

November 2008

Kitsap Higher Education Center

Executive Summary

Background

A Legislative proviso in the 2008 Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) appropriation called for a program and operating plan for a higher education center in the Kitsap area of Washington and report findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature by Dec. 1, 2008.

Pursuant to this directive, the HECB engaged the services of the Northwest Education Research Association (NORED) to assess the needs in the region and make recommendations on the most appropriate means to meet the higher education needs of the residents. In addition, HECB staff and NORED consulted with a local advisory committee that included broad representation from the four-county area including Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason counties.

Consistent with previous studies in the region, the report finds that baccalaureate participation rates in the region are well below the state average and that students have limited access to baccalaureate institutions and programs. Despite those limitations, the report finds that nearly 1,000 students in the region are accessing a wide variety of bachelor's and graduate programs from 10 public and private providers. Only about one-third of these are enrollments at public colleges and universities; and of those, all except for those in the two community college bachelor programs are non-state funded (self-sustaining) programs.

Providing higher education capacity in the region is complicated by the geography. The region is more than 5,000 square miles, broken up by waterways, making travel time a real constraint to college participation. The present population of the region is about 400,000 – although there is a major population center in Kitsap County where more than 60 percent of the population resides – the remainder is spread across the region.

The report analyzes a number of university center models and finds that a university center built on an existing community college campus would be the most efficient means to provide baccalaureate access to the region. In addition, because of the expanse of the region and long travel times, a single center would not meet the needs of the region. Therefore, the report recommends the development of two proportionately sized centers, one on each of the community college campuses, which would operate in a collaborative and coordinated fashion and would build on the existing public and private programs already serving students in the area.

Specifically, the following recommendations are detailed in the report:

1. There should be two higher education centers operated in a coordinated, collaborative manner in the Kitsap Region; one center in the Olympic Community College District, the other in the Peninsula College District.
2. The higher education centers should be located on the Olympic and Peninsula College campuses.
3. The organization of each of the two centers should accord with district needs, historical relationships with public and independent four-year institutions, and other regional conditions and needs.
4. Inter-district cooperation in such matters as program needs assessments, planning, and scheduling is essential. This will require continuing conversations and communications between the presidents of the two districts and their higher education center directors, and close relationships between the governing boards. A regional advisory committee also would be an important contributor to the region-wide perspective.
5. Each higher education center should have a university present in a lead university co-partner capacity.
6. Administration of the center should be the responsibility of the host community college and the lead university co-partnership. The host community college in cooperation with the lead university should be responsible for managing the center, enlisting other institution providers; and with the advice of the regional advisory committee, identifying program needs.
7. FTE funding at the upper-division and graduate levels at the average rate of the comprehensive universities should be provided as operating appropriations to the higher education centers. It should be augmented with income from space rentals and other sources.
8. The higher education center director should be a high-level person within the community college who reports to the host institution president and the lead university co-partner.
9. The baccalaureate and master's program inventories for each of the higher education centers should focus on the fields identified in the study, previous assessments of employer and regional needs identified in the report and HECB's list of high demand programs and programs in STEM fields. Cooperation and coordination should be stressed and addressed through cooperative planning, conversations, staff interactions, scheduling, and communications between the two centers.
10. The bachelor programs of the respective community colleges should be included in the higher education center program inventories.

11. As with other endeavors of this type, the Kitsap Higher Education Centers may prove to be an interim solution, should enrollment and participation rates exceed projected levels or at a point where the higher education center needs to become more comprehensive. The HECB should consider a process for evaluating the centers in a timely fashion, assessing the need, and approving transitions from one stage to the next on an orderly and predictable basis.

12. The study directive calls for program and operating plans for the higher education centers. In the formal or detailed sense, such plans would need to await the higher education center's inauguration; be developed by center and institution staff; and go through the institutional and state review processes. Plans at that level of detail would be premature at this stage. What can be productively offered here are recommendations on principles and stages that can be considered by the institutions as events unfold. They are not intended to be prescriptive; rather, they are offered as guides or benchmarks. Though presented here in the manner of two centers that proceed in tandem, which is the recommended approach, budget uncertainties may require a sequenced approach with one center advancing a step ahead of the other. If staging cannot be avoided, the Olympic College center should receive the first priority for capital funding, with Peninsula College following in the next biennium. In any case, both districts should be allowed to proceed simultaneously with the other, i.e., noncapital, aspects of the program - especially with high demand and stem programs, locating activities, and programs in other space on campus - while the capital process proceeds.