

North Country Higher Education Alliance

An Idiosyncratic History of the Early Years

Julie Hatoff, Co-founder

June 2, 2005

In 1990, the three Vice Presidents of Instruction (SDSU North County Center, Palomar, and MiraCosta) applied for funding to bring the founding faculty of the new CSUSM together with their colleagues at MCC and PC. Coordinators Dick Rush, Jan Moser, and Julie Hatoff invited about thirty participants from the three institutions to Murrietta Hot Springs the weekend of April 27-29 for *The Great Colleges Seminar*. Short essays that each prepared provided the agenda for the retreat. Out of the intense dialogue came cooperative efforts ranging from developing curriculum to disposing of hazardous wastes. Over the next couple years of this consortium, degrees and majors were aligned; library service were coordinated; job fairs for employees and students were held; calendars were matched up; cultural activities were jointly promoted; directories were published, etc.

In 1992, administrators from the three institutions gathered in Encinitas with the presidents to strengthen further these links. They asked the presidents to write cross-institutional cooperation into each mission statement, to implement a single application process, to direct our Foundation heads to discuss mutual goals; to assign a task force to write A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO TRANSFER AND CO-ENROLLMENT; to appoint a standing alliance committee for remedying articulation problems; to support shared staff development programs. Presidents Bill Stacy, George Boggs, and Deon Holt not only responded positively, but also they each assessed their institutions \$7500/annum to support the organization and hire an executive director. Julie Hatoff had shepherded the organization for those early years drafting the original by-laws, publishing a newsletter, and convening meetings.

In 1993, Kendra Jeffcoat, working as an independent contractor, came aboard as Director of Development. She devoted herself to researching other consortia and their best practices for achieving the founders' goals. She also surveyed faculty at the three institutions about projects for which they needed external resources. She communicated with many national and local foundations, then wrote grant applications, where appropriate. With the help of MCC's Dave Megill and others, she sought support for a distance learning project involving interactive video. To her dismay, little was available to the North Country Higher Education Alliance (the consortium's new name) for discipline-based communication among professors. Refusals came with questions about why faculty should be paid to align curriculum. She *was* successful in hosting a half-day workshop for the Alliance with area employers, less successful in promoting a summer workshop on multi-culturalism. In 1993, Palomar appointed a campus leader, Bonnie Doud to the post of director and paid her with reassigned time. Rotations of directors across the campuses ensued over the next decade, and the term of office was extended to two years with a transitional semester for each incoming director:

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1994 Diane Martin (CSUSM), 1995-6 Gloria Floren (MCC), 1997-8 Ann Maioroff (PC), 1999-2000 Vicki Golich (CSUSM), 2001-2 Karen Baum (MCC), 2003 Judy Eberhart, 2004-5 Darci Strother.

The most significant achievements of the Alliance have not been the most public. However, the appearances of Ernest Boyer and Parker Palmer brought hundreds of participants to their sessions and created enormous resonance in classrooms and out. Futurist Michael Dolance challenged traditionalists. Assemblywoman Dede Alpert keynoted the Alliance's first education summit. Every bit as important—if a bit more local--was the analysis of the community's attitudes about the three institutions, which the Alliance contracted with CSUSM's Social and Behavioral Research Institute to undertake. SIRSI also complete a second project for the Alliance in its internal scan of the partner institutions and the community colleges' transfer rates. Facilitating communication across North County staff was Teresa Macklin's website for the organization. Providing refreshments came to be seen as the best way to ensure department-to-department dialogue occurred. Assessment of learning across disciplines has continued over the years with many professional development workshops open to all campuses. Most memorable were Notre Dame's Barbara Walvoord, Alverno College's team on student learning outcomes, Glenn Singleton's Beyond Diversity seminar, Edward Zlotkowski from AAHE on service learning, and Vicki Golich's case teaching methods. Many other jointly hosted workshops on topics of mutual interest have brought together representatives from articulation, financial aid, counseling, career centers, etc. The board has been expanded and hence made more creative; it now includes student representatives and articulation officers as well as directors of professional development. This consortium now even attracts some money. One of the biggest co-sponsored programs is the Bridges grant from NIH, which was just renewed for \$600K; it has put underrepresented freshman and sophomores on track to CSUSM and beyond into science careers. We have every expectation that some will return to North County and help us diversify our faculties.

In fifteen years, the North County Higher Education Alliance has wrought many positive changes in support of the region's students, its faculties, its economy. Transfer between the community colleges, now much smoother, is trending upwards. Because of good communication among the institutions, more community college students are taking degrees. Collaboration, coordination, and consortial activities—they are symbolized in the three-way handshake embodied in the logo of NCHEA.