

DRAFT

SURVEY OF CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES: EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS
IN WASHINGTON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Report of Task Force B of the Committee
on Instructional Programs

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DRAFT

REPORT OF THE "CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES" TASK FORCE
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

The current circumstances task force is one of a number of advisory committees and task forces empaneled by the Council on Higher Education to assist in the development of a comprehensive long-range plan for postsecondary education in Washington. Working sessions for the group commenced in November, 1973. Its area of concern was defined by the following charge:

"In collaboration with representatives of each institution or segment, as appropriate, determine and describe the current circumstances obtaining in each major academic field...."

A subsequent refinement of the task force charge called for the formulation of hypotheses concerning the current state of instructional programs in Washington higher education; the need for change, expansion, or contraction in program offerings; and an assessment of the quality of academic programs statewide. The task force perceived its responsibilities as a mandate to assess overall program offerings statewide in the major instructional fields, rather than to critically evaluate the instructional offerings in each institution. Moreover, it was decided that any current circumstances review would be remiss if it did not encompass the full array of postsecondary program options, inclusive of areas such as occupational and continuing education, programs not categorized within standard academic discipline groupings. Therefore, given the rather broad scope of its assignment, the task force concluded a survey of the major instructional program areas, comprehensively defined, was the most appropriate method for gathering the desired information.

Method

The first phase of the task force work was to design a survey questionnaire. By refining a series of questions the task force itself was ultimately expected to answer, a brief, open-ended survey instrument was developed (see attached). Brevity and simplicity were seen as the critical merits of the questionnaire in that they allowed for flexibility and ease in responding. These objectives were sufficient to override concerns and the awareness that in some cases less than complete information would be obtained. However, because of this, a strong and multiple review option was considered essential to the report's development.

The second phase of the task force's efforts involved the development of a "program" taxonomy for the survey. Originally the task force intended to use the HEGIS classifications originated by WICHE. While this proved useful, it was necessary to expand it to fill some gaps, as there were no categories for Ethnic Studies, Proprietary Education, Occupational Education, and Continuing Adult Education. Also, it was found convenient to divide some of the HEGIS categories into two components, such as Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Once the various areas had been defined, each was assigned to a member of the full committee, or to someone expected to be knowledgeable in the field. These people were in turn asked to write an exemplary report and submit it for review and comment to a variety of people in their program area or discipline. From these responses a final compendium was to be prepared.

There were variations in methods. In several cases the questions or the reports were submitted to groups for comment. In a few areas the survey questions were considered inappropriate to the subject, as the format of such reports indicate. In one instance, "Proprietary Education," a prior report had been requested by the Council on Higher Education, and that report is provided as the statement on that subject. Several authors added materials, often in the form of earlier publications, that were considered germane. In all instances the promise was made to the author of each section to publish the statement as written, edited only for grammatical or typographical errors.

Overview and Statement Summary

The following description of issues pertaining to current circumstances concerning programs in postsecondary education is based upon the information gathered. Recognizing there is a potential need for expansion, clarification, or correction, the material submitted in the following drafts is regarded as tentative. The summary of the statements and the statements themselves will be refined as anticipated institutional input is achieved. However, it is requested that information be submitted in accordance with the format indicated.

A review of the statements will reveal a high degree of commonality of issues across the various discipline lines. The major concern raised throughout the statements, regardless of the educational level involved, is the problem of (in)adequate resources. Upon this hinges a range of issues varying from the attraction and retention of qualified faculty to curriculum development. Running a close second as an oft-mentioned concern is the problems associated with matriculation between the community colleges and the senior institutions.

The statements repeatedly focus on the budgetary constraints and cutbacks facing virtually every instructional area. Paramount within these concerns is the impact this is having on existing and potential faculty. The reductions in institutional budgets are viewed as major hinderances to the attraction of high quality faculty for new or vacated positions. According to the statements, competent faculty are being drawn out of the State by higher paying positions elsewhere. Moreover, financial constraints have forced faculty reductions which often result in the non-renewal of nontenured faculty specifically recruited for the input of new ideas, or for their expertise in current developments in their fields. Such losses are regarded as critical.

Common points related to optimal utilization of limited resources also are apparent. Frequent mention is made that programs which should be available in both the eastern and western sectors of the State are available only in the west. Discussions also call for increased library and laboratory facilities in the eastern portion of the State. Access to adequate recorded media was also identified as a need in that region.

Running somewhat counter to this, comments were also made that special programs should be offered only in selected institutions on a regional basis. The obvious examples are the medical school at the University of Washington and the veterinary medicine program at Washington State University. The regionalized location of the three operating law schools is also cited. However, the need to review programs in which there appears to be insufficient student demand to warrant their offering at given institutions is also identified. Related to this the suggestion is made that such programs be singly offered at the institution strongest in the particular field, with the understanding that students from other institutions would have access.

The general view throughout the statements is that Washington is self-sufficient in most program areas. This is to say that almost any program area is covered by a full range of offering within the aggregated institutions. Reports of the interstate cooperation in specialized high-cost programs also contain the suggestion that Washington be the base for such offerings.

Some statements, particularly those for areas most directly affected, take issue with institutions' tendencies to perform budget cuts first in the instructional areas which teach "value" or "culture" rather than "professional" skills. They call for continued support of program offerings to ensure a totality of experience for students and an increased awareness of the humanities; other commentaries substantiate this with the viewpoint that such offerings contribute to the overall development of students' intellectual tools.

Somewhat related to this, an issue is raised concerning the need for increased information to the public and political decisionmakers on the fundamental importance of liberal arts programs. The intention is to promote better understanding of the potential ramifications of the economic decisions made on these programs. As suggested in one statement, long-range commitments in the resource area are necessary in order that more efficient and effective planning can take place.

Availability of resources is also tied into the discussions of curriculum development. In drafts describing anticipated changes in instructional methods, it is observed that new educational modes such as self-paced individualized instruction, educational contracts, and truly interdisciplinary offerings require substantial program development and faculty commitment, and therefore better funding is necessary to provide worthwhile programs. Increased utilization of such approaches appears to be likely, given the frequency of remarks concerning the needs for greater flexibility in program offerings, increased desire for off-campus educational experiences, anticipated use of electronic resources, and rising interest in expanding continuing education programs.

The need for continuing education programs is emphasized in a majority of the draft statements. Those involving highly specialized or professional areas state that increases in the form of continuing education options are essential if specialists and professionals are to remain abreast with developments in their fields. Outlining the need for continuing education in the highly specialized and professional fields, one report succinctly comments that "the half-life of information in the formal training program becomes shorter as technological change becomes more rapid."

Not only does continuing education persist as a need "in the field" but it is repeatedly suggested as imminently necessary for postsecondary education faculty. In conjunction with improved evaluation of instruction, this is suggested as an important component in the overall improvement of instruction. Additional suggestions for in-service training updating of faculty through increased inter- and intra-institutional communication and cooperation through statewide meetings, traveling exhibits, faculty exchanges, etc., are found in the reports. Another feeling often expressed concerns the need for faculty to more often leave the institution environment to develop a practical awareness of the current happenings in their fields. Such options are discussed as a means of alleviating what is termed "academic incest" or the tendency of some departments to continually renew faculty from the same sources.

With regard to students, one problem frequently reiterated concerns the ambiguity of the processes by which community college credits are transferred to four-year institutions. According to an effective summary of the problem in one report, the transfer of credit "controversy is centered around several issues including terminal education, quality, and quantity. Much of the community college education is guided towards terminal programs, while a large group of students transfer to four-year institutions....(the community college maintains) it must build programs to fit all the various four-year schools in the State as well as take care of the terminal students." However,

considering that the curricula vary from community college to community college, each school must negotiate its transfer program with the receiving four-year institutions. As a practical matter, the student is then left to negotiate with the four-year institution for credit for classes taken beyond the core offerings at the community college. The drafts carry no suggestions on the subject, although it appears that the most effective transfer programs are those developed in concert between the two- and four-year faculties in the specific program areas rather than between the institutions themselves.

Another subject concerning students is the issue of employment opportunities in the areas in which the student was educated. The oversupply of students at the graduate level was guardedly suggested to be a self-balancing situation, whereas at the undergraduate level suggestions call for more realistic educational programs (e.g., rounding the student's specialty area with helpful business or personnel management courses) and more effective counseling programs so as to make the students more aware of the vocational potentials related to their field of study.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following questions outline the primary concerns of the Planning Task Force charged with surveying current circumstances existing in each major instructional field in the State of Washington.

1. How would you identify or classify the programs or functional areas within your Broad instructional field? (e.g. the Fine Arts: Art, Dance, Music, and Theater.)
2. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the instructional programs in this field currently offered in the State of Washington?
3. What instructional program gaps are apparent in this field in Washington higher education?
4. What new programs in this field are now contemplated for offering during the remaining years of the decade?
5. What are the major problems and concerns of educators and students with respect to this particular instructional program area?
6. What trends of change in instructional method do you perceive in this program area?
7. What are the major contributions to this instructional field that you would like to see emanate from the statewide long - range planning process?

In responding to this, please give special attention to non-degree, non-traditional, external programs or continuing education programs.

8. Are there program areas within this instructional field in which current offerings are excessive (e.g., in excess of likely student demand or need)?
9. To what extent should the State of Washington be self-sufficient in offerings in this program area and to what extent should it rely on regional programs or the programs offered in surrounding states?

For convenience in reading this report, a foldout copy of the survey questions is enclosed at the end of the document for easy reference.