 9% increase per year in its inmate population, which will dictate a combined 9.28% increase in correction budgets. This increase

will allow 400 new beds per year at an annual construction cost of $24 million and an annual operational cost of $8.8 million.

Facing such dramatic increases, it has been common for state legislatures to fund incremental salary increases only or, in some cases, provide higher education institutions with no increased funding, encouraging instead that they downsize to provide salary increases. For the past 13 years, Utah institutions have not received any increase in operating and maintenance budgets; therefore, a higher percentage of an institution's budget goes to salaries each year. The result has been that students must pay higher fees to support activities previously covered by state appropriations. It is not uncommon for some students to pay fees that are half again the amount of their tuition.

The student fee dilemma, coupled with no increases in operating and maintenance budgets, have made many institution administrators look hard at eliminating low-enrollment undergraduate and graduate programs. This past fall, Utah State University was re-accredited by the Northwest Accrediting Association. One of the committee recommendations was to carefully examine the future of several low-enrollment graduate programs. On the surface, this recommendation seems very logical. However, as budgets are analyzed, it is soon recognized that cutting a low- enrollment graduate program will save few education and general fund dollars because external research grant dollars are not only paying the cost of research but also the cost of maintaining these graduate programs. This same scenario could be posed for the new and emerging sub-disciplines such as biotechnology. These new areas not only require a great deal of start-up funding, but enrollments initially are typically very small. Therefore, often the low-enrollment programs and the new and emerging programs lack a critical mass of students, critical mass of faculty, and adequate funding for operations.

INTERSTATE COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

In 1987, the Western Council of Administrative Heads of Agriculture (WCAHA) commissioned a study to determine the feasibility of sharing educational programs in teaching, research, and Extension across state lines. Factors sparking this investigation included enrollment decreases, no increases in operating budgets, and the traditional desire of colleges of agriculture in the land-grant system to be "all things to all people". WCAHA hoped that through advanced telecommunications systems and other models, programs could be shared across state lines, making it possible for colleges of agriculture to downsize or eliminate some programs and still provide all agricultural disciplines to state residents. This study was confined to two disciplines, dairy and sheep, and found an annual cost savings of $4.5 million for the dairy program and $1 million for the sheep and wool program across 13 western states.

The western regional effort was further developed with the founding of A*DEC, which now ties 50 land-grant universities together via telecommunications technology. Over the past 10 years, these and other institutions have successfully shared many educational programs. Based on this experience, the following represents beneficial reasons to share programs among states:

Research

- Facilitate replicated research and Extension demonstrations among participating states.
- Conduct research seminars to encourage faculty to develop joint research proposals.
- Link commodity groups and scientists to discuss research problems and priorities.
- Provide a forum for university and private sector scientists to design future research projects.

Extension

- Provide a medium for interstate discussions and diagnosis of production problems.
- Allow immediate access to all states for the transmission of emergency information.
- Provide an economical and efficient mechanism for regular interaction among state Extension specialists and program leaders in the development of interstate Extension programs.
- Furnish an easy way for one state to provide Extension expertise to other states on an as-needed basis.

Teaching

- Effectively increase class size as students from various universities are taught by one faculty member.
- Offer courses annually that are now offered only every other year.
- Stop discontinuing degree programs simply because of low enrollments.
- Teach classes using professors actively engaged in research in specific disciplines.
- Offer graduate students the benefit of inter-university graduate committees.
- Enhance course work through special seminars and guest presenters from various universities and scientists from private industry.
- Give students a broader perspective of the discipline by involving students and faculty from other states.
- Enable students desiring degrees in disciplines not offered at their "home institution" to receive instruction through a cooperative program.
- Organize and fund new degree programs on an interstate basis rather than have each state provide for itself.

While the above benefits are very real, the lack of discretionary funds at the academic unit level has negatively impacted the end results. There are also other barriers that need to be overcome to make cooperative education programs possible. They include:

- Accreditation/governing board approval
- Common course content and vision of subject matter to be included in educational degree programs
- Common calendars (semesters vs. quarters)
- Common class schedules
- Common tuition (out-of-state vs. in-state)
- Common application/registration/financial aid procedures
- Access to library/computer resources
- Access to laboratory facilities and proctors for laboratory experiences
- Payment of program costs (tuition funded vs. institution subsidized)
- Access to telecommunication equipment
- Marketing of educational programs across state lines
- Traditional on-campus vs. off-campus delivery
- On-campus students' reluctance to participate in telecommunicated courses

SENIOR YEAR ENHANCEMENT MODEL

The Senior Year Enhancement Model could be used most effectively when an institution does not offer a degree important to only a few individuals per year. An example for Utah is the BS degree in Poultry Science. USU gave up this degree four years ago because there was an average of three students per class. Though the class size was low, the poultry industry is very important to Utah's economy. Therefore, USU proposed to the Western Region Colleges of Agriculture the Senior Year Enhancement Model which would allow USU poultry students to major in Animal Science for three years at the Logan campus, then physically transfer to an institution such as Oregon State University to receive poultry courses specific to the Poultry Science Degree. In return USU would make its Dairy Science Degree available to other western states.

This model has attracted only a limited number of students to these "regional programs." Interviews with students indicate they are generally unwilling to move to regional sites. Even with the home institution tuition rates, other barriers loom large, including the cost of moving, summer work on family operations, finding new part-time employment, financial aid changes, and many personal considerations. The model has further been complicated in that cost effective regional telecommunications systems have not been available. In addition, there has not been enough use of the systems to develop models which will compensate for hands-on laboratory experiences. However, some institutions and industries indicate site proctors can be very effective in extending the laboratory experience to distance sites.

LOW ENROLLMENT SHARED DEGREE PROGRAM

The Low Enrollment Shared Degree Program selected as a model is the BS degree in agricultural education. This degree was selected because it represents a low-enrollment discipline throughout the western United States but has a high demand for high school agricultural teachers. While this model have not been tested, it may act as a catalyst to encourage institutions to form cooperative degree programs.

The model begins by examining the demand for graduates. The 1996 Western Region Agricultural Teachers Supply and Demand Report shows 199 graduates vs. 279-346 teaching positions available. There were an estimated 80-147 teachers needed more than those being supplied.

It was determined that a critical mass of faculty for any given program should be seven, with 21 being the critical mass of students for that same program. Therefore, the Western region states were divided into five subregions, which gave each subregion at least the minimum number of students and faculty necessary for a quality educational program.

The proposed model was developed for subregion III, which includes Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. Each of the states in this model would be assigned a particular discipline within this comprehensive degree. The University of Nevada-Reno could be assigned those courses relating to water, soil and range management; Colorado State University--animal science; University of Wyoming--agribusiness and computer applications; and Utah State University--agricultural systems and teaching methods, with each institution providing its own general education and some science-related courses. It should be noted that the Agricultural Education Model has not been negotiated with the states listed. Once the model is developed it may include different states and different subject matter assignments.

Should this degree program or a similar interstate program be developed, the following guiding principles should be used:

- All educational institution partners must provide courses and students to the program. Since it is difficult if not impossible to send tuition and fees between institutions, it is important that all institutions provide an equal share of instructional resources.
- All institutions must dual list all courses. Institutions are not likely to participate in a cooperative degree program if the institutions cannot maintain their own students. Therefore, each institution must accept each other's institutional credit and faculty within the consortium. This will allow each institution to maintain its own student body.

- All institutions must provide student services for their students. Important student services such as application, registration, financial aid, library, and computer services must be provided by the home institution. Otherwise students get "caught" in the system and will quickly become discouraged.

Under this model, the only resources being shared are the courses themselves. If an institution understands that it will not lose student credit hours to another institution and will receive 75% of the course work free by providing 25% of the course work free to three other institutions, there will be no competition and theoretically great incentives for faculty to become involved.

TUITION AND FEES MODEL

This model was developed to provide a mechanism allowing all institutions to retain their own students, their own tuition and fees, and provide student services to their own students.

Tuition

Historically, tuition has been set by higher education institutions and their governing boards, based on institutional research costs of instruction models. State legislatures have determined the amount of subsidy allowed for in-state tuition and generally mandated that out-of-state students pay the full cost of instruction. Out-of-state students' full cost of instruction is generally three to four times that of the subsidized in-state student tuition.

Fees

Traditionally, fees have covered costs other than instruction, such as student activities and health services. However, most institutions and student bodies have elected to add student fees to tuition as a means of enhancing the educational experience, since higher education budgets have not provided adequate funding for educational support, such as computer laboratories and library resources. More recently, continuing education units have attached a "program fee" to pay additional costs of delivering programs to non-traditional students at times and locations conducive to their needs.

Proposed Tuition For Multi-Institutional Degree Programs

The Western Governors University (WU) concept suggests that state boundaries should not be a barrier to sharing resources. There are many efficiencies related to allowing greater educational access to more students with fewer higher education institutions or enlargements to current institutions. This concept, while very valid, creates a necessity for higher education institutions to rethink the traditional tuition rate for extending educational programs beyond state lines and collaborating with out-of-state institutions in the delivery of programs.

A guiding principle in higher education is to develop and deliver educational programs important to state residents. Therefore, the principle suggests that any institution delivering programs for a multi-state delivery should first determine that there is a need within its own state. Hence, if only those states participating in a multi-state cooperative degree actually offered courses, each state could charge its own in-state tuition and enough fees to pay for its portion of the delivery costs. This scenario would build a "win-win" situation for each state, since each state would charge its students (those from within that state) in-state tuition and claim the student credit hours generated by the in-state students. Each state would then be responsible for the student services required by its own students.

This type of relationship would start with representatives from the continuing education units and the academic departments for a particular discipline, meeting and developing a cooperative degree program. Academic representatives would first agree on a core curriculum and assign the teaching evenly over the institutions involved in the delivery of the degree program. All courses in a given cooperative curriculum would be assigned course titles and numbers by each institution. This configuration would allow each institution to offer its own courses to its own students, with its students paying in-state tuition and a program fee, based on delivery costs within each state.

States that wish to participate in cooperative degree programs, but cannot offer educational resources to those programs, will contract with the sponsoring institutions to deliver the degree programs into their respective states. It is recommended that the tuition and fees for the non-instructional states be based on an average of the tuition and fees of the institutions providing the instruction. The tuition and fees from the non-instructional states will be divided equally among the instructional institutions. In this case, the instructing institutions will also be responsible for student services for students in non-instructional states. This tuition and fee relationship is possible because the instruction institutions will have paid all direct delivery costs within their states; therefore, out-of-state tuition need not be charged to students from non-instructional states. However, first priority must be given to students living in instructional states.

This same model could be used for in-state institutions sponsoring cooperative degrees. In this instance, each instructional institution would charge its own tuition and fees to its own students. In may be necessary, however, for an average tuition and fee schedule to be adopted to prevent "institutional shopping" should the tuition and fees vary widely among institutions.

It is possible that the percentage of institutional effort may vary among institutions in either the interstate or intrastate models. If this occurs, the institutions will prorate the income from tuition and fees based on the percentage of effort provided by each institution. Since costs of instruction vary greatly, depending on production and transmission costs and faculty salaries, it is important to have equal partners to limit tuition and fees crossing state lines.

DEVELOPMENT OF A COOPERATIVE DEGREE

The following steps have been used in the development of a model degree program with eight different Idaho and Utah institutions. While telecommunications equipment analysis is still ongoing, the projected start date for this degree program will be fall semester 1998.

Individuals Involved

- Faculty

  Each institution provided one faculty member representing the degree discipline. The charge to these faculty was to develop a common set of courses needed for the particular degree program. They determined subject matter content and sequenced the courses.
- Continuing Education Directors

  The continuing education deans or directors developed a finance model to ensure success of the program. Continuing Education Units needed to be involved because they generally have discretionary income through tuition and fees to finance degree programs, particularly if there is an off-campus clientele.
- Institution Technology Representative

  The institution technology representatives determine common technology within the participating institutions and the feasibility of scheduling and using these technologies.

Once the curriculum has been determined, sequenced, and technology scheduled, marketing and persuading students to receive their education through this non-traditional medium becomes critical. It is important that a brochure be developed which outlines the positive nature of receiving a degree from academics specializing in a particular component of the curriculum. Marketing the program to the entire department faculty is also critical. Cooperative degrees tend to threaten faculty if they think they will lose their "pet courses;"therefore, they must be reassured that no student credit hours will be lost to the department and there will be more time that can be devoted to research and Extension activities.

Since interstate cooperative degree programs are still relatively new, it may be advantageous for only two or three institutions to work on a cooperative degree at a time. It will be less complicated and lessons learned can guide the formulation of more complicated future cooperative degree programs.

Recently continuing education deans and directors from 10 institutions met and discussed the development of cooperative degrees. Their list of potential degrees include:

Pharmacy
MBA/Prerequisite Courses
MS Engineering Management
MS Technical Management
P.D./EdD
P.D./EdD Leadership of Higher Education
MS School Psychology
MS Assistive Technology
MS/BS Environmental Science
MS/BS Special Education
BS/MS Speech and Hearing Communicative Disorders
BS/MS Computer Science
MS Instructional Technology
MPA, BS Nursing
MS Food Services and Dietetics
JD National American Law
Library Studies
MS Journalism
MS/P.d. Adult Education
BS/MS Criminal Justice
MS Applied Math
MS Physics
BS Secondary Education
MS Non-thesis Chemistry

The development of the list of the degrees is an important first step. The most important second step is to meet with faculty and telecommunications/system directors to determine the feasibility of the joint degree programs.

We must be pro-active and have the courage to investigate new methodologies and approaches to delivery of higher education programs. If we fail to do so, there are many other institutions waiting in the wings to fill the void.