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THE UNIVERSITY GOES TO MORRIS

by

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Educational history will likely report that no state has studied its higher educational problems more intensively during the last two decades than Minnesota. In addition to much research by individual faculty members, the Association of Minnesota Colleges, various administrative and teaching departments of the University and of the State Colleges, five state-wide commissions have reviewed problems of post-high school education. The Minnesota Commission on Higher Education began its work right after World War II and published a major report in 1950. The Minnesota Commission on Vocational and Higher Education continued the work of the previous commission between 1951 and 1953. The Governor's Committee on Higher Education gave its attention to these problems during 1956, and the Legislative Commissions on Higher Education and Agricultural Schools reviewed previous studies and made new ones of their own between 1957 and 1959.

One of the most persistently maintained positions in these reports has been that Minnesota must give attention to the so-called "barren areas" of western Minnesota. The last three studies mentioned contained first the suggestion and then the recommendation that the University's Agricultural Schools in western Minnesota be developed into collegiate institutions. Both Legislative Commissions were specific about these recommendations in their 1959 reports.

The Legislative Commission on Agricultural Schools recommended in part that:

"The Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota augment the recent study of the Institute of Agriculture of the outlying schools of agriculture by the preparation of buildings and administrative plans for the development of four-year college branches for resident and non-resident students at the Northwest and West Central Agricultural Schools,

and that the results of this study be presented to the 1959 legislature."

The Commission further recommended that:

"The Legislature of the State of Minnesota appropriate the funds determined by the Board of Regents to be necessary for the establishment of college instruction at the Northwest and West Central Schools of Agriculture according to the following time-table:

Fall 1960—First and second-year college students admitted.

Fall 1961—Third-year college students admitted.

Fall 1962—Fourth-year college students admitted."

The Legislative Commission on Higher Education recommended:

"That the Board of Regents be requested to develop collegiate programs at the University Agricultural Schools beginning with Crookston and Morris, and that adequate funds be provided for this purpose."

The two most relevant outcomes of the 1959 Legislative Session included action urging the Regents to continue to study the feasibility of establishing collegiate work at their Morris and Crookston schools and a new assignment given the Legislative Research Commission.

The LRC was requested to study "the feasibility of the establishment of a State College in west central and southwestern Minnesota."

In the general context of studies it should also be noted that independent of Legislative and other commission studies, many members of the University faculty and administration have shared the concern for the future educational development of the state as it relates to western Minnesota. Underlying most

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attempts to forecast and assist in planning this development have been the studies of a wide variety of population characteristics of this area. A great deal of research has been conducted by Drs. Marshall, Nelson, Peterson, Archer, Berdie, Eckert, Francis, Keller, Corcoran, Stecklein, and others of the University faculty, on such subjects as population trends, levels of and factors in educational development, and the influence of selected conditions upon the decisions of young people about their education.

While the University reactivated its study approach in autumn, 1959, to the western Minnesota problem, an LRC subcommittee also began work on its assignment. In this connection the specific question was raised with the University: "What will be the effect upon a branch of the University at Morris of the establishment of a State College in south central or southwestern Minnesota?"

Here, as in its own studies, the University was confronted with two basic and long-considered questions:

- 1) Is establishment of college-level work feasible in west central and southwestern Minnesota?
- 2) How might the University contribute to the development of such a program?

The purpose of this paper is to focus sharply on these two questions, without attempting to explore other ramifications and considerations of the developments at Morris.

In approaching the first question it is first necessary to take a look at Minnesota's population. In a state where the people have built

a distinguished University and an enviable record for educational achievement, Dr. Lowry Nelson found in 1940 that only 52.7 per cent of the 16-17 year old boys and girls in the rural farm population were enrolled in school.¹ But a striking change occurred in the decade 1940-50.

While the national figure of high school attendance for 16-17 year old white farm youth increased from 60.8 per cent to 67.2 per cent, the Minnesota figure improved from 52.7 per cent to 72.1 per cent. The state's position improved from that of being 40th in the United States to being 24th.

Of specific significance are the marked advances made in certain west central and southwestern counties. In 1940, 70.9 per cent of all the Minnesota boys and girls 16 and 17 years of age were in high school. By 1950 this had been increased to 80.1 per cent. But the following improvements were made in two counties immediately served by Morris:

	Attendance Percentage		<i>Position improvement among 87 Minnesota counties</i>
	1940	1950	
Grant	64.8	82.3	Plus 23
Stevens	63	81.9	Plus 32

In eight of the 23 western counties high school attendance rates exceeded the state average by 1950, and in 19 of the 23 they exceeded the United States average.²

While over one-third of the population of the state resided in the western half of the state in 1940, two-thirds of those in this western half lived in the "rural-farm" population category. By 1950 the population in "rural-farm" and "urban and rural-urban" classifications in that half of Minnesota were divided almost equally.

The 1950 population distribution in the 23 counties principally involved (Rock, Nobles, Jackson, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, Yellow Medicine, Renville, Lac Qui Parle, Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Big Stone, Swift, Traverse, Stevens, Pope, Grant, Douglas, Wilkin, and Otter Tail) showed several shifts. Fourteen of the 23 counties lost population between 1940 and 1950. The 23 counties as a whole declined from 401,754 in 1940 to 399,475 in 1950 for a loss of 0.6 per cent. This is a period when Hennepin County increased 18.9 per cent and Ramsey County increased 14.6 per cent. Out-

¹Nelson "Marked Progress Made by Minnesota in Rural Education 1940-1950" University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, 1953.

²Nelson "Marked Progress by Minnesota in Rural Education 1940-1950."

side of the 23-county area (or in 64 counties) the state increased 8.1 per cent and the state as a whole 6.8 per cent.³

The net effect has been a further decrease in the role of the "rural-farm" category in the 23-county picture.

In the six counties immediately contiguous to Morris (which is located in Stevens County) the rural farm population declined from 51,240 in 1940 to 43,130 in 1950. The urban population over the same period increased from 13,558 to 18,771 and the rural non-farm increased from 24,181 to 26,401.

Coupled with migration from the farm and heightened interest in high school attendance has been a strong effort in many of these counties to reorganize their school districts to achieve more effective programs of high school offerings. Traverse County, for example between 1947-59 reduced the number of its school districts from 60 to 7—for a total reduction of 53 school districts. Grant County reduced the number from 71 to 11.

Increased consolidation has been accompanied by a marked increase in high school subject offerings such as vocational agriculture. In 1946 there were 115 departments of vocational agriculture in the state high school system. By 1959 the number reached 289. This increase in availability of agricultural education in high school has had the effect of offering young people an opportunity to study agriculture within the normal structure of the high school. This factor accounts in part at least for declining enrollments of Minnesota youngsters in the University's Morris and Crookston agricultural schools.

A number of preliminary unpublished studies suggest that the improvement in high school attendance in the western area has been reflected by increases in numbers of high school graduates and in college attendance.

The evidence therefore seems to suggest that many population characteristics of west central and southwestern Minnesota underwent rather marked changes between 1930 and 1950. And there are no striking reasons to doubt that the changes between 1940-50 continued during the decade of the "fifties." These changes include migration from the farms into the towns and cities, a reorganization of school operations with marked efforts at consolidation in many areas, and a marked increase in the interest of young people in continuing their education beyond the legally

required age. Clearly, too, there has been notable support in the Legislature for the University and the state colleges from the elected representatives of most of these counties.

All of this would appear to suggest that the answer to our first question be "yes." It might be reasonable to attempt to develop another four-year college in western Minnesota.

What then could the University's contribution be to the development of such a college program.

While an increasing percentage of the young people of western Minnesota may be showing some interest in continuing their education beyond a minimal level, the evidence is far from complete that there are a sufficient number who would want to do four years of college work at a college located in that area.

One recent study⁴ shows that only 9.56 per cent of the young people in west central Minnesota were attending Minnesota colleges, but because this study counted only "students in attendance at Minnesota colleges" it undoubtedly underestimates the actual rate of attendance. There may be significance, however, in the fact that in Clay County—the location of both Concordia College and Moorhead State College—the percentage increased only to 14.03. If the changes found elsewhere in rates of college attendance since 1950 occurred in this area, too, comparable figures would be higher.

A further problem relates to the developments in the over-all population picture, some of which have already been indicated. The total population resident in the 23 counties has declined. The percentage of the population of college age has declined at a still sharper rate. No large cities are centrally located. In the entire 23 county area Fergus Falls (Otter Tail County) is the largest city and is located on the northern fringe of the area, almost midway between Moorhead State College and St. Cloud State College. Apart from Fergus Falls, in 1950 there was no city over 10,000 in the entire 23 county area.

It has been firmly advocated by several of the Commissions already referred to that junior college development might provide a sound base for meeting the higher educational needs of western Minnesota. But the small size of the communities and the distance between them meant only a few would provide enroll-

³1950 Census of Population, Vol. II "Characteristics of Population, Part 23, Minnesota."

⁴De Boer, Keller and Dowell: "A preliminary survey of selected factors associated with local proposals for the establishment of junior colleges in northwest and west central areas in Minnesota" 1957. (These figures are adopted from an unpublished study in college and university attendance in Minnesota during 1949 and 1950 by Roy Francis)

ment sufficient for a minimal operation. A resident type institution (with dormitories, food facilities, etc.) might, therefore, more adequately meet the needs of the region.

It was consideration of this latter which began to suggest the role the University might play. While there is quite evidently now a greater readiness to support a four-year college in western Minnesota than has been true at any time in the history of the state, the question of whether or not the region involved will furnish the enrollment that would be required for another institution along with the existing public and private institutions already available in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa—remains unanswered. This is the unanswered question for the Regents and for the Legislature.

But with the question mark as large as it is, the University found itself in a unique position to offer the State the chance to test the feasibility of collegiate level work in west central Minnesota at a minimum cost to the people of the State. A plant estimated at a replacement value of approximately five million plus dollars is available. The relatively small numbers of children attending colleges from these counties allowed marked room for increase. If the availability of a new program attracts additional youth such that Morris achieves a satisfactory enrollment level, there would be no marked displacement of students from any existing institution.

Because the potential for enrollment appears to be present and because unusually appropriate facilities are available, the Board of Regents, on October 31, 1959, reached the decision to offer first-year college courses at Morris—on an experimental basis—beginning in the fall of 1960.

A program has been developed by a special advisory committee under the chairmanship

of Vice President Malcolm M. Willey (the committee consisted of Dean Marcia Edwards, Dean Theodore Fenske, Mr. Clinton Johnson, Dean E. W. McDiarmid, Professor Lloyd Short, Dean R. E. Summers and Dean Frank Verbrugge) that will offer a fair test of student interest. The community has raised in excess of \$60,000 to help purchase necessary supplies, library materials, etc. The Agricultural School will divert some of its teaching funds which, when added to tuition income earmarked for teaching purposes, permits the program to be started without invading the University's budgeted resources. Numerous other problems are yet to be faced, of course.

But the experiment will permit the state to test the major question confronting the people in this entire matter: Will the young people of the western counties register in a college established in their midst? While only one academic quarter of experience will be available when the Legislature meets (the registration experience of the fall quarter, 1960), the Legislature will be given this information. This will provide the Legislature with important information which no study heretofore could yield. The Legislature will then make its decision with respect to the continuation of the experiment.

Nothing in this article is meant to suggest that the people in any part of Minnesota are lacking in interest in having outstanding educational facilities available in their state. The evidence is in the record that the people of western Minnesota and their elected representatives have shared in building this University and all the educational facilities of Minnesota. The problem is to determine what is the best way to make higher educational opportunity more available to college-age youth of western Minnesota.

