

Appendix E: Letter to Three Governments

(U.S. version, attached; counterparts sent in Canada and Mexico, in French and English, and Spanish, respectively.)

March 27, 2000

Keith Geiger
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Academic Programs
Department of State
301 4th Street, SW - Room 202
Washington, DC 20547

Dear Keith:

We write to bring you up to date on the collaborative project of the American Council on Education (ACE), la Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superiores (ANUIES), and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) to explore the concept of a trilateral "marketplace" to facilitate North American collaboration. This project emerged from several years of collaboration among the three associations, including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 1998.

The goal of the project was to explore the feasibility of creating a new mechanism for encouraging North American interchange, a multifunction marketplace for higher education cooperation, collaboration, and exchange. The initiative was designed in two phases. The first phase included the exploration of the desirability and feasibility of such a marketplace and of the issues surrounding its design. At the end of the first phase, the three organizations, in collaboration with the advisory group, were to decide if the concept was sufficiently promising to move to the design phase.

The process of envisioning, exploring, and researching this initiative has involved, since its inception in late September 1999, the active participation of a specially appointed trilateral advisory committee (see enclosed list) composed of three members from each country; and of separate reference groups in each of the three countries. The advisory committee met on March 8 to consider whether the concept warranted further development in light of the analysis presented in a comprehensively researched background paper. The committee concluded that a complex new structure would not provide a cost-effective, value-added solution, nor address the real barrier, the lack of financial support. The group therefore reached the following conclusions and offers the following recommendations to the Trilateral Steering Committee:

1. That the most important single measure to foster student exchanges is through need-based student top-up awards. Without such support to broaden and expand access to exchange, mobility will fail to reach the level envisioned in the trilateral process, and will remain marginal rather than transformative for North America. We support the continuation of the North American Mobility Program, which provides both student stipends and faculty professional travel opportunities to realize sustainable interchange. We recommend that the three governments deem student top-up awards a significant priority in promoting trilateral mobility.

2. That while we determined that a complex new physical structure will not be the most effective approach, we did determine that certain initiatives can foster and advance exchange. One such measure, a "virtual marketplace," is determined to be a cost-effective, productive, and sustainable direction to pursue. Features of this marketplace might include informational services, a brokering or "matchmaking" function, an advising function, and a "best practices" site. We recommend that existing efforts in this arena be supported and utilized to their fullest capacity to avoid duplication of efforts and expenditures.

3. That work-study opportunities are a promising direction for enhancing and broadening North American interchange. As these programs link mobility to professional life, and address student and corporate interests, they are an important new approach that can also increase interest in language acquisition and help address issues of financial support. Our final report will expand further on this concept. We recommend that the Trilateral Steering Committee convene relevant government agencies in each country (e.g., Departments of Commerce, Labor, Science, Energy, Education, Environment) to join forces and create partnerships to further trinational mobility through work-study, internships, and cooperative education.

4. That bilateral programming within the trilateral context will be an effective means to achieve major goals for North America, without rigid insistence that every exchange be trilateral. Given the complexity of developing and implementing international collaboration, some efforts will be more successful if they are bilateral rather than involving all three countries.

5. That there is need to recognize and address problems with visas as actual or perceived barriers to exchange, especially in regard to work-study and cooperative education programs and internships. We recommend that the Trilateral Committee encourage the appropriate government entities within and between nations, under NAFTA, to address relevant barriers to visa acquisition, to ease and rationalize the process; and to develop information to be disseminated through the information site.

6. To reach these conclusions, the following process was used: The principal investigator identified and analyzed existing model programs, drafted and tested a survey questionnaire on various constituencies, and gathered feedback from the advisory and reference committees and other constituencies. From this and other research, a concept paper and feasibility study were developed and distributed (on January 11 and February 22) to the advisory and reference groups. The reports, which analyzed and reviewed obstacles to exchange, identified and analyzed model programs, and laid out the higher education context for exchange, posed a draft concept for a comprehensive multifunction marketplace to enhance North American exchange.

As next steps, stemming from conclusions of the March 7-8 advisory committee meeting, the three associations will not pursue the design of a marketplace structure, but will, to complete the project, develop an outline design of elements of a virtual marketplace; and an approach to work-study programs, using a sample of existing models. Input from the advisory committee and reference groups will continue; and appropriate specialized expertise may be engaged. A final report will be submitted with relevant documents.

The associations are grateful for the opportunity to work on this significant initiative, and look forward to continuing a productive and successful partnership with the Trilateral Commission to foster and advance North American Higher Education cooperation and mobility.

Sincerely,

Madeleine F. Green
Vice President

Enclosure: as stated