

TRANSBORDER INTEGRATION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: THE INTER-UNIVERSITY WORKING GROUP (IUWG) IN THE EL PASO DEL NORTE REGION.

Prepared
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I.- BACKGROUND

In the El Paso del Norte Region (1,826,204 million inhabitants)¹, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), the New Mexico State University (NMSU) and the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) are the three most representative and best-known universities. Together, the three universities offer 183² undergraduate programs, 182³ graduate programs for a student population of 54,281⁴ students linking three cities from three different states and two different countries. Although the region encompasses other 16 public and private universities on both sides of the border, these three universities offer the widest variety of academic programs and command the largest number of faculty members (1385)⁵ conducting research projects in this border area. To illustrate, together, NMSU, UTEP and UACJ have the largest number of graduate students in the region (3808)⁶ and the largest number of graduate students at the Ph.D. Level (772)⁷.

The geographic locations of UTEP, NMSU and UACJ, all within a radius of 40 miles from each other, have contributed to the development of a close institutional relationship. However, this relationship has lacked a formal, short and long term plan of cooperation and therefore has lacked continuity. Under said circumstances, the potential of the three universities to have a greater impact on the social, cultural, and economic development of the El Paso del Norte Region has been wasted.

Understanding this vacuum and acknowledging the importance of planning for institutional collaboration among higher education institutions at the regional level, NMSU and UACJ began, one year ago, the integration of an Inter-university Working Group (IUWG) addressing two main targets: first, to make the institutional collaboration between both universities a comprehensive, well-planned, and permanent process capable, in the short term, of extending to the other universities in the region. Second, to develop in the medium-term, a Bi-national Educational Plan for the Paso del Norte Region designed not only to open academic programs to exchange students and faculty, but also to develop a strategy aimed to retain, in the region, a larger number of high-skilled individuals that have been educated in the local universities. Both targets will be described in more detail in the following section.

II.- ESTABLISHMENT OF THE IUWG.

The initiative for the establishment of the NMSU- UACJ Inter-University Working Group originated from the activities carried out by a group of faculty members of NMSU and UACJ in the Water Policy and Region Building Research Project. The Water Policy and Region Building Project is a research initiative sponsored by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation designed to advance the integration of the Ciudad Juarez, El Paso and Las Cruces communities in order to develop shared policies and solutions to their common water problems. As a result of the shared activities carried out by faculty members of both institutions in this research project, the Presidents of NMSU and UACJ, Jay Gouge and Felipe Fornelli, recognized the necessity of building a genuine environment of institutional collaboration among the different departments of both universities. Both University Presidents acknowledge that the most important challenges

to the building of a true institutional collaborative environment between both universities are: language differences, the lack of knowledge about the administrative structure of the universities on both sides of the border, the lack of knowledge about the work environment of university professors on both sides of the border, and the lack of frequent opportunities or institutional agendas for general interaction among faculty members of different departments from both universities.

To overcome these deficiencies, President Gouge and President Fornelli suggested the establishment of a working group encompassing administrators and professors from both universities to build a common agenda in academic exchange, research, and extension activities. The main focus of the working group is to advance the creation of an environment of mobility and institutional collaboration. Moreover, the purpose of integrating administrators and professors in the same group is to have an informal institutional entity with decision-making power and capable of facilitating the planning process. The informal institutional entity has been named the NMSU/UACJ Inter-University Working Group.

The NMSU/UACJ Inter-University Working Group (IUWG) is headed by the Head of the Office of International Exchange at both Universities. However, each university is determining which other administrators and professors are to be appointed to IUWG. Although IUWG doesn't have a permanent structure yet, there is a transitional group that has already worked in the first annual plan of institutional collaboration. After nine months, the IUWG has conducted a series of activities in the three targeted areas. In the research area, the most relevant activities are those involving students and professors within the Binational Water Program. This program is funded by the William and Flora

Hewlett Foundation with 400,000 thousand dollars for both NMSU and UACJ. The Binational Water Program has been relevant because it has brought about permanent contact and involvement of students and professors from different departments at both universities. In addition, another project on Ecotourism funded by the Southwest Center for Research and Policy (SCERP).has been relevant in linking, for the first time, the Business Schools of both universities.

In terms of academic exchanges, there have been a series of meetings during the year to define the best strategies to increase the mobility of students and professors from different programs on both universities. Finally, in terms of extension, both universities have organized 2 symposiums, one on terrorism and the other about literature. The purpose of these symposiums is to promote cultural activities that can help to bring the community of both Ciudad Juarez and Las Cruces together to discuss topics that affect the region⁸.

In general, during the first stage of the IUWG, the main objective has been to design the First UACJ/NMSU Annual Plan of Activities. The idea is to continue planning annual activities in the three targeted areas to advance during the first two years toward the formation of a Six-year Plan for Institutional Collaboration between both universities.

III.- CONSOLIDATION OF A REGIONAL INTER-UNIVERSITY WORKING GROUP IN EL PASO DEL NORTE AREA.

The consolidation of the UACJ/NMSU IUWG is a keystone to extending the model to the entire Paso del Norte Region. To do this, it is important to consider three major steps: First, to visualize the Six-year Plan for Institutional Collaboration between NMSU and UACJ as an integral part in the development of each institution. Second, to integrate

other Higher Education Institutions in a Regional Board to have a structure for decisions and for the establishment of a Regional IUWG in the El Paso del Norte Region. Third, to elaborate a Bi-national Plan of Education for the El Paso del Norte Region to define the educational strategies needed to retain, in the region, the best prepared individuals that have been educated in the local universities. This is important in order to make the El Paso del Norte Region a more competitive region in the globalization process. In the next part, each of the three major steps will be explained in more detail.

The first step is related to the need of considering institutional collaboration among Higher Education Institutions in the border not as a complementary activity but as a comprehensive process that should be planned and considered in every department. The border universities need to be aware that all of them share the same geographic space and that in the border area, hundreds of students and a large number of professors from both sides of the border face similar needs. Unlike other places, in the border area, students and professors informally exchange their academic experiences on a daily basis. The problem is that the Local Higher Education Institutions have not pursued formal mechanisms to channel and strengthen this daily interaction. The development of Annual Activity Plans and of a Six-year Plan for Institutional Collaboration will acquaint participants with the culture of interaction among the administrative tiers of NMSU and UACJ. Institutional collaboration should not be an incidental activity, rather it should be a common and familiar process among the decision makers of both universities as it is already among a large number of students and professors. This is why the activities conducted by the IUWG are specially important at both NMSU and UACJ.

The second step in making institutional collaboration a systematic and permanent process in the region is to integrate other Higher Education Institutions in a Regional Board. The establishment of a Regional Board of Higher Education Institutions will allow a structure for decisions and for the establishment of a Regional IUWG in the El Paso del Norte Region. A regional IUWG will be important for the preparation of a common agenda aimed at the consolidation of a culture of collaboration in three targeted areas: academic exchange, research and extension activities. In addition, having a planned common agenda for Institutional Collaboration in the El Paso del Norte Region is necessary to move toward the design of a Bi-national Plan of Education. This requires a more refined level of collaboration as it is important to identify the regional needs that require attention by the Higher Education Institutions to make the El Paso del Norte Region more competitive.

The third step is related to the design of a Bi-national Plan of Education in the El Paso del Norte Region. One of the most important needs and challenges that a Regional IUWG must face is to design a Bi-national Plan of Education aimed at contributing to the economic, social, and cultural development of the region. A Bi-national Plan of Education is also necessary to determine a strategy designed to retain, in the region, the best prepared individuals that have received their education from local universities. In this challenge, the incorporation of the public, private and community sectors from both sides of the border will be important to define what mechanisms should be adopted to guarantee the development of the region in education and research. These mechanisms should be used to identify the gaps between the academic programs offered by the local universities and the needs of the region for highly-skilled professionals. The relationship

between universities and community should be addressed to reduce the duplication of academic efforts among the Higher Education Institutions in the El Paso del Norte area and should be linked to the development programs of Ciudad Juarez, El Paso and Las Cruces.

In summary, the establishment of the IUWG answers not only to the need of making institutional collaboration between NMSU and UACJ a permanent and systematic process, but also to the vision of contributing a more effective model for making Institutional Collaboration a permanent, integral, and systematic process in the other universities of the region. In this vision, the process of bi-national collaboration among the Higher Education Institutions in the El Paso del Norte Region is seen as one of the most important steps to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of this border area.

FOOTNOTES

1. Juárez: Scince 2000, INEGI, Ciudades de EUA: Census Boreau, 2000
2. <http://uacj.mx/oferta/oferta.html>
3. [http://nmsu.edu/en español/cifras.html](http://nmsu.edu/en%20espa%C3%B1ol/cifras.html)
4. <http://utep.edu/graduate/programs/degree.html>
5. En Universidad Estatal de Nuevo México-Las Cruces 734; en Universidad de Texas-El Paso 410; en Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez 245 . Fuente Graduate Catalog 1999-2000 New México State University, Centro de Estudios Interamericanos0 y Fronterizos UTEP, Departamento de Planeación UACJ.
6. En Universidad Estatal de Nuevo México-Las Cruces 2,378; en Universidad de Texas-El Paso 960; en Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez 470 . Fuente Graduate Catalog 1999-2000 New México State University, Centro de Estudios Interamericanos0 y Fronterizos UTEP, Departamento de Planeación UACJ.
7. En Universidad Estatal de Nuevo México-Las Cruces 616; en Universidad de Texas-El Paso 111; en Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez 45 . Fuente Graduate Catalog 1999-2000 New México State University, Centro de Estudios Interamericanos0 y Fronterizos UTEP, Departamento de Planeación UACJ.
8. Educational Alliances in US-Mexico Borderland: “UACJ-NMSU-UTEP International Cooperation Experience”. Laura Patricia González Campos, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez.

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THREE MAIN SECTIONS:

I. BACKGROUND

II. CONSTITUTION OF THE IUWG

**III. CONSTITUTION OF A REGIONAL IUWG
IN EL PASO DEL NORTE AREA**

I. BACKGROUND

- UTEP, NMSU, UACJ offer 183 undergraduate programs, 182 graduate programs for a student population of 54,281 students linking three cities from three different States of two different countries.
- The relationship among these Universities has lacked of a formal plan of cooperation for the short and long term and so has lacked of continuity.

II. CONSTITUTION OF THE IUWG

- The Presidents of NMSU and UACJ, realized on the necessity of constructing an authentic culture of institutional collaboration.
- Challenges to construct an authentic culture of institutional collaboration between both universities are:
 - a) Differences in language.
 - b) Lack of knowledge about the administrative organization of the universities and culture of work.
 - c) Lack of frequent planned institutional agendas.

II. CONSTITUTION OF THE IUWG

- a) In the first state of the IUWG the main objective: First UACJ/NMSU Annual Plan of Activities for Institutional Collaboration.
- b) The conformation of a Six-year Plan for Institutional Collaboration. In Three targeted areas: academic exchange, research and extension.

CONSTITUTION OF A REGIONAL IUWG IN EL PASO DEL NORTE AREA

Three major steps:

- Consolidate the Six-year Plan for Institutional Collaboration between NMSU and UACJ as an integral part in the development of each institution.
- Integrate other Higher Education Institutions in a Regional Board for the constitution of a Regional IUWG in the El Paso del Norte.
- Elaborate a Bi-national Plan of Education for the El Paso del Norte Region needed to retain in the region the best prepare human resources educated in the local universities.

INTER UNIVERSITY WORKING GRUP (IUWG)

UACJ/NMSU

Preliminary – Structure of Organization

**RECTOR OF THE
UNIVERSIDAD
AUTÓNOMA DE
CIUDAD JUÁREZ**

- OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE
- GENERAL DIRECTION FOR RESEARCH
- GENERAL DIRECTION FOR EXTENSION
- 1 REPRESENTATIVE FOR COLLEGE
- P.I REGION BUILDING PROJECT (HEWLETT)

FIRTS STAGE:

*ANNUAL ACTIVITY PLAN
FOR INSTITUTIONAL
COLLABORATION*

SECOND STAGE:

*SIX-YEAR PLAN
FOR INSTITUTIONAL
COLLABORATION*

**PRESIDENT OF THE
NEW MEXICO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

- OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE
- VICEPRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
- OFFICE OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
- 1 REPRESENTATIVE FOR COLLEGE
- PI REGION BUILDING PROJECT (HEWLETT)