

CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL
OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The New England Board of Higher Education is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized, interstate agency whose mission is to foster cooperation and the efficient use of resources among New England's approximately 260 colleges and universities. NEBHE was established by the New England Higher Education Compact, a 1955 agreement among the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

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Just a few years ago, when CONNECTION's "Cover Stories" last focused on higher education finance, terms like "downsizing" and "reorganization" were greeted with a dose of cynicism. Now, these concepts are grudgingly accepted on most campuses. After all, by the end of the 1980s, higher education had become paunchy. As the economy soured and the pool of 18-year-olds dwindled, academia's belly began to offend financially pressed taxpayers and tuition-paying families. Anti-intellectual commentators prescribed a lean new diet, and an army of higher education consultants showed institutions how to stick with it.

In the short term, it may be easy to keep weight off. David W. Breneman, a visiting professor at Harvard University and former college president, warns in this issue that no income source — tuition, endowment, private giving, state or federal appropriations — is likely to grow enough to allow higher education to solve its budget problems on the revenue side alone.

The dilemma, according to the scholar Adam Yarmolinsky, is that education is a little like a Mozart symphony, and "it takes the same number of person-hours to perform a Mozart symphony today as it did when Mozart was alive."

And so, with revenues and potential gains in efficiency both limited, the old slogan of doing "more with less" has necessarily given way to doing "less with less."

What remains to be seen is how the consultants' advice aimed at making individual institutions leaner, if not meaner, will shape the larger goal of maintaining — better yet, expanding — access to quality higher education opportunities throughout New England. It may make good economic sense for an institution to cancel an academic program due to underenrollment. It doesn't make sense to let less popular programs disappear entirely from New England's academic landscape, just because too many institutions were competing for a relatively small number of students.

It's heartening that many New England institutions have cut through the consultants' mumbo jumbo and found something more precious — each other.

Most recently, six Maine institutions formed the Greater Portland Alliance of Colleges and Universities. This agreement permits students at one institution to enroll in undergraduate courses at another college in the consortium at no extra charge, as long as the class isn't offered at their own school and won't be in the near future.

In Massachusetts, meanwhile, more than 50 public and private colleges and universities jointly purchase goods through the Massachusetts Higher Education Consortium. Since it began in 1977, the consortium has saved member institutions about \$170 million on items ranging from dorm furniture to computers.

In New Hampshire, a loose association of public and private four-year institutions called the New Hampshire College and University Council flies in groups of guidance counselors from across the United States to tour New Hampshire's campuses. The idea is to bolster enrollment at *all* New Hampshire colleges. "We all compete in a multitude of ways," says Walter Peterson, president of Franklin Pierce College and former governor of New Hampshire. "But the aim is not to put people out of business, it's to work toward raising the level of quality everywhere."

Peterson also chairs the New England Board of Higher Education, which epitomizes higher education cooperation. Since 1957, the board's Regional Student Program (RSP) has allowed tens of thousands of New Englanders to pay significantly reduced tuition at out-of-state public colleges and universities within the region, if the students pursue specialized degree programs not offered by their own states' public institutions. This year, the RSP saved New England students \$25 million in tuition. The program also saves the states millions of dollars, because they don't have to duplicate costly academic programs.

The "Cover Stories" in this issue of CONNECTION shed light on some of the difficult economic choices facing New England colleges and universities. We trust that one choice will be increased cooperation.

John O. Harney is the editor of CONNECTION.