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Gilbert A. Schulkind
White House Task Force on Education

**NOTES ON INTERVIEW WITH CHALMERS G. MORRIS, DIRECTOR, UNDERGRADUATE
GRANTS BRANCH, DIVISION OF UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC FACILITIES, BUREAU
OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Mr. Morris had with him a Mr. Kenneth Ashworth who is a recently employed program management officer on his staff. The function of his Branch is to administer Title I of the Higher Education Facilities Act, which provides grants to states to finance some of the cost of constructing undergraduate academic facilities. These include such things as libraries, classroom space, and laboratories. They exclude housing facilities, dormitories, chapels and schools of divinity, etc. His function includes providing grants adding up to a maximum for each state established by a formula provided in the statute. These formulas are set separately for community colleges, under which 40 percent of the cost of construction facilities can be borne by the Federal Government, and four-year private colleges for which the Federal Government can provide up to one-third of the developmental and construction costs.

Under the law, each state is required to set up a State Commission to review and set priorities for requests from community colleges and private schools for financial grants to construct facilities. These State Commissions (some newly created and some existing organizations revamped somewhat to meet the terms of the law) determine the priorities and the Federal share out of the total money available to the state within the guidelines and criteria established by regulations of the Office of Education.

They have had about five hundred applications and expect to obligate approximately \$200 million under this program before the end of the fiscal year. The time cycle for clear-cut cases (about one-half of those submitted out of five hundred applications expected this year) is from thirty to one hundred and eighty days.

This is the first year of the program and about 40-50 percent of the proposals have required renegotiations of one kind or another. He feels that by the second year this should shake down to approximately 20 percent, as the State Commissions learn their jobs better and as the office becomes more effective in handling the applications. They fully expect to obligate all the money available for obligation.

The office deals with the Community Facilities Administration of the Housing and Home Finance Agency on all review projects for engineering and architectural acceptability and for following through on the construction phase

of the project, after money has been authorized. The Branch receives and reviews the projects for acceptability and authorizes the grant of the money and the approval of the contract. The contract is made through a grant agreement which includes standard and special conditions under which the money is provided. Associate Commissioner Muirhead has the final authority to sign these contracts, however, he makes no review of substance and his signature is pro forma. The Division Director, Mr. Jay du Von, finally approves the project and the grant agreement, without the file, is sent up to Mr. Muirhead's office for signature, although the letter of approval accompanying the grant agreement is signed by Mr. du Von.

I asked Mr. Norris to identify problems that he has in carrying out his functions. He mentioned the following:

1. The current internal channels for approval of projects are somewhat confused and duplicative. Mr. Muirhead's signature is really an extra operation since there is no substantive review by him. The fiscal clearances are currently given by two separate offices, one by the Bureau Fiscal Officer and one by the Bureau Executive Officer. He felt that this was excessively complicated and unnecessary.
2. There have been some problems of differences of interpretation of the eligibility requirements in the law by his office and the Division of Graduate Academic Facilities. There has been a lack of coordination apparently between these two offices with the result that graduate projects have not been acceptable because of policy decisions by the Graduate Grants Branch which would have been acceptable as an undergraduate facility in Mr. Norris' Branch. As an example, his Branch would approve construction projects involving incomplected structures (i.e., structures which would be partially finished to permit future expansion, or structures where the foundations are designed to permit additional stories to be constructed at a later date). The Graduate Facilities Division, however, would not accept such projects. This could cause embarrassment, particularly where projects have been proposed by the same institution for both Undergraduate and Graduate Facilities construction.
3. A review of projects for civil rights acceptability now takes place at three levels, yet each of these is purely ministerial. The Office of Education has provided a list of institutions that have met the civil rights requirements and their sole function consists of signing a form certifying that the institution is on the list. Yet this form must now be signed at three levels by three people in the office. In the civil rights area, the Branch also advises institutions which have not yet been placed on the list that they must get themselves on it in order to be eligible, but does not get into substance as to what it takes to comply.

4. Mr. Norris said his biggest problem is under-staffing. He feels that the budget was under estimated, that the workload is greater than they can handle with efficiency.
3. Mr. Norris also feels that there have been excessive delays in the personnel system, particularly on classification of positions. He has sometimes had to go around his own Executive Director in the Bureau to get action, but that bird-dogging these things has taken more of his time than they should. He feels that the GS 1720 job series is used excessively on the theory that it is quite easy to use. He has had a problem in the past in getting other series to be used, such as the general administrative series, in lieu of the education specialist group. However, he has had some help from Mr. Elsbree on this more recently and was able to get Mr. Ashworth on board as a public administration major outside the educationist examination route.

I also asked Mr. Norris about his relationships with Community Facilities Administration and whether there is a need for field services in carrying out a program. He indicated that the relations with Community Facilities Administration have been quite effective. They have had no real problems on coordination or of quality of responsiveness of service. There have been no complaints from the colleges or universities on their dealings with CFA. However, he felt CFA's requirements for approval of architectural and construction features of projects may well be more restrictive and rigid than are really necessary and that perhaps some lesser review than is now required and more flexibility in application of requirements would be desirable. Since CFA provides the field contact and inspection activity, he has no real need for field services in the Office of Education.

Mr. Norris' function is not directly affected by the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act. However, there may be indirect implications because of the need for coordination of technical policies relating to construction at the elementary and secondary level that will grow under the new legislation.

With respect to his own function, Mr. Norris feels that it is necessary to have a separate unit to review eligibility of projects for funds under the Undergraduate Facilities Program, although he believes that there could be greater coordination of the technical facets of construction activities both within the OE and potentially in DHEW, if the Office remains a part of the Department. He also said that he is convinced that the Office is not budgeting for what it really needs in his program area to really effectively carry out the responsibilities.

With regard to the Office as a whole, Mr. Norris likes the focus on higher education reflected in the establishment of this Bureau and feels that this should be carried further so that all programs relating to higher education are consolidated. He also feels that the Bureau of Higher Education should have systems capability on the use of automation.

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Finally, Mr. Morris indicated that we should break out of the "strangle hold" of the educationist series in recruiting to fill essentially management type jobs throughout the OE.

Attached are copies of an estimated workload of the Undergraduate Grants Branch and examples of the types of forms and letters used in connection with applications for grants.

Attachments

cc: Mr. Ink
Mr. Jasper
Subject File
Chron

GASchulkind/tvf