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ABSTRACT

The Rochester Regional Center, or consortium, a cooperative arrangement involving several public and private postsecondary institutions in the Southern Minnesota area, is described. The regional center is designed to provide studies leading to bachelor's and master's degrees through joint services and courses offered by institutions from four public systems and three private colleges. The students vary widely in age, educational background, occupation, and goals. For some the consortium provides an opportunity for continuing education in their profession, and others participate for advanced degrees and better jobs, or for reentry into the work force. The program was established because historically the educational needs of the area's population have been underserved, especially at the upper division and graduate levels. The events that led to the establishment of the regional center are traced. An advisory task force, comprised of lay citizens and postsecondary institution members, serves as a forum to discuss community needs, potential problems, and concerns of programs and students. The consortium does not grant degrees, does not offer credit for classes, or employ instructors. Each of the individual institutions perform these functions according to their usual operating procedures. The consortium was designed to utilize existing resources, eliminate unnecessary duplication in the region, promote regional planning and coordination, and explore means for increasing interinstitutional cooperation in meeting articulated local and regional needs. (SW)

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"THE ROCHESTER CONSORTIUM":
A DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM ON IMPROVING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION IN THE SOUTHERN MINNESOTA AREA

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" 'The Rochester Consortium': A Developmental Program on Improving Post-Secondary Educational Accessibility Through Inter-Institutional Cooperation in the Southern Minnesota Area

by

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The Rochester consortium is one of three regional projects authorized by the 1973 Minnesota Legislature to be administered by the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board to improve accessibility in the area of post-secondary education. The other projects are based at Wadena, Minnesota and the Iron Range at Virginia, Minnesota. The paper focuses upon the Rochester project.

Rochester -- Higher Education came to this southeastern Minnesota city and its surrounding area in a new and expanded way in late 1973. That's when an important experiment began which uses existing resources in the region to provide better opportunities for residents to earn bachelor's degrees without creating expensive, new buildings or the traditional and stereotyped cloistered tree-lined campus.

The Rochester regional center, a cooperative arrangement involving several public and private post-secondary institutions in the region, was established.

And it couldn't have come at a better time in this metropolitan area where no four-year institution exists to serve the approximately

90,000 people. To be sure, some upper division courses were offered in Rochester before 1973, and to a limited extent some baccalaureate and graduate degrees were available. But too often obtaining a degree required a big investment in time, travel and money that many residents found difficult to make because of job, home, family and community commitments.

This situation existed even though an urgent need to provide a broader curriculum and instructional support services and to increase degree opportunities had been documented for several years.

But following the higher education building boom of the 1960's, hopes for constructing a new institution diminished in a time of economic recession and projected enrollment declines for most of the state.

Recognizing that the educational needs of many area residents were not being met, but questioning the feasibility of another major investment in bricks and motar for higher education, the 1973 Legislature authorized an experimental regional center in southeastern Minnesota. It was a fairly new concept and it began under a cloud of doubt and uncertainty.

"Nobody knew exactly what it was to be, how it would work or if anyone could participate," said Richard C. Hawk, Executive Director of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Commission. "In the past, institutions in the area had not participated in cooperative programs in any substantial way. Moreover, the budget was small for the project. And it was unknown how the community would respond to this kind of approach."

The regional center, often called the consortium, is designed to provide studies leading to bachelor's and master's degrees previously not readily accessible. The project is administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, a state agency responsible for planning and coordinating all post high school education in Minnesota.

The regional center does not offer degrees. But through use of a joint schedule, joint advising services and other means students may select courses and obtain degrees from among institutions that bring their resources to Rochester. Institutions from four public systems of post-secondary education and three private colleges participate.

Now, early in the fourth year of the experiment, community leaders, representatives of area institutions, state educational planners, and participating students generally express enthusiasm about the accomplishments and the potential of this approach. They acknowledge, however, that such a project is not without problems and frustrations. And the future of the center, they say, will continue to depend on commitments by area institutions, financial support and continued positive student response.

To community leaders, the consortium is hardly the four-year institution, such as a University of Minnesota branch, that they would have preferred; but they agree that it has enhanced much-needed higher education opportunities.

Registrations, in fact, have grown from 1,500 for the entire 1973-74 school year to about 2,300 this fall in the credit classes

presented. Many additional students participate in non-credit classes and community service offerings.

To representatives of area post-secondary institutions, the regional center has improved cooperation and communication among them and has worked well. It has not provided as many upper division and graduate programs as some had hoped for by now, however. Tight budgets and various resource constraints continue to limit growth and development of new programs, although has been as rapid as sound judgment could allow.

To educational planners, the center has stimulated institutional representatives to talk to each other in ways that hadn't occurred before; and as a result, someone is paying attention to students' needs.

To students, the regional project is a "godsend." It is enabling them to advance toward degrees without having to commute long distances or abandon commitments to their families and jobs.

For Joyce Gibbs of Rochester, the consortium is making it possible to pursue a B.S. degree in elementary education and special learning disabilities without giving up her job or leaving town.

"The consortium saved me," Ms. Gibbs said. "I would have been able to go to Winona State University, but I would not have been able to keep my job, too. Without the consortium it would have been one or the other."

Ms. Gibbs, who works with mentally retarded children at Olmstead Day Activities Center, plans to spend one or more summer sessions at Winona State; but without the regional center she would not have

"But I also have been going to class for self enrichment and a personal desire to learn."

Dorothy Krupp was a single parent head of household with eleven children. She had been a homemaker since starting her family. She had a bachelor's degree in Physical Therapy. After extensive personal advising and educational planning Mrs. Krupp decided to pursue a Master's degree in Counseling. She was a part-time graduate assistant for Winona State University students while she completed her degree and maintained her family. She is now employed as the Director of the Women's Resource Center headquartered at the Rochester YWCA. Her work involves leadership, counseling, support for women with a broad range of problems and concerns. Her contributions to the women of the community are already observable. Her unique combination of personal experience and collegiate study make her specially qualified for the work she so enjoys. She said she probably would not have been able to assume such a role if the program had not been provided in Rochester.

And, on and on...countless hundreds of unique case briefs could be presented...each student has his own story and his won aspirations, needs, opportunities, and problems. The Rochester consortium with its staff and participating institutions largely serves those who didn't go "off to college" or those who have "new" or changed needs. Again, the consortium provides courses and programs for those who have family, job commitments, and who find it difficult to leave the area of commute to classes on central campuses.

Ms. Joyce Meyers serves as part-time advising coordinator to

progressed as far as she has. The consortium, she adds, has been responsive by bringing special courses to Rochester which she and others need.

Harvey TePoel had been going to college in Rochester for seven years and received his degree in 1976. Without the arrival of the consortium in Rochester, he would still be going to college.

In 1969, TePoel enrolled in Rochester Community College. He was 23. After taking courses at night and on weekends for four years, he graduated. He was the first person ever to graduate from the community college by going nights, he says. He then enrolled in Winona State's External Studies Program. His individualized program combined traditional courses with independent study and focused on recreation and park services.

TePoel missed only two classes in seven years. Without the consortium he would be 30 or 40 credits short of the degree, he said.

"I worked until 5:00 p.m.," said TePoel, who is an equipment operator and crew chief for the Southeast Rochester Park area. "It would have been impossible to work until then and travel out of town to classes that start at 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. and last until 10:00 p.m., and then drive back," he said.

Although he was a student at Winona State, he took more than 25 credits from the University of Minnesota in Rochester. He was able to do an internship in recreation for Winona State in Rochester.

"My goal is to be a park administrator," TePoel explained.

assist students in order that they may be able to progress smoothly in the pursuit of their personal educational goals.

Since the consortium opened the doors to its small office in Rochester Community College, hundreds of residents have walked in seeking information and assistance. The students vary widely in age, educational background, occupation and goals; but a few generalizations can be made, says Ms. Meyers.

"First, most of the students range in age from their early 20's to 40's and 50's," Ms Meyers said. "In other words, they are beyond the traditional age for college and have probably experienced some interruption in their educational careers. Because these are adults, they have multiple commitments -- to jobs, families, and community as well as their own education."

Because of these commitments, most of these students prefer to go to school on a part-time basis, and they require conveniently scheduled classes that are in accessible locations, Ms. Meyers said.

"Most of these people would find it impossible to commute to classes at various campuses in the region," she said. "In other words, they would not be going to school at all if the opportunity were not provided here."

Educational background of students vary from almost no post-high school experience to graduate degrees. Motivations and goals also vary widely.

For some, such as educators and health personnel in the region, the consortium provides an opportunity for continuing

education in their profession, and for some others, advanced degrees and better jobs. Other students attend classes hoping to change careers or obtain more interesting jobs by acquiring knowledge in a new field.

"Many of our students are preparing to re-enter the work force after some years by updating their knowledge of their former field or by learning about a new one," Ms. Meyers said. "In this category are many women, who, after 10 or 20 years in their homes lack not only marketable skills but also confidence in their ability to perform academically and on the jobs. The accessibility of the consortium programs seems to be an important factor in motivating these students to take the first steps toward further education."

In addition to students enrolled for purposes of new careers or career advancement, there are many students relatively uninterested in credits and degrees but whose primary motivation is enrichment.

"For these people, the consortium offers the opportunity to enroll in courses of interest from more than one institution with a minimum of red tape and no long-term commitment," Ms. Meyers said. "Some of these students, after their initial exposure, modify their goals and take the plunge into an organized program of study."

According to a sample of students interviewed at the consortium office from August 1974 to September 1975, 224 said they desired a bachelor's degree, 144 said they desired a master's degree, 20 wanted an associate degree, 47 said they enrolled for

continuing education, 7 enrolled to obtain post-baccalaureate certificates and 3 enrolled to work on a Ph.D.

Of those responding, 302 were female and 152 male; 364 were from Rochester and 90 from outside the city; 50 had completed high school, 110 had an A.A. degree, 178 a B.A. or B.S. degree, 23 had an M.A. or M.S. degree, 24 had a Diploma Nurse degree, and 28 didn't respond.

Areas of greatest interest listed were business, counseling, nursing, psychology, and elementary and secondary education.

The need to serve these higher education interests, particularly the need to offer baccalaureate degrees in the region, has been expressed for many years.

The Historical Background. "The unique aspect," Hawk said, "is that Rochester is a major population area with a very high level of educational achievement. It is an area with very high expectations about education and historically educational needs have been underserved, especially at the upper division and graduate levels."

Through the years several studies of post-secondary education needs in Rochester have been conducted. In 1962 a study was sponsored by civic-minded business and professional leaders. It was performed by the Illinois School Survey Associates, a group of higher education specialists from Illinois. The study concluded that there was a significant unmet need for additional post-secondary education in Rochester and the surrounding area.

Convinced of the need for baccalaureate degrees, community leaders attempted to bring University of Minnesota offerings to Rochester. This was accomplished through the establishment of a resident director of extension and continuing education by the University in Rochester. The business community raised more than $60,000 to assist in funding the first two years of the operation.

The program began in 1966. During 1967-68 the University provided 34 quarter courses (24 different courses, 6 of which were two or three quarters long) for a course enrollment of 620. Courses were presented by live, two-way, closed circuit television from the Twin Cities, and commuting faculty of Twin Cities departments in the late afternoon, Saturday morning, and evenings. Four courses were presented by Rochester residents who were authorized by the University to teach them.

These community efforts showed the Univesity that there was strong interest and need in the Rochester area and resulted in two internal University studies. These studies agreed with previous ones in finding the need for additional educational opportunities to be real. Several alternatives were suggested.

During this time, also, Mankato State and Winona State were developing the capability to grant baccalaureate and graduate degrees in Rochester in addition to the University. But broader curricular emphasis was needed.

Meanwhile, the Rochester community was busy developing its approach which resulted in a request for the establishment of a

University branch in Rochester. A statewide committee to support a branch was developed. At the request of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, a study by Dr. Lewis Mayhew, an educational consultant from Stanford University, was conducted in 1970. Mayhew concluded that a new four-year institution in Rochester should be established which would be run by the University.

The 1971 Legislature requested the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to assess the possible need for additional public institutions in the southeastern area of the state, and the implications of this for existing institutions in the area.

Testimony and information presented to the Commission focused on issues relating to a University branch in Rochester. For the most part, presentations from Rochester citizens and University of Minnesota officials indicated a strong desire and important advantages of establishing a University campus in or near Rochester.

But presentations from representatives of some other communities and institutions in the area reflected concern that a University campus in Rochester would be an unnecessary duplication of post-secondary programs and might have a negative effect on existing area institutions.

Following its comprehensive study, the Coordinating Commission recommended that the 1973 Legislature establish a consortium. The purpose of the sonsortium would be to offer or arrange to have offered courses and programs at the upper division and graduate level which could be developed through the cooperation of existing institutions to meet specific needs in the area.

Although the three centers have developed differently in response to the environment in each region, the centers share the same primary objective - to meet regional needs more efficiently and effectively through increased cooperation among area institutions and coordination of programs and planning in the area.

Specifically, the centers seek to improve accessibity at all levels, to identify and eliminate unwarranted duplication in the region, to better use facilities and resources in the area, to provide more effective liaison between regional planning and coordination in post-secondary education with other regional planning activities and to accomplish inter-institutional cooperative efforts in meeting local and regional needs.

Leaders from the community or communities in each region and representatives from each of the participating institutions help in selecting staff for the centers, identifying priorities among regional needs and setting objectives for the year. A coordinator to run each center is selected by the Coordinating Commission's executive director with advice from the local committee.

The decision to try the regional center approach in Minnesota, as opposed to building new institutions, is somewhat typical of developments throughout the country, according to Hawk.

In response to requests for more program options, needs expressed by adult and part-time students as well as the traditional 18-22 year-old students, tighter budgets and competition for limited resources, and expansion of cooperative efforts has occurred. These efforts have been initiated between neighboring states as well as

among post-secondary institutions in a region within a state.

A variety of cooperative projects such as pooled service plans, consortia, reciprocal agreements, transfer agreements and regional projects have been developed. Many of these projects, such as the Minnesota centers, reflect the growing interest in life-long learning.

The successful experiments have resulted in increased cost effectiveness, a reduction of duplicated services, greater efficiencies, and the availability to students of additional services and opportunities. Regional efforts have focused on decentralizing decision-making, better coordinating services in each area and encouraging greater involvement in planning by area citizens.

Although inter-institutional projects exist in other parts of the country, no specific model was applied to establishing the Rochester center, Hawk said.

Hawk said he thinks that the Minnesota approach to establish a "institution-community" dialogue through an advisory task force of community and institutional representatives is unique.

"Most other similar arrangements concentrate the oversite responsibility with people from the institutions," he said. "The Minnesota centers bring in the community in a dominant way."

Hawk said that few inter-institutional projects are designed to bring additional services to areas not well served (such as Rochester). Most projects deal with established markets and already-established institutions and attempt to be more effective in combining these, he said.

Although the Rochester regional center is in its fourth year and is drawing increased enrollments, some confusion about the consortium remains.

The consortium is described by community leaders as a catalyst or a broker or educational services. It is not an institution and it does not grant degrees. A student takes courses and earns degrees from institutions that participate. The student makes the choice of what degrees he or she wants and from where he or she wants it.

Geographically the area served consisted of Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmstead, Rice, Steele, Wabasha, Waseca and Faribault counties. The Rochester metropolitan area is the hub.

Many institutions contribute out of their existing budgets in a variety of ways such as providing courses, degree programs, faculty, classroom and office space and planning assistance. Rochester Community College, for example, provides support in terms of overhead, facilities and maintenance, library and other services.

Institutions currently participating include College of St. Teresa, Mankato State University, Minnesota Bible College, Rochester Area Vocational-Technical Institute, Rochester Community College, St. Mary's College, University of Minnesota and Winona State University.

Headquarters for the center is the small office provided by Rochester Community College. It houses the coordinator, several part-time advisors, a secretary and office supplies.

Classes are taught at several locations in the Rochester area

including the Community College, the Vocational-Technical Institute, high schools, school district offices, hospitals, churches, hotels and motels and other sites.

The consortium operates on a modest budget from the state -- about $40,000 per year. Out of this comes the salaries of the coordinator, advising coordinator, and secretary, rent money, telephone bill, duplicating costs and other services. In addition, the consortium has received several small grants from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for library materials and grants from the Southeastern Minnesota Education Foundation and Industrial Opportunities, Inc., which provides a reserve for the center as well as supplemental funds. A small grant was provided by the State Department of Public Welfare for the Children's Center, a day care facilities for students and faculty which has been operated in conjunction with the consortium. After its establishment the day care center was "spun off" to Rochester Community College for on-going management.

One of the main reasons for making the consortium work has been the participation of the advisory task force, according to Hawk. "The Task Force is an unusually dedicated group, and the members have put a lot of themselves into it," Hawk said.

The 21 task force members, who are appointed by Hawk, meet about once every two months, sometimes more often. Most meetings are held in the Rochester Chamber of Commerce board room. Members listen to reports from the coordinator and institutional representatives and exchange ideas about plans and problems.

"The major accomplishment of the task force has been to represent with some urgency the needs and desires and aspirations of the Rochester community," Hawk said. "It has provided a climate in which expectations for institutional activity can be reasonably expanded.

"The task force has insisted that institutions work together and not engage in unhealthy competitive activities. And it is has been instrumental in creating an environment within the community which is giving this consortium approach a chance to prove itsef."

Fred Hubbard, a Rochester bank president and chairman of the task force, is the driving force in making the group work well, according to several members.

"You would think that it could be a quarrelsome group," said Dr. Robert Aarsvold, superintendent of schools in Chatfield, Minnesota, and a member of the task force. "But the people are educationally concerned for people. I feel this is beautiful that there are not selfish interests."

The main role of the task force, several members say, is to provide the consortium coordinator with ready access to community and institutional representatives so he can get a pulse of thinking and clear up questions and problems.

The Legislative Mandate. The 1973 Minnesota Legislature mandated the Minnesota Higher Education Board to test the feasibility of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of post-secondary education in meeting regional needs through increased inter-institutional cooperation and coordinated planning in three experimental regional projects. A $175,000 bienniel appropriation was made for

the experiments.

In response to the legislation, the three regions were selected by MHECB: Rochester (Southeast), Wadena (West Central) and the Iron Range (Northern).

The general objectives of the projects were to: (1) improve accessibility to postsecondary education, (2) utilize existing resources to the maximum extent possible, (3) identify and eliminate any unnecessary and unwarranted duplication in the region, (4) provide for more effective regional planning and coordination in post-secondary education with other regional planning and coordination activities and agencies, and (5) explore means for accomplishing increased inter-institutional cooperative efforts in meeting articulated local and regional needs.

The Evolving Organization Structure. The Rochester consortium was organized in the summer of 1973 with the appointment of a 21-member task force comprised of lay citizens and postsecondary institution members. The technical voting balance rested in favor of the lay citizen with eleven members and ten institutional members. This represented a more symbolic posture toward the development of a program that would be responsive to community needs and aspirations. The task force role is to serve as an advisor to the coordinator of the consortium project. It serves as a forum to discuss community needs, potential problems and concerns of programs and students.

Most executive action on the part of the coordinator of the consortium and the institutional representatives is reflected and influenced by a compelling desire to respond to the community needs

in a coordinated and effective way. The chairman of the task force, Mr. Fred Hubbard, frequently speaks for the task force to interpret the goals of the project to other citizen groups, the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Minnesota Legislature regarding the progress of the project. Ultimate executive authority rests with the director of the Higher Education Coordinating Board. Institutional perogatives and authority rest with their executive hierarchy and ultimately with their governing boards.

Seven institutions currently participate in the project. They are: College of St. Teresa, Mankato State University, Minnesota Bible College, Rochester Community College, Rochester Vocational-Technical Institute, St. Mary's College, University of Minnesota and Winona State University.

These institutions provide whatever resources and programs they can toward the total program of the consortium. A group called the institutional representatives meets regularly with the consortium coordinator to approve the joint schedule. The schedule is approved four times a year and is announced publicly through various means. The institutional representatives are concerned about joint planning of courses and programs and about the elimination of unnecessary duplication. Several joint programs have been developed through this procedure.

The consortium does not grant degrees, does not offer credit for classes or employ instructors. Each of the individual institutions perform these functions according to their usual operating

procedures. Tuition and fees are variable depending upon institutional policy and level of entrance. Student records are kept in each of the institutions and routinely reported through the institutions. Minimal enrollment and class data is kept in the consortium office regarding the enrollment in classes and the aggregate enrollment in the total program. This information is used in planning future programs and to report the general progress of the effort. The joint advising program is headed by an advisory coordinator employed on a half-time basis, who works with studetns to assist with the determination of courses and programs and educational goals with the student. Much student referral occurs at this point to individual institutions for specific advising and additional assistance for planning a student's program of study.

The institutional representatives have resolved many questions regarding joint programming and transfer of credits among the institutions. Considerable progress has been made i this area and at the present time there is a minimum of transfer problem involved with students who systematically plan their programs of study and work regularly with an advisor.

Classes are housed in available space in the community, particularly Rochester Community College, The Rochester Area Vocational-Technical Institute and public school facilities. As many as twenty-five different facilities have been used to house classes.

Growth in registration has been steady, with more than a fourfold increase in student registration in the first three years of operation. Class offerings have been greatly expanded and many new

course options have been faced with substantial budget constraints. A heavy reliance for the support of the program rests with special staff assistance provided by the institutions, and tuition income, as well as several grants which have been provided for support.

A deliberate attempt has been made for the staff coordinator to serve a linkage role and brokering role in working with the individual institutions and the institutions as a group. Much time is spent in improving procedures in resolving various kinds of delivery problems in attempting to respond with as many programs and classes as is possible for the needs of the area students.

Deliberate strategy has been employed to preserve the institutional autonomy and perogatives while at the same time fostering a coopeartive give and take in developing the program. Special attention is given to openness in communication and to understanding the problems and concerns of each of the members. Because of the close proximity and frequent contact among the institutions and staff people, a great deal of understanding of each personality, aspirations, and goals occurs. Territorial fears, while a concern, are greatly minimized by the two-way communication which occurs.

The institutions who participate are both large and small, public and private. The institutions are probably bonded together more than any other factor, with an intense desire to be of service to the students in the area.

The future of the program rests largely out of the sum total of the needs of the students, the commitments of the institutions and their ability to find resources to satisfy those student needs

and the on-going support of the policy makers of the state. At this time, it appears that during the next five to ten years there will be substantial needs to be met, courses to be planned, classes to be fitted together, in order to satisfy the area educational needs. It also appears that there is a determined desire on the part of the institutions and their staffs, as well as the policy makers, to continue to work toward the satisfaction of those needs.