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The priorities for providing student services on a metropolitan campus differ somewhat from those on the traditional campus. One of the high-priority needs is availability of day care for students, faculty, and staff. The sequence of planning for a day care center at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, is described from initial needs assessment through consideration of various funding and operations options, the operations contract, and quality control mechanisms. The center at WSU implements a cooperative arrangement in which the center is owned by the university but operated by the private sector. The success of the center is assessed over the first four years of operation and demonstrates a viable, cost-clearing alternative to the traditional, state-subsidized laboratory school model.

Providing Day Care for a Metropolitan Campus

A University/Public Sector Collaboration

The students of metropolitan universities are likely to be older, fully or partly employed, married, and have children. These characteristics imply most pressing needs for different types of student services such as easy campus access, scheduling convenience, and, in many cases, day care facilities, rather than the traditional student union, entertainments, and recreations. Indeed, the extent to which these needs are met may determine whether or not a potential student will initially enroll and continue enrollment at the university. The issue of day care, in particular, has become a rallying point for women seeking access to higher education in the urban setting.

Day Care and the Traditional Laboratory School

The history of campus programs for children of faculty, staff, and students is grounded in the laboratory schools of the 1930s through the 1970s. Their function was to provide a setting for training teachers for preschool children and they were, therefore, a part of the institution's academic program. Their focus was educational. They were intended to provide an ideal learning environment for young children during a two- to three-hour span and were state subsidized as part of the teacher training

program. Members of the academic community flocked to enroll their children in these programs, recognizing the advantages of programs staffed by well-trained teachers and students, supervised by Ph.D.'s, and located in ideal facilities subsidized by state funds. Of course, they would like to continue to benefit from this unique setting.

But times have changed and needs have changed, particularly at metropolitan universities. The societal trend toward fully employed women is reflected on the university campus as well. The nontraditional student common to metropolitan campuses, as well as the single and two-wage-earner staff and faculty, require full day care as a support service. Yet they expect the same quality and attention to educational enrichment they have come to expect from the traditional laboratory schools. They would expect these schools, where they exist, to expand their programs to full day care, while retaining an embedded educational component. This blurs the distinction between the functions of "educational" programs, for which laboratory schools were considered essential and therefore subsidized, and day care "services," which are not essential to the academic mission of the university.

University administrators, in attempting to respond to such requests from faculty, staff, and students for full day care services, have examined the possibility of expanding their laboratory schools, where they exist, to full day care, or of adding a new day care facility. They have discovered that solutions are complex, expensive, and often controversial. The controversy is not solely a campus-based dilemma, but a broader societal issue revolving around availability and cost of quality day care for increasing numbers of employed mothers. Thus, any campus constituency bringing its day care needs to the attention of the administration will bring as well the highly charged emotional and ethical issues surrounding the society's responsiveness to the needs of women. Expectations are likely to reflect the position articulated in a recent paper published by the National Coalition for Campus Child Care (NCCCC). The NCCCC advocates that campuses should take the position of leading society in providing model centers that demonstrate commitment to family issues and assume responsibility for all aspects of early childhood education, parent education, child nutrition, and public health. The position paper further describes the subsidies required to operate the model center: centers should be staffed by professionals who are reimbursed at levels of equivalent responsibility within the university; centers should be subsidized by providing free space and utilities; center staff should have access to all benefits and resources of the university; and center administrative costs should be subsidized.

The nontraditional student, as well as the single parent and two-wage earner families, requires day care services.

While the university community sees academic and service functions of campus child care programs as overlapping, legislators see them as distinct; and legislators tend to fund academic programs, but not services. If the university decides to try to gain state support for day care, administrators can be better prepared to defend the requests for funds by

being aware of the typical supporting arguments and counterarguments. Firstly, to the extent that the center provides a setting for training teachers of young children for both preschool and day care settings, one could argue that the investment is justified as crucial to the academic program. On the other hand, almost all universities train elementary and high school teachers without operating such schools themselves. In fact, many universities that previously have operated elementary and secondary laboratory schools have divested themselves of these units. Student teachers can be placed in the public school system, and, in fact, it might be argued that such a setting is more appropriate and realistic for training than a laboratory school. Similarly, laboratory schools and day care centers for preschool children could also be considered nonessential to the training of teachers since off-campus sites are available. Therefore, the argument based on teacher training will not necessarily convince state legislators.

A second approach would be to defend a request for funds based on the mission of the metropolitan university to provide a model that could help improve day care services in the private sector, thus serving an educational function both on the campus for teacher training and off campus within the community. While this is an appealing argument, consider also its counterargument. While the metropolitan university is committed to responding to the needs of the surrounding communities and to the real-world problems of society as a whole, state-subsidized campus day care does not convincingly provide a model that is relevant to the nation's day care dilemma; day care centers will not be directed by university faculty, staffed by graduate assistants, have the low teacher-child ratios enabled by student field placements and state subsidies, or have tuition fees that are not related to the real costs of the service. In addition, the subsidized university day care center, with its lower fees and higher quality, directly competes with the private sector adjacent to the campus. If the university is intimately concerned about the economic health and quality of life in the surrounding communities, it cannot enter into direct, unfair competition with local businesses.

A university finding itself in the midst of the opposing perspectives of advocates of an ideal day care model and the reality of limited availability of funding must seek solutions that have real-world applicability. Thus, should state legislatures decline to provide the needed funding, university administrators need to seek creative ways to respond to the need for day care on campus. Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, has faced up to this challenge.

Assessing the Need for Day Care on Campus

The problem of operating a day care center on campus that would be self-supporting should be approached as a business venture. Before making a decision to locate in an area, a "needs" assessment or market survey is advisable. This step is critical for several reasons. The success of a day care center, in financial terms, requires a minimum enrollment to meet costs; there is an economy of scale that must be considered. If the

campus center is to pay reasonable salaries to qualified teachers, provide benefits, meet high loan costs to cover initial building expenses, and provide a quality program, the minimum enrollment needed will be high. In the case of WSU that minimum is around 110–120 full-time children. It is important not to minimize this factor in such a decision. In their enthusiasm, campus day care advocates may overestimate need. Almost anyone if asked, “Do you think a campus day care center would be a good idea?” will respond, “Of course.” The “needs” questionnaire must ask whether the respondent has preschool children, where the children are currently receiving care, how much the parents are paying, how much they are willing to pay, and how frequently they need care. Many people have a family member at home to care for the child; many have a willing neighbor; some only need evening care one day a week; some want to use the campus center as a backup when their sitter is ill.

At WSU, a campus of around 17,000 students, the questionnaire predicted an opening full-time equivalent enrollment of around 80 student, faculty, and staff children, corresponding to as many as 120 children enrolled in programs varying from two half-days to five full days per week. This prediction is typical of universities of this size; over 70 percent of campus day care centers serve 100 or fewer children; 21 percent serve between 100 and 200. The number of students needing care appears low, but it is more realistic than the need expressed by advocates who had persistently pressed for ten years for state funding for campus day care at WSU. On the basis of the needs assessment, the enrollment from the campus community was projected to increase to fill the center within the first three years of operation.

Because of the location of metropolitan campuses, their day care centers can make up needed enrollment by opening their doors to nearby populations. WSU intended to do so, and therefore conducted a further survey to ascertain tuition costs of day care in the immediate vicinity, as well as whether centers were full and had waiting lists of children seeking placement. These two important items of information helped WSU determine the off-campus demand for additional day care services in the area.

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Construction and Operation Alternatives

Both the on-campus needs assessment and the local day care surveys indicated that a center on the WSU campus could attract the needed enrollment for a fiscally viable operation. The next step was to consider the possible construction and operational alternatives. Three possibilities were evaluated. The first possibility was for the university to build the facility and operate it as an auxiliary enterprise. Such a center would have to earn enough to cover amortization of all building construction and ongoing operating costs without additional subsidies from university funds. This plan was appealing in that the university would own the building and have direct control over the quality of the service. However,

although WSU wished to pay as high salaries as the center would permit, the wage structure on the campus exceeded not only personnel costs in commercial day care and federally funded centers, it matched public school salaries. Two costs, building and personnel, drive the cost of day care. To pay day care staff on the university scale would drive fees to a level that would not be accepted in the local market, regardless of quality.

The second alternative considered was to contract with an outside entity who would both construct the facility and operate it. This approach was tempting because it passes on the responsibility and risk of investing in the building, finding qualified staff, and balancing the budget to an outside builder and operator. The university could offer the land and leave the business to someone else. This also would avoid entering into competition with local private enterprise. The serious drawback that ruled out this alternative was the lack of control over the quality. Without external quality controls, commercial operators are likely to compromise building quality and size, as well as teacher quality and compensation and teacher/child ratios. If the university does not own the building that sits on university land, what happens if the operator withdraws or if the operator's service does not meet quality expectations? The inevitable outcome would be a conflict between the university's need for quality and the operator's objective of maximizing profit.

The third alternative proved to be the most feasible. It combines the university with private enterprise: the university constructs the building, but contracts with an outside operator to run the center. In this hybrid scenario the university obtains the mortgage to finance construction, then recovers those costs through a monthly fee from the operator. This approach avoids the problems inherent in having an operator terminate the contract; the university continues to own the building and can contract with a different operator, if desired. In addition, it avoids the dilemma of being tied to an unrealistic wage structure because the teachers would be employees of the operator, not of the university.

Soliciting Construction and Operation Proposals

The university initiated a multistep process to identify a suitable contractor to build the center and a suitable operator. The initial solicitation sought to identify individuals or firms interested in constructing and/or operating a facility in a manner consistent with the objectives of the university. Objectives specified included a specific timeline, quality control guidelines, and qualifications of the operator, including both knowledge of children and proven business management skills. Responses to the initial solicitation for proposals ranged from regional firms currently operating multiple day care centers to experienced center directors with innovative approaches and commitment to quality, but no proven expertise to manage, nor funds to initiate such a project. A key aspect of the evaluation of the proposals included visits to a large number of area day care centers, including those operated by persons initially submitting proposals. This process allowed the university to bring the project to the attention of many individuals who would not routinely

receive bid solicitations from the university or read the legal notice section of the newspaper.

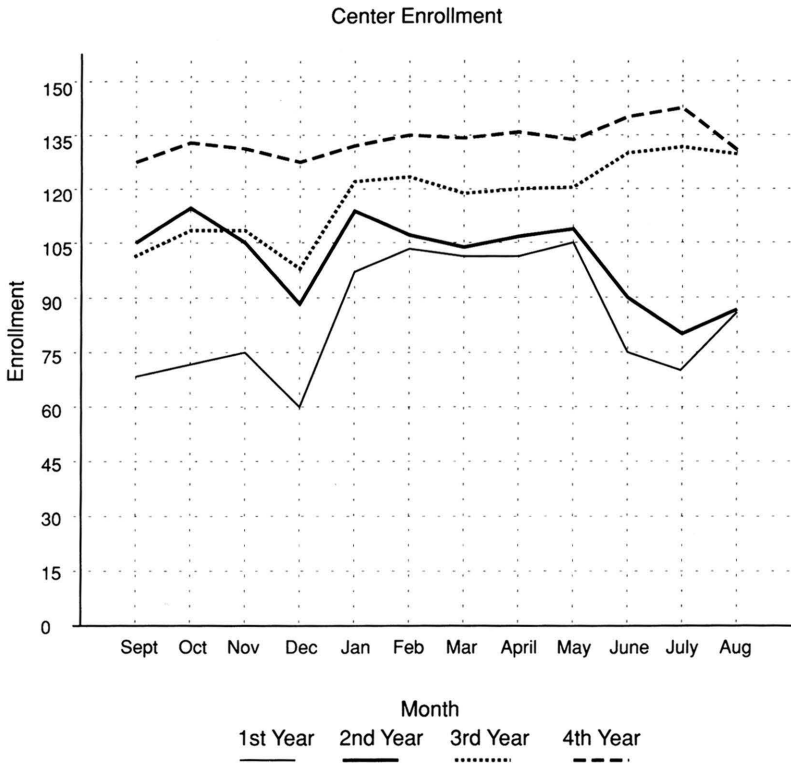
The process of screening the proposals was simplified somewhat by providing the quality guidelines. Some firms with much day care experience withdrew because the guidelines would not permit them to operate in their accustomed ways, with the same profits. Some who proposed a quality program were unable or unwilling to take the financial risk involved. An accelerated timeline eliminated further consideration by some building contractors. Finally, a team was selected to operate the center who had demonstrated both commitment to quality programs and success in financial management of day care. For construction, the project was awarded to an organization constructing apartments on contiguous property utilizing a manufactured panel system; this permitted them to construct the facility within the desired timeline. In addition, the location of their equipment near campus allowed them to save on construction costs.

The center, though conceived for service, also serves educational functions.

With the center management team identified, the university undertook the development of the center on a turn-key basis. The center would be constructed and equipped with both permanent supplies and a month's consumable supplies, as if the university were to operate the center. The operators were retained as consultants during the design-development period to work with the architect and builder and to assist in selection of equipment and supplies. At the same time, the operator began to recruit staff, secure licensing, develop the program, and solicit enrollment. This entire process, including construction, was accomplished in three months.

The Contract with the Operator

Ultimately, a contract was drawn that set down the obligations of the operator and of the university. The contract addresses three areas of agreement: financial obligations of both parties; quality control mechanisms; and the cooperative relationship between the center and the university that would enable the center to be used as a laboratory setting for training university students. Financial agreements include a lease agreement with a monthly fee equivalent to the carrying charge of a conventional mortgage with an additional allowance for repair and replacement of major building components. Also included is a monthly payment to reimburse the university for the initial supplies and equipment. The operator assumes responsibility for utilities and for routine cleaning and maintenance of the equipment, building, and grounds. Lease payments are reviewed at each renewal period, every three years, and adjusted to be consistent with current interest rates. During the first three years of operation, the university accepted a reduced lease payment during December and the three summer months to recognize the impact of the academic year on the center operation. Subsequently, the center enhanced

Figure 1: Center's Four-Year Enrollment Pattern

summer programs by leasing vans and providing enrichment programs for school age children; this produced the more level enrollment needed throughout the year.

Quality control mechanisms delineated in the contract include oversight by an Advisory Board composed of university faculty and parents of children enrolled in the center, including faculty, staff, student, and off-campus parents. This board meets quarterly, or as needed, to review program quality and to ensure parent satisfaction with the program and services through periodic surveys. It also acts in an advisory and advocacy capacity to assist the operator in meeting expectations. A second important quality control item in the contract is the expectation that the center would seek and achieve accreditation of the program by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs within three years of opening. The NAECP is the accrediting agency of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. That accreditation was achieved, on schedule, during the third year of operation.

The contract further specifies that the facility may be used as a laboratory setting for the training of students in fields related to child development, schooling, counseling, etc. Thus the center, though conceived for service, also serves the educational functions of the traditional laboratory setting.

Enrollment

The actual enrollment pattern shown in Figure 1 illustrates the growth of the center over the first four years of operation. The projected enrollment was achieved the first year, and the break-even enrollment was reached during the second year.

WSU's success in meeting enrollment goals was helped by a student-financed tuition subsidy for the children of students. Fully employed faculty, staff, and off-campus patrons can afford the service, but most students need some assistance. To alleviate the burden of the tuition costs necessary to operate the center, a request was submitted to the university's Student Budget Board, which controls the expenditure of a portion of student fees set aside for student services and activities. The board agreed to provide funds adequate to cover 25 percent of the tuition for children of students.

Conclusion

The essential ingredients for success in identifying the appropriate combination of alternatives for this project included the commitment of the university's administration, a qualified consultant, a flexible approach to examining all options, and a dash of good fortune in identifying a successful operator. After three years, the center operates at full capacity and has requested an expansion to extend care to infants. The administration and the Board of Trustees have given approval for the building extension to provide infant care. Given the center's success in meeting its financial obligations and its achievement of accreditation, the university considers its partnership with the private sector in providing quality day care a success.

Suggested Readings

- Keyes, C. R., and R. E. Cook, eds. *Campus Child Care Issues and Practices; a Collection of Conference Presentations 1975-1987*. Milwaukee: National Coalition for Campus Child Care, 1988.
- National Coalition for Campus Child Care. *Position Paper on College-Sponsored Child Care Programs* [Pamphlet]. Milwaukee: NCCCC, 1991.