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ABSTRACT

A 2-year pilot demonstration project was undertaken in two U.S. regions to clarify the concept of regionalism and its application to postsecondary education. This concept was tested in two natural planning and service regions that were artificially divided by state boundary lines: The Upper Allegheny Region II (New York and Pennsylvania) and the Eastern Gulfcoast Region I (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida). Attention was focused on making postsecondary education more accessible to a diversity of learners, reducing institutional competition and program duplication, and effecting more efficient uses of personal and material resources. In addition, two leadership groups were created: a citizens council representing the lay public and a task force representing postsecondary institutions and other organizations. Project activities consisted of: producing factual reports describing the region, planning for project continuation, organization building, and preparing for broader action on behalf of the region. Reports on demography, economic trends, socio-civic-cultural history, college academic programs, and noncollegiate programs were produced. Conclusions and recommendations are presented, along with a list of task force and council members for the two regions. (SW)

ED234673

Cooperative Regional Planning and Action To Enhance Postsecondary Education Across State Lines

A Report to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)

The Pennsylvania State University
Center for the Study of Higher Education

The Catholic University of America
School of Education

MAJOR OUTCOME: NEW POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN TWO REGIONS

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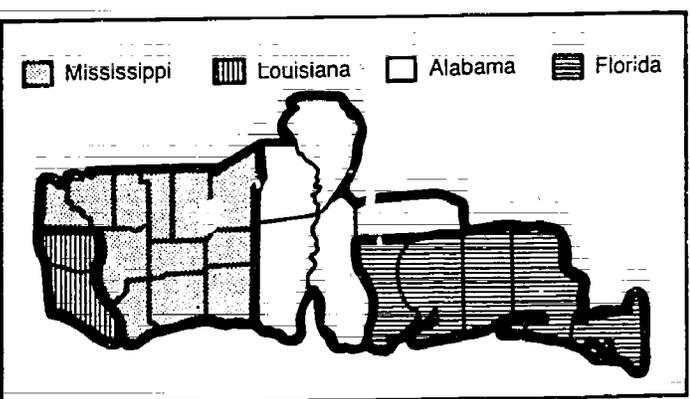
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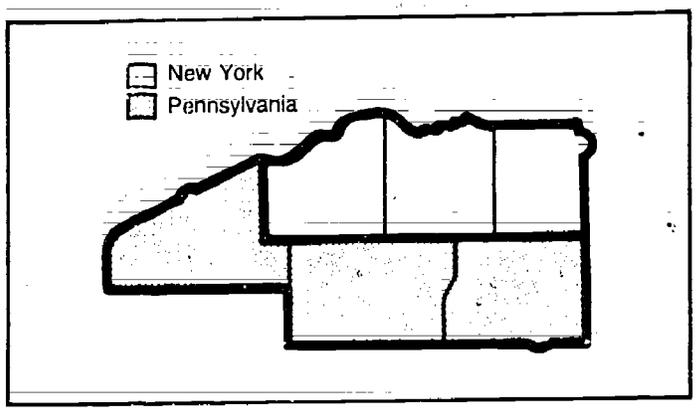
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Eastern Gulfcoast Region I



Eastern Gulfcoast Regional Consortium for Postsecondary Education

Upper Allegheny Region II



Upper Allegheny Postsecondary Educational Association

AE 016 571

The Problem

The problem addressed by this pilot demonstration project is that institutions and organizations, which are responsible for postsecondary education, and which are located within a region whose characteristics provide a natural basis for cooperative planning of policies and programs, are often unable to act cooperatively in this planning. The impediments they face are two fold. First is the fact that regionalism as a basis for planning in postsecondary education is still a novel concept. Second is the related fact that throughout the United States the general practice in the formulation of policies to guide postsecondary education development and operations is to do so within the general framework of state government. Often state boundary lines artificially divide a natural planning and service region, exacerbating difficulties encountered by efforts to promote interinstitutional cooperation to meet regional postsecondary needs.

The presence of artificial jurisdictional lines which cut across natural socio-economic and geographic planning and service areas for postsecondary education create barriers. These barriers have a direct, though often unrecognized impact on the learner. They decrease student choice, increase costs to students who must pay out-of-state or out-of-district tuition, and foster program duplication rather than encouraging institutions to focus on programs directly related to their central mission. One effect of this dilution of institutional resources is an eroded quality of education available to student participants and their communities. Without the artificial jurisdictional barriers, colleges and universities could offer programs reflecting their academic strengths and could develop a much closer congruence of total regional resources available to total regional needs.

The Purpose

The broad goal of the project, then, was to enhance postsecondary education in a natural planning and service region divided by state boundary lines by making it more effective in providing greater access to learners of all types, in reducing institutional competition and duplication of programs, and effecting more efficient uses of personal and material resources.

Within the project's broad goal, more specific subordinate purposes envisioned were:

1. to compile from available sources of information a description of each region's current and projected needs for postsecondary education as reflected in its demographic makeup, economic characteristics, and socio-civic-cultural history;
2. to gather and coordinate information about current and projected resources for postsecondary education available in each region as reflected in formal and non-formal academic programs and other services provided by educational institutions in the region;
3. to identify barriers of a jurisdictional nature which prevent a matching of regional needs to resources;
4. to develop and implement plans for eliminating those barriers to the effective and efficient provision of postsecondary education in these two pilot areas;

5. to formulate an approach to evaluation of accomplishment of items 1 through 4;
6. to develop a more generalizable model from the experience of the two project sites; and
7. to formalize action for continuation of project activities at the two sites and to extend application of project outcomes to other similar places in the country.

The Approach and Activity

Design of the project called for creation of two leadership groups: (1) a Task Force representing postsecondary institutions, organizations and agencies of all kinds having an interest in the region, and (2) a Citizens Council representing lay public interest in the region. This bicameral approach was consistent with basic principles which guided the project throughout; principal ones were that: (1) there should be both citizenry and educator participation, (2) participation of postsecondary institutions and organizations should be as inclusive as possible, (3) participation should be voluntary and flexible, (4) factual information should be cooperatively acquired and used for future joint planning, and (5) meetings should be on a regular schedule.

Project activities emanated from bi-monthly meetings of the Task Force which was organized with the start of the project and the Citizens Council which was convened late in the first project year. Joint meetings of the Task Force and Council started early in the second year. Project activities fell into four types: (1) production of factual reports describing the region and establishing its identity, (2) planning for project continuation, (3) organization building, and (4) preparing for broader action on behalf of the region and for plans to carry advocacy to higher levels of authority. Five descriptive reports for each region were produced: (1) Demographic Status and Trends (2) Economic Status and Trends, (3) Socio-Civic-Cultural History, (4) Formal Academic Programs in Collegiate Settings, and (5) Formal Programs in Non-Collegiate Settings. In addition, participating institutions and organizations joined in a survey of "barriers" to effective cross-state boundary interinstitutional cooperation, and in developing proposals for external funding of regionwide program development. Initially, meetings were mainly conducted by the co-directors; as the project developed leadership passed to members of the Task Force and Citizens Council in each region and to working groups and committees.

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The Outcomes

This two-year pilot-demonstration project in two particular natural planning and actual regions was expected to do much to clarify the concept of regionalism and its application to postsecondary education. It was designed to test the concept in the most difficult of settings — a region artificially divided by state boundary lines. The project proved the feasibility of the concept, albeit at a preliminary level. The approach used in the project can be viewed as a model for other cross-state border regions to use, and the project co-directors are proceeding to disseminate its use. The model they propose builds on the following conclusions believed to be tenable and supported by the experience, insights, and information gained from this FIPSE project.

Conclusions

The concept of a "natural region" as an appropriate base for planning and implementing postsecondary education is operationally feasible even when such a region is divided by state lines.

Institutions and organizations actually engaged in, or for other reasons having a legitimate interest in the quality (effectiveness and efficiency) of postsecondary education in the region, will respond positively to initiatives calling on them to enter into cooperative regionwide effort to enhance that quality.

Such institutions and organizations will participate in regional cooperative programs even though their primary responsibility to, and source of authority for functioning, is a state system which has only a partial interest in the region.

A major requirement in establishing and expanding use of the concept of regionalism as a basic approach to regional planning and coordination of postsecondary education is acquiring for it a greater legitimacy in both public policy and institutional policy arenas.

The "regional" concept is only marginally understood and has only limited support in state agencies and offices responsible for leadership in postsecondary education planning and coordination.

The SREB, while showing a history of "regional cross-state-border" program development in postsecondary education, has not yet attached a high priority to providing field services to expand its use in the Southeast.

Among the main mechanisms which seem appropriate for making regional, interstate cooperation in postsecondary education a continuing operation are two: (1) creating a voluntary free-standing consortium of interested institutions and agencies, or (2) creating an interstate organization officially recognized by appropriate state agencies and/or the legislature in the states concerned. Of these, the first seems both easier to implement, and preferred among participant organizations.

There is a demonstrable merit to having at the highest level of policy development a strong representation (voice and participation) on the part of both the general citizenry of the region and the leadership responsible for postsecondary education operations.

Once seen in practice and understood, the concept of a joint general citizenry and postsecondary educational leadership role in regional planning and coordination of postsecondary education is supported as an operating principle by participants in both groups.

Major "barriers" to enhanced postsecondary education in natural planning regions divided by state lines result from both state governmental policies, and institutional, administrative and academic policies.

Major "barriers" to enhanced regionwide postsecondary education coming from state governmental policies are the result more of state agency administrative rules and regulations than of requirements explicit in state statutes.

Major "barriers" to enhanced regionwide postsecondary education found in state governmental policies relate largely to two areas of academic concern: (1) academic program coordination and planning and (2) transfer of academic credit from institution to institution; and to two areas of student financial concern: (1) tuition and fees charged out-of-state students and (2) portability of financial aid. Major "barriers" stemming from institutional policies and practices touch mainly on the two first mentioned and on the tuition issue.

Institutions and organizations actively engaged in or otherwise having a legitimate interest in improving postsecondary education in a region will support regional cooperative efforts more readily by providing "in-kind" resources, such as assigning representatives or participant personnel, rather than by giving direct support.

Institutions and organizations endorse the proposition of developing and maintaining regionwide information and a data base for purposes of enhancing regional identity and improving institutional planning and programming. At the same time, they recognize its expense and wonder how to cope when funds are scarce. They recognize that dissemination is essential to usefulness, and take the initiative in utilizing existing conventional systems. They also recognize the potential of more technologically advanced distribution systems, but at present do not foresee the resources necessary for implementing and updating such services.

Institutions and organizations actively engaged in or otherwise having a legitimate interest in postsecondary education in a region will provide data and devote institutional energy necessary to develop a regionwide information and data base to assist regionwide cooperation and action.

The level and intensity of participation and regional cooperation on the part of participating institutions and organizations in the region are directly related to the specificity of purpose and action orientation seen in a given regionwide activity: such agendas as ones needed to develop an academic program inventory or a proposal for external funding are illustrative.

Leadership most interested in a regionalism effort tends to be of two kinds: those from institutions clearly already in strong positions: who are farsighted enough to see the institutional gain that will accrue in the long run; and those from institutions which are rising (or trying hard to rise) in stature; and see that the benefits of interstate interinstitutional cooperation outweigh its possible disadvantages. Those in leadership positions who involve their institutions only marginally if at all tend to have locally successful operations in a somewhat insulated market: for them cooperation may have more, apparent or short-term disadvantages than advantages.

Finding ways to publicize the overall efforts of such an enterprise is crucial to its long-term support and viability. The businesses and industries, the schools, the student-consumers, etc., have only a vague idea about needs, resources, and barriers, but the ways they are addressed affect their lives and livelihood. Continuing media coverage could be one answer; and could be helpful when the time comes for gaining support from legislators and other decision-makers.

As with all organizations, leaders who are strong, credible, respected and far-sighted make the difference in any continuing effort. Action orientation seems to be a key: leadership focused on important and mutually agreed upon purposes, which involves as many as possible in meaningful related efforts, would appear to be essential.

Leading such an effort takes time: those who would be best at this role tend to be the busiest. Thus the willingness and capacity of the institution or organization to free that busy person from some home duties to take on this larger community (regional) role is essential.

In view of the traditional leadership role of personnel from postsecondary institutions in the provision of their services to the community, the very conscious involvement of non-institutionally-affiliated persons in leadership roles may need to be formalized lest it be neglected and eventually forgotten.

Major Recommendations

- Postsecondary educational policy decision-makers and planners at all levels (institutional, system, and state) should give stronger attention to principles and practices of regional planning in deciding ways and means to improve their enterprise.
- Besides leadership at highest executive levels, institutions and organizations offering postsecondary educational programs within a natural planning region should encourage and support initiatives by particular functionaries, notably academic administrators, finance officers, directors of community services and continuing education, and directors of institutional research and planning, especially when the region is divided by state boundary lines and regionwide information for planning purposes, therefore, cannot be obtained from a single state source.
- Agencies having responsibility at the state level for enhancement of post-secondary education should give particularly strong attention to natural planning and service regions that are divided artificially by state boundary lines.
- State postsecondary educational agencies in adjoining states partly included in natural planning and service regions should take initiative in establishing working relationships and programs of information exchange which bridge state boundary lines; these initiatives should be addressed to encouraging, reinforcing, complementing, and supplementing actions at the institutional levels intended to enhance regional cooperation and action.
- Interstate compact educational organizations should similarly act to help "cross state border" regions to achieve better and more regionwide programs and services in postsecondary education.
- Leaders in development of regional planning for postsecondary education should establish closer communications and working relationships with regional planning agencies and officials active in other types of regional planning, such as transportation, health care delivery, public utility and media system development, and economic development in their region.
- Incentives to regional planning in postsecondary education especially as applied to "cross state border" regions should be provided by state legislatures and the federal government; these should be directed toward eliminating negative effects of such factors as tuition differentials for in- and out-of-state residents; non-portability of student financial aid across state lines, restrictions of institutions acting to offer programs across state lines, and non-approval of academic programs offered out of state.
- Citizen interests within a natural planning and service region should be given more specific roles and a stronger voice in the structure and process of regional planning in postsecondary education.

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