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Providing Opportunities in Education in the West

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THE COOPERATIVE THRUST

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For twenty-one years the western region has provided for access to professional education through a student exchange administered by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

The Compact

The WICHE Student Exchange traces its origin to the Western Governors' Conference of 1949. A resolution passed by the governors expressed the belief that "a cooperative plan among the western states is necessary and desirable and should be developed to provide more extensive facilities and training for students of this region." In 1950 the Western Regional Education Compact was drafted. Each of the compacting states pledged to each of the other compacting states full cooperation in carrying out the purposes of the Compact.

The language of the Compact states that "many of the western states individually do not have sufficient numbers of potential students to warrant the establishment and maintenance within their borders of adequate facilities in all the essential fields of technical, professional, and graduate training nor do all states have the financial ability to furnish within their borders institutions

capable of providing acceptable standards of training in all of the fields mentioned." The Compact declares that "Western states or groups of states within the region cooperatively can provide an acceptable and efficient educational facility to meet the needs of the region and of the students thereof..."

The Compact has been in full force since August 1953 when, having been approved by the governors and legislatures of more than five of the states eligible to participate and having been approved by the Congress of the United States as required by Article I, Section X of the Constitution, it was signed by Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States. Today, all thirteen of the western states are members of the Compact.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) was created through enactment of the Compact. To the Commission was assigned responsibility for negotiations concerning cost. "The Commission shall, after negotiations with interested institutions, determine the cost of providing the facilities for graduate and professional education for use in its contractual agreements throughout the region."

Twenty-one years of growing

The first program effort to be approved by the Commission under provisions of the Compact was the placement of students in professional schools of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. In academic year 1953-54, there were 41 students at three schools, and a total of \$70,000 in support fees crossed state lines along with the students. In academic year 1974-75, 1,087 students

crossed state lines, and their sending states spent more than \$3.6 million in support of their educational endeavors in twelve fields at 59 enrolling schools.

Initially the thrust of the SEP was in the health professions of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. However, the history of the program has demonstrated that when additional needs were perceived by one or more of the compacting states, the Commission endorsed still other fields for inclusion in the exchange.

For 1975-76, professional education is available through the SEP in fourteen fields--medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, dental hygiene, physical therapy, occupational therapy, optometry, podiatry, law, forestry, graduate library studies, graduate nursing education, pharmacy, and public health.

One hundred thirty-one professional schools have agreed to enroll qualified WICHE students. The schools maintain that professional education has been well served by the presence of WICHE students. They are often referred to as "the cream of the crop."

Both Public and Private Institutions Included

Both private and public institutions throughout the West have benefited from the presence of WICHE students. Since the WICHE support fee is related to the student's acceptance of an offer of admission, there has been no problem in forwarding funds through WICHE to the excellent private schools of the West. Thirty-two percent of the students enrolled through the SEP in

AY 74-75 were accepted at private schools offering education in a professional field.

New Professional Schools Phased In

The existence of the WICHE SEP has not prevented the establishment of new professional programs, but rather has assisted the states in planning for phasing in a new school at an appropriate time. Through the SEP a reservoir of well-qualified applicants has been identified from which to draw in establishing new schools in the health professions and in maintaining existing schools at a high level of academic and professional excellence. The cooperative regional approach has proved to be a positive factor in securing federal funds for capital construction projects.

Since the SEP was first established, new medical schools have been opened in New Mexico, Arizona, Hawaii and Nevada. A new dental school has been established in Colorado.

The University of Washington has established a regional medical program, WAMI, which provides some health care services in four states as well as medical education in each of the cooperating states. A Regional Veterinary Program is under active development at Colorado State University with the participation of the western "have-not" states in veterinary medicine. A Tri-state Veterinary Plan is under active consideration in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. These subregional efforts in a specific field of professional education have been planned in full view of all compacting states in order to address a specific problem.

Cooperative Approach Responsive to Emerging Needs

Cooperative endeavors have taken many forms and directions in the history of the SEP as western states have worked together to respond to emerging needs. At the present time WICHE administers other exchange programs which encourage the movement of students across state lines. These programs are the Mineral Engineering Program and the Community College Student Exchange Program. State money does not follow the students but there is a benefit to the student of paying resident tuition as well as the benefit of access to an otherwise unavailable opportunity. Participating schools are able to utilize more fully their available spaces.

With recent impetus provided by the Western Governors' Conference emphasis on the desirability of broadening exchange services, there is a current assessment of need in graduate education and vocational-technical education in each of the western states. Thus, if state needs are not being met at home in graduate or vocational-technical education, the WICHE Compact states are looking to see if such needs can be accommodated elsewhere within the region. Planning for a regional flow of students in graduate and vocational-technical education will require intense, purposeful regional cooperation to balance needs and opportunities--access needs in one or more states against opportunities for full utilization of existing facilities in other states. The WICHE Commission has established a goal of making each state both a "sender" and "receiver" of students. A fair expression of intent is that the traditional receiving states want to be part of the solution, not just part of the problem.

The WICHE Student Exchange has adapted as it has continued to grow. It is not an end in itself, but it has provided an evolutionary, viable means of offering educational opportunity without the necessity of providing each of those opportunities within each state.

No Problems?

That is not to say that the cooperative approach has no inherent problems! Equity in admissions is a problem. Equity in costing is a problem. Changing interpretation of residency is a problem. The lack of sophistication in costing techniques in professional education has been a problem. Intrastate pressure to accept only residents in high-demand fields is a problem. Legislative response through appropriation of support fees is a problem during an inflationary period. Anticipating emerging needs in education is a problem.

Sponsoring Education Outside State Boundaries

Two complaints are frequently heard in association with discussions about sponsoring students outside home-state boundaries. One complaint is that all certified applicants desiring education are not admitted. Another complaint is that too few students sponsored return home to practice.

The first complaint is universal and is heard also in states where professional education is offered at a state university. The professional schools maintain that their admissions committees must be assured of the academic and professional promise of each applicant.

The second complaint has to do with the maldistribution of professional services. Securing, deploying, and holding trained manpower are parts of a complex problem which is not likely to be solved overnight. Indenture of services is believed to be unconstitutional. Attracting professional service rather than indenturing that service seems to offer more promise of success.

Contracts a Better Way?

Certainly each Compact state must consider benefits and problems associated with placing students beyond their own boundaries in the perspective of providing services to meet needs.

Recently, individual professional schools and one or more compacting states have raised the question about replacing the regional cooperative approach with a "go-it-alone" system of bilateral contracts in which a state secures places at professional schools in each field where educational services are desired. The contracting state and school agree on a fee and a specific number of places which are secured through contractual arrangement for specified period of time.

Given my personal enthusiasm for the effectiveness of the cooperative approach for solving problems, I am nevertheless able to identify arguments for and against both contractual and cooperative approaches for providing educational services.

THE CASE FOR THE COOPERATIVE REGIONAL APPROACH

1. The student is free to apply to all professional schools of his choice.
2. Opportunity is made available at private institutions of the West as well as the public schools.
3. Professional schools determine selection of candidates based on merit and professional promise.
4. Regional agreement on support fee avoids competitive bidding.
5. A single office is maintained to plan, negotiate fees, and administer the exchange program at a modest cost to each Compact state.
6. Emerging needs are more quickly noted on a regional basis. A channel of remediation for effective response is instantly available for intervention through the WICHE Commission in which all thirteen western states have equal representation.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE COOPERATIVE APPROACH

1. The receiving state gives more than it gets.
2. The sending state does not secure all places it desires.
3. All problems have not yet been solved.

THE CASE FOR BILATERAL CONTRACTS

1. A contract would buy places to meet needs.
2. The desired number of opportunities are assured.
3. The sending state determines the selection process.
4. Two states could trade opportunities.
5. A state could staff an exchange office to meet specific needs.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CONTRACTUAL APPROACH

1. The reservoir of good will associated with cooperative efforts would tend to disappear.
2. The competitive bidding for places may provide a short-term benefit without offering a long-term solution to the access problem.
3. State selection of candidates would diminish the quality of professional education.
4. Student choice would be limited.
5. The cost of staffing an exchange office in each state would exceed by far the \$7400 spent by each state on the WICHE office.