

REPORT TO THE SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION
ON HIGHER EDUCATION

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION AND OUTCOMES OF
THE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

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Background of the Centers of Excellence Program

The Centers of Excellence Program was established by the Education Improvement Act of 1984. According to that legislation:

The Commission on Higher Education, in consultation with the State Board of Education, may contract with selected public or private colleges and universities, or groupings of such institutions, to provide centers of excellence in programs designed to train teachers.

Funds for implementing this activity shall be appropriated annually to the Commission on Higher Education which, in consultation with the State Board of Education, shall monitor the performance of participating institutions and may or may not elect to renew such contracts to any original college or university.

In 1987-88, the Commission approved revised guidelines for this program to elicit proposals of greater scope and wider impact. Under these guidelines the Commission has established six Centers of Excellence:

mathematics and science education at Clemson University
early childhood education at Winthrop University
special education technology at USC-Columbia
foreign language education at Furman University in
cooperation with USC-Spartanburg
English composition at USC-Coastal
assessment of student learning at USC-Columbia.

Scope of the Report

This report reviews the Centers of Excellence Program in the form it has taken since 1988, evaluating its results, and making some recommendations for future operation of the program. It is based on a reading of the program guidelines for the last three years, the original applications of the six centers, their annual reports, and the reports of the two-year review teams for the four centers that have reached that stage. I visited each of the centers for a day during March, 1993, meeting with those responsible for the center's operation, the dean or vice president under whose aegis the center falls, those active in carrying out the work of the center, and the recipients of center services. I also talked to Commission on Higher Education staff responsible for administering the program.

My charge was to review the Centers of Excellence Program, not the operation of any individual center. I have not sought to gather the kind of information that would allow me to make a fair estimate of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular center. Rather, my explorations of the workings and accomplishments of the centers was conducted with an eye to determining how they functioned within the structure and context of the Centers of Excellence Program. My question was not "How has this center succeeded relative to expectations?" but "How has the Centers of Excellence Program succeeded in achieving its purposes in the context of this center?"

The scope of this review does not include budgetary

analysis. Thus I will have reference to budgets only when such reference relates to another point.

The Nature of the Centers of Excellence Program

The main purpose of the Centers of Excellence Program appears to be improving practice in elementary and secondary school curriculum and instruction. As the "Guidelines for Submission of Proposals" for 1992-93 state, the Program aims to "enable eligible institutions to serve as 'state of the art' resource centers for the State in a specific area related to the improvement of teacher preparation programs." The "Guidelines" further stipulate that the area targeted by the center " should be one in which the institution has clearly demonstrated a substantial commitment and potential to develop a regional or national reputation." Thus colleges and universities chosen to develop and carry out the programs were selected because of their existing expertise in the particular area of curriculum and instruction on which the center focuses. They were given substantial funding from the Commission on Higher Education, matched in varying degrees by institutional funding, to carry out the activities delineated in their proposals.

These activities are addressed to several audiences, the emphasis varying from one program to another:

1. the faculty of the center's institution responsible for preparing teachers;
2. school teachers in the institution's area of the State;
3. either or both of these groups statewide;
4. a national audience.

Although the ultimate beneficiaries of the program's activities

are school and university students, in only scattered cases were students the direct recipients of center services, notably the disadvantaged and handicapped students served by the Early Childhood Center at Winthrop University. The direction of activities to teachers--both school and college--is an intended feature of the Centers of Excellence Program.

The variation in emphasis on the particular audiences listed above is a function of the opportunities available to the center, the particular strengths of center personnel, and changes in the thrust of CHE guidelines. Throughout the six years of program operation, the guidelines have emphasized pre-service education, but only two programs, the Early Childhood Center and the Assessment of Student Learning Center are designed with pre-service programs as a major object of their efforts. The work of the others has been mainly with in-service teachers, using university faculty to provide expertise.

FINDINGS

The Centers of Excellence Program, in its present form, is a bold and ambitious undertaking by the State of South Carolina. Its goal is not only to create a group of resource centers for the State but to support them in efforts to establish reputations for that expertise in the southeast and the nation. Though the centers have not to date achieved that anticipated breadth of impact, they can point to many important accomplishments in their regions of South Carolina and throughout the State.

This lesser impact has a variety of causes, including program design, ambitions that exceed the level and duration of funding, center personnel's understanding of their task, and budgetary restrictions that have affected South Carolina as they have much of the rest of the nation. Yet even within these budgetary restrictions the Centers of Excellence Program can achieve results well worth its continuance if the problems are clearly faced and adjustments of expectation and practice made accordingly.

Impact of the Centers

All of the centers have made substantial efforts to establish a statewide presence, except the Center of Excellence in Composition, which was established under circumstances that dictated a more local focus for its first two years. The principal means of gaining attention beyond the centers' immediate region has been summer residential workshops involving teachers from all over South Carolina. This strategy, along with presentations at meetings of statewide organizations and participation in state-level policy formulation, appears not to have had the desired effect: the centers have not become widely known to their broader constituencies nor are they the source to which the groups they seek to serve statewide naturally turn as a source of expertise.

The centers certainly could provide the expertise and are more than willing to do so. They simply have not penetrated their potential audiences' awareness sufficiently to be seen in

that role. The centers' presence in schools is largely local; advisory boards, where they exist, have only limited membership beyond the center's region and do not include a full range of people potentially influential in creating visibility; they involve and are known to few college and university faculty members beyond their own campuses.

The hope for impact beyond South Carolina has not materialized. Most centers have presented accounts of their work at regional and national meetings, with, according to the center reports, gratifying expressions of interest. But indications of continuing national or regional visibility are sparse.

The centers have, in general, had a strong impact on teachers in their regions. Each of the five established centers has conducted a variety of activities for in-service teachers. Those who have participated, usually a significant number in terms of expectations, have been exceptionally enthusiastic about their experiences. The rare opportunity to increase their knowledge and competence through concentrated periods of study with nationally recognized experts, university faculty and colleagues from around the area and state has had a rejuvenating effect. University staff have approached their task in a spirit of collegiality and willingness to learn from the teachers as well as providing expertise, an attitude much appreciated by the teachers and yielding substantial rewards of both insight and morale for the university personnel.

Continuity of the Centers

The CHE funds the centers for four years with the hope that at the end of that period they will be sufficiently well established to sustain themselves. Thus the Commission requires that the institution housing the center demonstrate strong initial support and commit itself to increased levels of funding over the four years. This level of institutional funding should, if continued beyond the four years, provide a base level of support for the center which can be augmented by grants and user fees.

The current budgetary climate in both elementary-secondary and higher education in South Carolina, as elsewhere in the nation, has not been conducive to this scenario. Institutions that have supported centers for four years have tried to be true to their initial expectations, but have not found themselves compelled to continue funding at more than survival level for those centers that have gone (or are about to go) beyond four years. Support from other sources has been or appears likely to be marginal. The Center in Early Childhood Education has, to all intents and purposes, ceased to function, while the Center in Mathematics and Science Education continues largely on the strength of some grants in mathematics which provide release time for the director. The Center of Excellence in Instructional Technology for Special Education, now in its last year of state funding, will go on, but under reduced circumstances that make its future viability uncertain.

The institutions that have sponsored these centers do not feel compelled, especially in a time of budgetary difficulty, to do more than provide makeshift arrangements for continuing their operations. Nor has support been forthcoming from other quarters either to supplement the university's contribution or to let the sponsoring institution know that the center is too important to allow it to dwindle. In short, these centers have not developed a constituency which either has access to funds or influence strong enough to support vigorous efforts to assure the center's continuity.

Why Continuity Is Proving So Difficult

In order to provide for its future, any entity created with grant funds needs to make a compelling case for its continuance beyond the period of initial external funding. The three centers whose four years of CHE funding have ended or is about to end have not made their case with enough people or the right people. The next two centers in terms of "seniority," the Centers for Excellence in Foreign Language and in Composition, are not at this time on their way to doing any better.

The root of their problem lies in the fact that the centers were not chosen with an eye to their relationship to major policy and program initiatives of the State Department of Education and of school systems. Thus, while the centers have done and could continue to do important work with teachers, either the curricular areas in which they operate are not those to which the public schools feel compelled to pay attention, or there is no

endorsement of the particular center by the State Department of Education as a source of expertise to meet a statewide need. Thus when external support for the participation of teachers which the centers provide has disappeared, school systems do not find it a priority to spend scarce dollars of their own on services provided by the center or even to support the center strongly in making the case for expanded funding by its university.

The centers, then, although they are doing well things that are important to do, are not engaged in the work that public schools must attend to. They are not operating at the point where school systems feel pressure from the State or, presumably, from the communities they serve.

The problem does not lie in what the centers have chosen to do, but rather in an insufficient realization on the part of all concerned that the centers' impact and future financial viability is heavily dependent on their alignment with priorities and initiatives that affect school systems widely. The centers are not sufficiently well funded nor is their four-year life long enough for them to create the necessary sense of urgency about their areas of activity. Thus they need to attach themselves to an existing priority.

The centers would not have to be dependent on public policy to make a case for their necessity if they had a strong constituency in support of their activities. Given the absence of state-level endorsement, most of the centers will have to

create that constituency themselves, the only possible exceptions being the Centers for Technology in Special Education and Early Childhood Education which have well-organized community groups with an interest in what they are doing.

No center so far, however, has succeeded in either mobilizing a natural constituency or creating one with any real influence. In general, they have not made a systematic attempt to do so. As far as I could determine, only one or two center directors has met with a school board or a superintendent. While centers are commonly in close contact with the appropriate curriculum coordinators for school systems in their geographic areas, centers have had little success in working with the coordinators statewide and enlisting their enthusiasm. Neither has any center made a successful effort to enlist the advocacy of community groups, such as special education organizations or business people interested in public education.

Thus, lacking a base either in public policy or school and community advocacy, the centers have weak standing within their institutions. Since they have chosen to focus their efforts primarily on in-service programs, they have, with one exception, no group internal to their institutions whom they have helped and who might support them. None has achieved such prestige in the academic world that the institution would find it disadvantageous to its reputation to reduce or eliminate funding. Under those circumstances, continuing support in a time of declining resources is a hard sell indeed.

Expectations for Research and Prestige

The statement of "Characteristics of a Center of Excellence" contained in CHE's request for proposals indicates that centers must have "a clearly defined focus in advanced scholarship, broadly interpreted to include basic and applied research and program development." Through such research and program development, the center "must demonstrate a substantial likelihood of achieving a reputation for excellence, at least at the Southeastern regional level."

The research and development activities of the centers have not resulted in the establishment of such a reputation. Each of the two-year review teams has found it necessary to remind the center that research and visibility beyond its part of the State is a major element of its mission. Each center has made an effort to respond, but success has been limited.

This limited success is at least partially explainable by the dynamics of starting a new program. The centers begin from a standing start. They receive their funding in August and typically spend most of the first year gathering data, finding avenues of communication with their audiences, and preparing for their first major public activity the following summer. By the time the review teams appear in the late winter of their second year, the center is barely beginning to take on a definable shape and philosophy such that center staff would have something to share with colleagues.

Just in the logic of things it would take at least until the

third year of operation before an article about the center and its activities could be written and accepted for publication or a staff member could be included in the program of a national or regional meeting. It is more likely to be during the center's fourth year and beyond before its creators have something meaningful to tell the professional field about research results. Thus some centers may find themselves poised on the edge of achieving a wider reputation just at the point where the major funding ends, but without the means to pursue possibilities aggressively.

The problem, however, does not lie entirely in circumstances. Some centers have not, at the beginning of their activities, taken those steps that might result in wider recognition. Most do not establish specific research agendas and take the steps necessary to begin research activities. Under pressure to get training programs in place, directors understandably but unfortunately postpone action on the research agenda. By the time they can turn their full attention to research and to establishing networks that will lead to recognition of the center, it is too late to achieve useful results within the four years.

Consideration of the specific experiences of the centers provides useful insights. The Mathematics and Science Center at Clemson University, one of the original two centers funded under the restructured Centers of Excellence Program in 1988, undertook six specific activities involving creation of teaching materials

and providing support for in-service and pre-service teachers engaged in particular activities (coaching teams for math competitions; taking the National Teacher Examination). The most successful activity is the creation of a set of problem solving modules in several areas of science and mathematics to be used with students at a variety of grade levels. Sales of the module packages has been quite brisk, not just locally but nationally, and they are scheduled for distribution by a major publisher. Any national visibility the center achieves will be based on this future publication.

This center has produced no research on the efficacy of its products and activities nor is there any systematic evaluation. Evidence of success is anecdotal. Thus, except for the problem solving modules and guidebooks for school mathematics team sponsors and those preparing to take the math portion of the NTE, it has little to share with the profession as evidence of its value as a model or a statewide or regional resource.

The Early Childhood Center at Winthrop University, which concentrated its efforts on serving at-risk and handicapped students in a campus preschool setting, established a master's degree program to prepare teachers for work with these students. This center made a formal attempt to establish a research agenda in its third year, but the person hired to spearhead the effort became ill shortly after assuming his duties, so that his efforts bore no fruit.

This center had three directors in four years. The person

hired to direct the center in its fourth year had an active research program, which he brought with him, but he never involved any of the other center personnel in it. There is some doubt as to whether his agenda was entirely relevant to the purposes of the Center, since much of it involves younger children (birth to age three). When State funding ended and budget circumstances became such that the University was able to make little further contribution to the Center's function, this director left for a more stable position. Personnel who were involved with the center throughout its four years produced one journal article, published in 1993, and developed and validated a rating scale useful to them in their work.

This center's problems in developing a research program stemmed from leadership instability rather than lack of planning. Ultimately, the bulk of the research output was the work of a director who spent only a year with the center and so made only a passing contribution to its reputation, which otherwise was confined to South Carolina and was based largely on some quite successful in-service work.

The Special Education Technology Center at the University of South Carolina has yet to achieve its considerable potential for wider impact for a still different set of reasons. The directors of this center spent the first two years evaluating and purchasing hardware and software and developing a graduate course. It was the third year of operation before they started talking about the center to area, State and national audiences

and inviting the use of the center by people in the schools. Despite two years of substantial activity, the quality of the center and the many ways in which it can and is anxious to support the work of schools has not become generally known.

The original proposers of the center planned to involve the faculty of the University's Special Education Program extensively in research related to the center, for which the possibilities are enormous. To date, no faculty member at USC or any other institution has built a research program around the center. At least part of the problem, I was told by several people, stems from reluctance of the great majority of the Special Education faculty, for whatever reason, to take ownership of the center.

In the case of the Special Education Technology Center, then, lack of wider impact is the result of a late start in publicizing it and lack of use of its research potential by those most likely to want to use it. This center, whose work has an urgency and appeal to clearly defined constituencies which is available to none of the other centers, now finds its funding ending without having established an external base of support.

These three centers differ in the specific circumstances that have disappointed expectations of wider impact. The common thread in these tales is failure to plan and begin early on a research agenda and to develop from the beginning a scheme to make the work of the center widely known.

Role of the Host Universities

The universities that have housed and provided substantial

financial support for the centers entered into original agreements readily enough and with apparent good will. The centers in most cases presented an opportunity to enhance the work of programs and individuals whose work was already bringing distinction to the institution. The centers also provided an avenue for cooperative efforts with the public schools which higher education institutions were feeling increasingly obliged to undertake. In half the cases, these efforts would (and did) involve arts and sciences faculty in addition to education faculty.

For the first two centers to be created in 1987 under the new program, those at Winthrop and Clemson, funding expectations were changed during the course of the grant. While the institutions were prepared to match the CHE contribution at the rate of one institutional dollar for each two State dollars, the expectation was that State dollars would remain constant throughout the four years. In 1989 CHE found it necessary to begin a policy of decreasing its contribution by a set percentage annually in order to award grants for establishing new centers despite level funding for the program. These institutions were put in a position either to increase their contributions to offset CHE's declining one or ask the centers to reduce the scope of their planned activities. In the actual event, Winthrop maintained its former level of funding in year three, despite the reduced CHE grant, then reduced its contribution in the fourth year to match a further diminished CHE grant dollar for dollar.

Clemson maintained its one-for-two match, reducing its contribution proportionate to CHE.

The Clemson model seems, until recently, to be the one to have been followed for the other four centers: both CHE and the institution reduce their funding, so that the centers operate with less money each year. Sometimes CHE provides supplementary funding so that centers can take advantage of particular opportunities. CHE staff has also recently made efforts to get the institutions to maintain or increase their share of funding as the Commission decreases its contribution.

When the CHE funding ends, institutions seem to be resorting to various makeshifts to keep the center afloat. So far these makeshifts appear inadequate, although there are only two actual cases from which to judge and unsupported predictions about a third one based on some partially formulated plans.

Thus institutions have upheld their part of the financial bargain, though they have been hard pressed to go much beyond. What they seem to have failed to contribute is guidance. Those to whom the center directors report are people with an enormous range of responsibilities who have not been able to sit down with the directors and think through the task of designing an activity like this one so that it can be self-supporting or close to it within four or five years. Center directors have been for the most part faculty members who think in terms of offering good programs of instruction. They are not by and large people who think in terms of public relations, politics, and strategic

planning. They need guidance in these matters, but largely they have been left to their own devices, with the kinds of results I have been documenting.

Role of the Commission on Higher Education

The Commission has provided little guidance of this sort either. Commission staff has seen its role as selecting the most likely recipients of the Centers of Excellence grants, approving their budgets and monitoring their activities at appropriate intervals. Keeping their distance in this way is no doubt conditioned by staff's experience of having aroused hostility for trying to intervene in the management of programs clearly given to institutions to run. Nor is there much staff time available to monitor and guide the programs. Having set the guidelines and determined the likelihood that they can be met, CHE sees its role as monitoring, encouragement, and seeing that the check arrives on time. Active intervention usually means burnt fingers.

CHE does use the occasion of the two-year reviews to get centers pointed in the right direction, but by that time it is often too late. An annual meeting of the center directors, which was held for the first time this year, provides an excellent occasion for CHE to nudge centers into position as well as providing an occasion for sharing and support among the directors.

CHE might also build into its guidelines requirements that institutions think through the non-programmatic aspects of center activity more systematically in the planning stage. Selection of

directors who have a broader notion of what administration involves would also help.

Summary of Findings

The centers seem to have been quite successful at providing a variety of education and training activities for different audiences, depending on the focus of each center's activities. Particularly successful has been the work with in-service teachers. Very little has been done to improve the practice of college and university faculty who prepare teachers, either at the institutions that house the centers or more generally throughout the State.

The centers have also played an important role in bringing college and university faculty into productive relationships with public school faculty. The Centers of Excellence Program has been a fine catalyst for achieving school-university cooperation through many kinds of healthy relationships.

The research record of the centers is not impressive. Very little work, either theoretical or applied, has emerged in print or been presented at meetings. Most presentations to professional colleagues have been descriptive accounts of the centers and their activities, rather than the results of systematic studies undertaken with data derived from center activities. The degree to which research, broadly interpreted, has in practice been considered by CHE to be an important activity of the centers is not clear, especially with regard to the first centers funded.

Nor have the centers achieved the goal of becoming resources for the State and models for the region and nation. They have developed the expertise that would qualify them for that role, but have usually not pursued vigorously the activities that would make achievement of such a role possible. Nor is it likely they could have achieved any such role beyond South Carolina within a four year period.

There has been no opportunity to see what might happen if the centers had more than four years to develop, since they do not seem able to sustain themselves beyond the period of CHE support. The institutions that sponsored the centers have not been able to provide more than subsistence funding beyond the four years, nor has any center mobilized the support or prestige that would have led their universities to find such continued funding advantageous. No center has tried systematically to do so.

Nor are the centers supported in their work by connections to highly visible policy or program initiatives of the State Department of Education or other agencies. They work on important matters, but their work is not recognized as essential to State education priorities.

The centers have for the most part been under the direction of people who do not have the entrepreneurial outlook required to make a center survive. They are able people who have been chosen for other, perfectly good reasons. But they have not had the guidance from their own institutions or from CHE that they need.

The Centers of Excellence Program is an admirable strategy of the State of South Carolina, both as to intent and funding. It can probably be made to achieve its intended goals, but it will require some significant changes in the way the program is managed and coordinated with initiatives in public education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving the considerable ambitions the Commission on Higher Education has for the centers will require more than four years of operation. Thus the main task for the centers, apart from the basic one of providing good programs, is finding ways to sustain vigorous activity beyond the period of CHE funding until their utility and reputations are well established.

The money necessary to support that continued activity is most likely to come from any or all of three sources: their own institutions; federal government, corporate, and foundation grant funds; and fees paid by school systems and higher education institutions for staff training. Grant funds in most areas of the curriculum are scarce and highly competitive. They have the further disadvantage of pushing applicants to do what the grantee sees as a high priority rather than what may be more central to the grantee's purposes. An organization that lives on grants ends up doing what money is available to support, rather than what it may think most important to do.

Attracting the interest and commitment of schools and colleges also requires tailoring programs to their needs, but in

this case that tailoring can be done at the time the center is established rather than after three or four years of operation, at which time responding to the grants environment may mean a distortion of established purposes. In other words, the future viability of the centers depends on their alignment with the interests of their primary clientele.

What school systems want, especially in a time of extremely limited training and discretionary funds, is heavily influenced by policy at the State level. They are compelled to respond to State policy mandates and associated programmatic initiatives. If the centers are not an integral part of these policy and program thrusts, they have little chance of deriving funds by providing in-service training. Nor will they gain strong advocacy from school systems by graduating teachers prepared to do what the systems need.

RECOMMENDATION I. The Commission on Higher Education should support only those centers whose goals are closely aligned with major State policy or program initiatives. Concomitantly, the State Department of Education, through its participation in the selection of new centers and monitoring of existing ones, should commit itself to working with the centers that meet this criterion. Carrying out this recommendation means close coordination between CHE and the State Department of Education. If, as it appears to be, the purpose of the Centers of Excellence is to bring colleges and universities into service of the public schools of the State, these two organizations need to work more

closely to determine the most useful areas of focus for the centers. Nothing would better support the long-term viability of the centers than to implement this recommendation. It may be that the Council on Educational Collaboration, with its broad-based membership, is the most useful vehicle for this kind of coordination.

The Commission is probably expecting too much in looking for centers to achieve regional or national visibility in four years. Achieving leadership status in the State within this time is in itself an ambitious goal, especially if the acknowledgement of such leadership by other higher education institutions as well as schools is a part of that status.

RECOMMENDATION 2. The Commission should set achievement of statewide, as opposed to regional and national, resource and leadership status as the four-year goal for the centers. A center will not achieve this status unaided. While there is much any program housed at a particular institution can do to help itself, very few institutions in South Carolina have a statewide presence in the education community, their work and strong contacts being mostly in their own regions of the State. They will need active promotion by the Commission and, one would hope, by the State Department of Education, both of which have strong statewide presences.

RECOMMENDATION 3. The Commission staff should actively and systematically promote the programs and leadership role of the centers, enlisting the support of the State Department of

Education, the Legislature and other appropriate State agencies to the degree possible. If the CHE believes in the centers, it ought to promote them. If it ceases to believe in the value or effectiveness of a particular center, it ought to terminate funding.

Experience to date suggests that the center directors need more than help in increasing the visibility of their activities. They need guidance in the non-programmatic elements of their jobs, more than is likely to be forthcoming from their institutions.

RECOMMENDATION 4. The Commission staff member responsible for the Centers of Excellence Program should continue to meet at least annually--and preferably more often--with the center directors as a group. These meetings should focus on those matters that experience has shown center directors tend to neglect: research agendas, leadership strategies, ways of increasing visibility, kinds of contacts that need to be made and ways that the centers can support each other. I understand that one such meeting has been held recently and that future meetings on a regular basis are both desired and planned by all involved.

Some of the problems that lead to the foregoing recommendations can be obviated by some changes in the criteria of selection and introducing some additional considerations into the selection process.

RECOMMENDATION 5. The Commission should require that applications for funding, both original and continuing, contain a

systematic plan for developing an influential constituency for the center. Center directors need to cultivate school boards, superintendents, parent groups, statewide organizations, and business leaders to the degree that such potential sources of support exist for a given center. These groups need to be represented on advisory committees and center personnel should be in regular contact with them. Except for the statewide organizations representing the curriculum area in which the center is operating, existing centers have paid far too little attention to these sources of potential support and influence.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Original applications should contain a plan for achieving a position of leadership in the State within four years. The leaders of the center should already have a reputation for special authority in the center's area of operation. The plan should indicate how the center will go about translating this authority into acknowledged leadership.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Applications for original and continuing funding should contain specific plans for developing and carrying out a research agenda. If a center is to achieve national or regional prominence in 6-8 years, it must plan from the beginning for the carrying out of research in connection with its activities. It will not do to spend the first two years concentrating on programs, waiting until the third year to think seriously about research. To be sure, a center must have some activities underway before research can begin, but the activities and the research connected with them must be planned together.

This need for simultaneous planning has as a correlate the identification and active involvement in center activities of people committed to carrying out that research.

While evidence of this kind of forethought can be a formal element of the proposal, some other significant factors in choosing centers to be funded requires sensitivity by the selectors to key factors in their success potential.

RECOMMENDATION 8. Selectors should look for evidence that the center will have strong support within the unit in which it is housed. It goes without saying that the administrator who will be responsible for identifying institutional funds to support the center must be strongly supportive. Other faculty members in the unit must share that enthusiasm. In at least two of the six cases the center of excellence appears to have been formed around the interests of a single faculty member and is not predicated on general departmental support. In such a situation, colleagues who should be counted on for support are likely to be resentful instead and, in tight budgetary times, will be only too anxious to throw the center overboard and reclaim the institution's share of its budget.

RECOMMENDATION 9. Those involved in the selection process should look for evidence that the proposed center director has a good sense of the non-programmatic, particularly the entrepreneurial aspects, of the director's role. No activity funded with soft money, unless it is self-terminating at the end of the grant period, succeeds without good strategic planning and

aggressive promotion within its potential base of support. As queasy as academics may feel about the notion of entrepreneurship, centers and institutes cannot survive without it. Entrepreneurial activities never need to be intellectually dishonest and undignified, but they do need to be pursued systematically.

I do not believe that more money is the key to the ultimate success of the Centers of Excellence Program. Even if it were, it would be hard to know what the source of additional funding might be. There are, however, a couple of recommendations regarding funding that seem feasible.

RECOMMENDATION 10. Institutions sponsoring the centers should be required to maintain support at least at an even level throughout the four years of funding, even as CHE funds are reduced. If the sponsoring universities reduce their funding proportionate to reduced CHE funding, as has been the case with existing centers, when the four year grant period ends their contributions will not be large enough to sustain the center. Universities entering into the Centers of Excellence Program should expect that their support will have to remain in place longer than four years and should be positioned to provide those funds. They also should feel entitled to set conditions for the Center's demonstrating its viability by generating its own funds within a reasonable period of time or ceasing operations.

RECOMMENDATION 11. The Commission should consider using a small portion of currently available funds to provide fifth-year

"bridge grants" to centers whose work shows promise of achieving program goals but needs another year to develop. These "bridge grants" should not exceed \$25,000 and should be used specifically in support of activities that will help the center develop regional and national visibility or acquire major external funding. These funds should be made available only to those centers that have already achieved the goal of leadership in the State. The provision of these funds may serve as an additional incentive to institutions sponsoring the centers to maintain their support and encourage centers that have done well but which may be operating in an area in which external funding is scarce.

CHE should not expect that all centers will be equally successful and should anticipate that some centers will not do well at all. Some centers should cease operations when the funding expires.

The Centers of Excellence Program is a good idea and can be made to succeed better than it has. The key will be to acknowledge frankly problems of coordination with the elementary and secondary education sector and the practical problems of making operations like these succeed. It will not help to wish that people and circumstances were different from what they are.

These recommendations involve dealing self-consciously with the problems that five years of experience with the Centers of Excellence Program have amply illustrated. They do not imply that the program has been unsuccessful or that the people

involved in it have failed to do their work well and conscientiously. Indeed, just the opposite is true. Achieving success in making the centers statewide resources is a matter of better interagency coordination and more attention to positioning of the centers. It is emphatically not a matter of the quality of the centers' work, which has been quite high. Achieving regional and national visibility will require more time and a higher level of continuing support for those institutions capable of achieving such stature.

I appreciate the cooperation of the Commission and all the center and university staffs with whom I worked. They have been unfailingly kind and helpful. If my judgements have sometimes been harsh, I hope they will be useful in bringing the program to its full and very considerable potential.

SUMMARIES OF INDIVIDUAL CENTER ACTIVITIES

These sketches are not intended to be full accounts of the activities undertaken by the centers. Neither are they evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of the centers, although I recognize that some statements will be taken, not unfairly, to imply judgements.

The main purpose of these sketches is to illustrate the major conclusions of the report. Consequently, I talk about each of the centers in terms of those matters that seem most relevant to the Centers of Excellence Program as a whole: constituencies served, research programs, impact. They are attempts to state briefly what each center has done to improve practice and to become a resource for the State.

I have sequenced the sketches in order of "seniority," dealing first with the earliest centers to be funded. Thus readers may have some sense of the way in which the program as a whole has progressed. Because they have been in operation longer, the first centers established will have done more and require more extended descriptions.

Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Education for Handicapped and At-risk Children-Winthrop University

I. Reason for Selection

Winthrop has a strong laboratory pre-school program (the McFeat School) located on the campus and in the school's director, Rosemary Althouse, a person widely recognized in the State for her expert knowledge of and success with young children. The focus on handicapped and at-risk students was, however, a stretch for the University staff.

II. Pre-service Preparation Activities

The University successfully implemented a master's degree program in special education with emphasis on early childhood education, which enrolled ten students, eight of whom completed it and are working in the field. The program has been discontinued.

A series of videotapes of handicapped students enrolled in the McFeat School were made and are used in undergraduate classes.

During the center's second summer, ten undergraduate students, recruited from predominantly black colleges and universities in the State, participated in an institute on teaching handicapped and at-risk children in a preschool setting.

III. In-service Activities

The center conducted a variety of in-service activities of varying length, including an intensive two week summer course for preschool teachers and several short training seminars for both teachers and administrators.

A major undertaking was the Rural Telementoring Project, designed to connect teachers working with preschool students in rural areas through a computer system. The hardware and software were put in place and teachers trained in the use of it, but it was little used for the kind of sharing of questions and information for which it was designed. After a formal evaluation of its use, the project was discontinued.

The center also offered some seminars for parents and one for trainers of trainers.

Staff of the McFeat School educated themselves in the whole matter of working with handicapped preschool children. This preparation and the experience in working with the 11 children enrolled in the school has resulted in a substantial reservoir of expertise.

IV. Research and Evaluation

Several large research projects were at one time or another associated with the project, but the only ones fully emerging from it were the creation and validation of an instrument for assessing the degree to which early intervention programs are providing family services and an article on fostering social development in children with disabilities.

Apart from the evaluation of the rural telementoring project, no estimate of the center's impact has been undertaken except for an enumeration of the numbers of people served through the various activities.

V. Work with Other Higher Education Faculty-The first activity of the center was a series of three staff development conferences for faculty of Winthrop University and other higher education institutions in the State.

VI. Other Activities

Eleven at-risk and handicapped students from the Rock Hill area were enrolled in the McFeat School over the course of the project, the cost of tuition and transportation subsidized by center funds.

VII. Leadership Activities

The network of rural teachers was organized by the center. The center also organized a conference of school and higher education faculty and Department of Education staff with the purpose of establishing common goals and objectives for preparing teachers for the field of early childhood special education. (No followup on this conference, attended by 37 people, occurred.)

VIII. Impact

The graduate program prepared eight people for work in the field. They are all employed in relevant positions, carrying their knowledge to others.

Several courses and in-service seminars for teachers and workshops for parents reached a substantial number of people, some activities with more intensity than others.

The staff of the center themselves developed a high level of expertise. Their interest and enthusiasm spilled over to the University's education faculty generally and caused some continuing modifications of the curriculum to reflect concern for preschool handicapped children. The videotapes of work with handicapped children are used in classes and in workshops with teachers and parents. Hundreds of pre-service teachers have observed the activities of the School.

The eleven students enrolled in the McFeat School benefitted.

The center was not able to establish a position of acknowledged leadership in the State or to develop a group of people who looked to them for assistance. Recognition outside the State is difficult to determine but is not widespread.

A small amount of training and technical assistance was provided to a couple of local schools, with continuing beneficial effect.

IX. The Future

The center is essentially defunct. The University was not able to continue support for activities. Enrollment of at-risk and handicapped students in the McFeat School has fallen to two students, largely because most such students cannot attend without considerable financial and logistical support which the center has no funds to provide. The staff's expertise is thus largely unused. The change after two years in expected level of CHE funding, coupled with general higher education funding problems, clearly played a role in the dwindling of center activities.

The last of the three center directors left the University in the year after CHE funding ended for a more stable position

with another kind of organization in another state. He took his research programs and grants with him.

Without funding, Winthrop staff members who have been associated with the center cannot either undertake the activities or mount the programs that would allow them to consolidate leadership in the State.

Since the issue of pre-school handicapped and at-risk students does not have a well defined group of people with a concern about it, it is difficult to know what group it would be that the center would lead unless it created this group itself. The situation was not helped by the lack of involvement of public school personnel in planning the center and the fact that the center did not establish an advisory board around which general support for its activities might have cohered.

Thus center staff were never able, during the period of CHE funding, to create a cohesive group around the center's focus of concern. This situation might be attributed in part to several causes, including continual changes of leadership (three directors in four years) with each director having a different agenda, the failure of the rural telementoring network, and a lack of follow through on initiatives, such as the goal-setting conference for the training of teachers in the field, that might have established leadership.

Center in Mathematics and Science Education-Clemson University

I. Reason for Selection

Clemson has an impressive recent history of innovation in science and mathematics teaching which has earned it a national reputation. Several science and mathematics faculty have good relationships with the schools. The University is the largest producer of mathematics and science teachers in South Carolina. At the time the center was established, Clemson had several active grant awards in areas related to center activities.

II. Activities

The center undertook to carry out six specific activities under CHE funding. All were directed at in-service teachers.

1. Creation of a set of problem solving modules for use by teachers at various grade levels in several math and science fields.
2. Developing a statewide mathematics contest program, including support for coaches of secondary school mathematics teams.
3. Developing instructional packages, including video materials to help teachers with instruction in hard-to-teach topics.
4. Teaching advanced placement courses via television.
5. Establishing a program for teaching materials evaluation.
6. Expanding a clearinghouse of information on training opportunities available to science and mathematics

teachers.

This center's agenda was unique in that it developed a specific set of activities nearly all of which were self-terminating. Thus it could cease operations when its funding ended without withdrawing a service, with the exception of the clearinghouse and the mathematics contests, on which people had come to depend.

This set of activities in both planning and execution represented strong cooperation between University faculty and school teachers in the area. Internal relationships between math and science faculty and counterparts in the College of Education were quite good, as is reflected in the sponsorship of the center by both the College of Science and the College of Education.

III. Research and Evaluation

No research has emerged from this center's activities, but developmental work, especially the problem solving modules, has been valuable. No evaluation of the center's products or impacts has been conducted.

IV. Leadership

The center has established a position of leadership among science and mathematics faculty, particularly the latter, in Pickens County and adjacent areas. Statewide leadership seems limited to the mathematics contest areas and coordination of some additional mathematics activities. The center's director serves on the Governor's Mathematics and Science Advisory Board. The problem solving modules have created some national visibility and could create more when the materials are regularly published. The center has also been active outside the State in the conduct of in-service programs in North Carolina.

V. Impact

The problem solving modules are a clear success and the math contest program continues as a strong part of center activities. The center helped to bring math/science and education faculty together internally, although with the slowing of center activities following the end of CHE funding those relationships are decaying.

The clearinghouse continues in operation but at a low level of activity. The teaching of advanced placement courses by television never got off the ground, although courses were prepared in two areas. The inability of schools to invest in the hardware necessary to make the program run is at least partially responsible for its current inactivity. Eight videotapes on difficult-to-teach topics in three subjects were completed and a supply of tapes prepared, but there has been little demand for them. Materials evaluations were conducted in math and biology.

The existence of the center and its range of activities is felt by many at Clemson to have played a role in acquiring a very large grant for high school biology curriculum development. This

grant is not, however, administered through the center. However, an NSF mathematics curriculum development grant of over a half million dollars is administered through the center, bringing the total of such grant funds generated by the center since its inception to \$2.5 million.

VI. Future

The center hangs on, supported by 25 percent release time for the director and some grants he has been able to generate. The center is now solely under the aegis of the College of Science and may soon come entirely under the direction of the Department of Mathematics. Thus it is losing its intercollegiate and interdisciplinary character. Much of the problem of finding an appropriate administrative home for the center stems from some more general internal controversies about who retains the overhead for externally funded projects that are associated with more than one unit.

If Clemson becomes one of the "hubs" in the State Systemic Initiative for which NSF funding is being sought, the center role may be strengthened through association with that activity.

Center of Excellence in Instructional Technology for Special Education-University of South Carolina

I. Reason for Selection

The center appears to have been selected solely on the strength of its original co-director, Dr. Sandra Parsons, and her work with technology for visually impaired students. Until this year, the center, by design, focused solely on this group and the learning disabled, with visual impairment being the more prominent. With Dr. Parsons' departure for another institution and the retirement of the other co-director, the emphasis is being broadened.

II. Pre-service Activities

The center and its resources are in the process of being well integrated into the training of students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. A graduate course, "Technology for Special Populations," is required for all graduate students in special education. Two other graduate courses make extensive use of the center. Students in several courses, both graduate and undergraduate, special and regular education, visit the center at least once during the semester.

III. In-service Activities

The center conducts an annual summer institute in special education technology for 12 teachers from around the State. A series of in-service workshops for teachers and administrators was held in May of 1992.

One original idea for the center was to be a place where teachers could come to see and evaluate the best available

technology, both software and hardware. The center spent most of its efforts in its first two years developing this collection, which in the areas of visual handicap and learning disabilities is quite impressive. The resource has not, however, become well known in the area. Part of the problem is a lack of time and resources for staff to offer workshops in school districts that would acquaint teachers and supervisors with the center's resources and how to use them. That effort has expanded in the past year.

The center has done no work with college and university faculty elsewhere in the State.

IV. Research and Evaluation

The process of exploring and evaluating available products was, in one sense, a major research project in itself. In the center's third year of operation, staff made presentations on the nature of the center and the process of establishing such a facility for State and national audiences. Journals and newsletters have contained written accounts of the center's work.

The initial application anticipated use of the center by USC's special education faculty as a locus for their own research. Little has so far taken place.

No formal evaluation of the center and its activities has been undertaken since the Commission's two-year review in April, 1991.

V. Leadership

The center did little before the current year to mobilize and involve its strong, active and well-organized natural constituency of teachers and parent groups in its activities. No external advisory board was established until the end of the third year of operation. It met once at the end of that year. Neither does there seem to have been an effort to establish formal relationships with the statewide organizations of special educators or parent groups, either locally or statewide. In general, externally directed efforts have not been systematic.

VI. Impact

The center has had an identifiable impact on pre-service training at USC and is beginning to explore its potential in working with in-service teachers. It has had no impact on faculty of other higher education institutions and none on the research programs of USC faculty.

The strong collection of materials and augmentative hardware that has been assembled is ready for much wider use.

VII. Future

The center is in its last year of CHE funding. The USC College of Education seems committed to continuing its operation. Current thinking would have the day-to-day operation of the center come under the supervision of the Director of the Educational Technology Center, in whose area it is physically

housed. A member of the Special Education faculty would be responsible for determining center policy and program. Whether a staff whose time is entirely committed to the Special Education Technology Center would remain in place is uncertain. Given the demands for depth of knowledge about the center's materials necessary to that staff's effective functioning, such a dedication of time and effort specifically to the center would seem important.

Equally important will be the availability of funds to keep the materials up to date. With the rapid development that characterizes all computer technology being no different for special education, the center will become a fossil unless its holdings are continually updated.

The center's long-term viability is dependent on its expanding its contacts in the schools and the special education community.

Center of Excellence in Foreign Language Instruction-Furman University

I. Reason for Selection

Furman has a very large foreign language faculty for an institution its size. It is a generally active and innovative group.

The center was originally designed to be run cooperatively with USC-Spartanburg. While some USC-S faculty remain active, any formal affiliation with the public institution has disappeared.

II. Activities

Nearly all activities are directed at in-service teachers. A few pre-service teachers have taken part in courses and institutes. Most offerings have been intensive summer courses, which have been extremely well received, with many participants coming back for a second and third course. One course has been offered during each academic year. Both institutes and courses are applicable to graduate degrees. While funds were available, the center awarded several summer travel abroad grants to in-service teachers. Efforts to have these grants support research projects have not produced the desired results.

The center has made special efforts to support elementary school foreign language teaching, particularly through two projects with nearby schools.

III. Leadership

The foreign language teaching community in the State is not large and has few strong educational opportunities available to school teachers, so that Furman's offerings have been very welcome to teachers from all over the state. The program's staff has been active in developing the State foreign language curriculum framework and helping at least one technical college revise its foreign language offerings.

Efforts to develop an on-going local advisory group, made up of educators and community and business leaders have not been successful. The group functioned well in helping to get the center started, but does not seem willing in this, the third year of center operations, to assume a role again.

IV. Research and Evaluation

The only specific research product has been an article in the International Education Encyclopedia on elementary school foreign language teaching, the area in which the center is attempting to focus its activities. Efforts to involve teachers in classroom research on foreign language teaching have not borne much fruit.

Individual courses offered by the center have been effectively evaluated. The regular two-year review of the center provided a useful evaluation of activities to date.

V. Impact

The center's activities have been enthusiastically received by teachers from all over the State and by the two local elementary schools with which staff have worked. Of all the centers this one has had the most statewide visibility, largely because it serves a compact and under-served group of teachers.

Potential for wider impact lies in the center's ability to develop a reputation in the elementary school foreign language teaching area.

VI. Future

Continued funding for the center at a level that will allow it to reach its potential will be difficult to achieve. Furman University has to date been quite supportive, but its funds are limited and it may not be able to keep the center active for as long as it will take, after CHE funding, to achieve a reputation that will help it attract grant funds. Foreign language teaching, especially in the elementary school, is not a high priority for granting agencies.

A possible source of funding is Greenville-area business, much of which is foreign-owned and employs foreign nationals. The center has not to date been able to interest this group in its work. Neither has there been an attempt to forge an alliance with the Greenville and Spartanburg public school systems which might leverage this business support.

This center is the clearest illustration of the disjunction between a center's focus and public priorities. Increasing student study of foreign languages and improving foreign language teaching is not a major public priority. Foreign language instruction in elementary schools is even less so.

Center of Excellence in Composition-Coastal Carolina College

I. Reason for Selection

USC Coastal was asked to take on this center when another institution in region, which had originally proposed it, felt unable to meet its commitments. The proposal was in fact written by staff of the Marion High School, which was to have been and has been the primary locus of project activities.

As a result of the shift of the program from one institution to another, the center got started a few months later than other centers have. While it is technically nearing the end of its second year of funding, it has actually been underway for less than 18 months.

II. Activities

The center focuses on improving writing across the curriculum in high schools. Thus this past summer's activities focused on eight Marion High School faculty in six disciplines who attended a summer conference and workshop on the teaching of writing in the disciplinary context and the use of computers to support the teaching of writing. These teachers have, during the academic year, been conducting classroom research projects related to the teaching of composition. They are supported by Coastal Carolina faculty.

In addition, the center conducted a conference and institute for eight pre-service English teachers from the College and eight in-service English teachers.

III. Research and Evaluation

The classroom research projects remain the only research activity in this young program, but they are, according to all reports, coming along well.

The center has just had its regular review prior to funding for two additional years.

IV. Leadership

Since the program has focused entirely on the Marion High School Collaborative Project, it has not had an opportunity to establish a role elsewhere. Staff in surrounding school systems have taken an interest in the Marion High School work and indicated an interest in becoming part of similar activities. The opportunity for leadership in the Pee Dee is thus clearly present.

V. Impact

An unanticipated benefit has been the effect of the center in reviving the activities of the Coastal Area Writing Project, which had been in decline. A key staff member of the center is also director of the CAWP, so that the two units collaborate with each other and supplement each other's work.

There is also a strong potential for impact of the center on the College's own writing programs, which are currently in a

state of flux.

VI. Future

The center carried out its promised agenda fully and effectively. The College's administration is committed to holding up its end of the bargain.

The major question is the breadth of impact the center will have. The potential in its part of the State is very large, but any broader impact will probably be slower in coming and will require extended support by the College after CHE funding. Just as crucial will be a State initiative in English composition to which the center can attach itself and for which it can provide the expertise it is now beginning to develop. The credibility of its efforts will also depend on the work of the College's own faculty, apart from the English department group, in improving practice in teaching composition across the curriculum.

Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning- University of South Carolina

I. Reason for Selection

The center's credibility is based on the work of its director, Joseph Ryan. It is not clear who, beyond the center's staff, has an interest in the success of this undertaking. Dr. Ryan and the associate director, Dr. Teri Kuhs, will have to create their own audience.

II. Activities

The center is in its first year. The only formal activity, organized very quickly but quite effectively, was a February workshop on "Trends and Practices in the Assessment of Student Learning," attended by college and university faculty and administrators from around the State. For the workshop, center staff had prepared reviews of trends in non-traditional evaluative strategies in seven major teaching areas.

This center's focus, unlike the others, is exclusively on teachers of teachers. The major purpose is to get those on whom future teachers will model their behaviors, both education and arts and sciences faculty, to improve their practices in assessing student learning.

Center staff have scheduled an extensive program of speaking engagements throughout the State during the spring to interest faculty in their work, as well as some summer workshops and an institute for pre-service teachers.

III. Leadership

Center staff have organized at least one meeting with other Centers of Excellence directors to consider cooperative ventures. The February workshop also, in the composition of the invited attendees, indicated a determination to take on a statewide role. The composition of the statewide advisory committee, with whom

they have now met twice, reflects a similar orientation.

IV. Impact

While it is much too early to make any assessment of impact, one should note that center personnel have already begun to work with USC instructors and appear in their classes. The center also has several successful authentic assessment activities underway at USC that vividly illustrate the effectiveness of the strategies they are trying to teach and promote.

V. Future

More than any other center staff group, this one recognizes the importance of active promotion of the work of the center. Having no organized constituency at all, they are in the process of trying to create one and have been most thoughtful and assiduous in their efforts.