

**REPORT OF THE STUDY CONDUCTED  
BY THE COUNCIL OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA**

# **The Feasibility of Establishing a Center for Graduate Study at Roanoke**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



## **House Document No. 10**

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REVIEW OF A STUDY ON THE FEASIBILITY OF  
ESTABLISHING A GRADUATE CENTER IN ROANOKE

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History

In May 1985, the City Council of Roanoke appointed the Jefferson High School Committee to study possible uses for the building which housed the high school, now vacant. The committee decided that the facility could house graduate courses and programs needed in the region. The committee observed that Roanoke is the only major metropolitan area in the state lacking a four-year public institution of higher education, and referred to the report of the Governor's Task Force on Science and Technology, which cited the need for part-time graduate education to recruit and retain high-technology firms.

The committee proposed to offer the property and building at the old Jefferson High School site to the state to establish the graduate center, and recommended that the state assume the obligation to renovate the facility. The committee suggested that non-general funds for the project might be obtained through a fund-raising effort conducted by the city and alumni of the high school. Participating institutions of higher education would operate and maintain the facility using educational and general funds.

The state-supported institutions of higher education in the region expressed support for a graduate center, provided that the need for graduate education could be established. The committee hired a marketing research firm to conduct a survey of post-graduate education needs in the Roanoke area, under the auspices of the Roanoke Office of Economic Development and Grants. The completed survey suggested community interest in postsecondary educational opportunities.

In November 1985, the Council of Higher Education adopted the following resolution in support of the proposal to establish a Center for Graduate Education in Roanoke.

RESOLVED: The Council of Higher Education supports the efforts to provide graduate education to the Roanoke region, and recommends that funds be appropriated to state-supported universities as required to meet the need. The Council also supports in principle the proposal to use the old Jefferson High School as a graduate center, with the state providing funds to renovate a portion of the facility. The Council recommends that the renovation project be developed in

compliance with the Commonwealth's policies and procedures for capital outlay.

Subsequent to the Council's action, the 1986 General Assembly received a request for an appropriation to renovate the high school. The Assembly did not appropriate funds but did request the Council and the Secretary of Education to study the feasibility of establishing a center for graduate study in Roanoke (House Joint Resolution 59, attached). The Council staff convened a group consisting of representatives of the state-supported institutions of higher education in the region and a representative from Secretary Finley's office to consider how best to do the study. They decided that to test further community interest in graduate study in Roanoke, the Council staff should arrange for focus group interviews, a non-quantitative, preliminary market survey technique used to collect impressions of needs and attitudes. The group also suggested that the need for graduate education in the valley and the city's desire to make use of the Jefferson High School building should be considered separately and that the first task was to establish need.

In August 1986, representatives from the Council and Secretary Finley's office, the Western Regional Consortium, and the city of Roanoke and Roanoke Valley met to plan the interviews. They decided that Professor Kenneth Bahn (Marketing, Virginia Tech) would do focus interviews with the following groups: school superintendents; teachers; medical administrators; banking and insurance officers; representatives of wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, and government; and personnel directors. In the interviews the interviewer would ask the members of each group about their perception of the need for graduate study among their constituencies in order to make an impressionistic assessment of that need. Interviews were conducted with all except the wholesale/retail and government groups, which were dropped due to the unavailability of key participants. In late September, Professor Bahn's report was submitted to the Council staff.

The survey revealed some interest in graduate education in Roanoke. The medical group expressed clear need for graduate health programs, especially in physical therapy and nursing, with the latter program allowing for a certain amount of specialization. The need for graduate business offerings was less clear. Reactions were mixed in and among the various groups both as to whether graduate training in business was needed and whether evening MBA courses at Virginia Tech could fill that need. There was a consensus in the education group that master's degrees in specific content areas would be desirable, including history, English, science, and mathematics. The personnel directors saw some need for graduate engineering and computer science programs.

The overarching concern of all the groups was quality: without first-rate faculty, library, and other support services, and the resources to support them, the center would not be useful to the community. The name of the degree-granting institution was also very important to several groups.

### Recommendations

Some of the needs articulated by the focused groups can be met by programs which are already in place or are soon to be: Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia presently offer a graduate TV engineering program, some area colleges offer master's programs in various humanities and social sciences, and Radford University proposes to offer an M.S. in Nursing in cooperation with the University of Virginia, beginning in 1988. However, the community needs someone to make sure that the programs that exist or are coming into existence do in fact meet the needs of the Roanoke region, and to organize other offerings for those needs that have not yet been addressed.

To that end, the Council staff recommends that a director and secretary be housed at Virginia Western Community College in a space, initially provided free of charge, to be clearly marked as the Graduate Center for the Roanoke Valley. The director shall not be affiliated with any single institution but shall instead report directly to the Council of Higher Education. A budget shall be provided through the Secretary's office or the Council to cover salaries and expenses. The director's function shall be to gather information about the needs of the region and then locate the institutional resources to meet them. Specific responsibilities shall be as follows:

- to consult with groups representing the various educational needs of the community;
- to work with an advisory board of representatives from manufacturing and production industries, service industries, health services, and education, as well as the presidents or chief academic officers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the University of Virginia, Radford University, Virginia Western Community College, Hollins College, Roanoke College, and other colleges as appropriate.
- to work with an academic advisory committee consisting of the provosts, deans, and department heads of institutions offering graduate work at the center, in order to coordinate course work and to insure the academic quality of the offerings;
- to solicit requests for proposals from senior institutions for courses and programs (persons interviewed were concerned that

courses and programs be the same as on the main campus and that degrees be granted from the institutions offering the programs);

- to arrange to have a high-quality business program brought into Roanoke, working with the Council to make appropriate use of the TV network in so doing;
- to work with Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia to assess and address any unmet needs for their graduate engineering programs;
- to arrange for classes to be held at Virginia Western, Roanoke College, Hollins College, and area businesses, hospitals, and industries, as well as for use of Virginia Western's capacity to receive television via satellite;
- to arrange for faculty at the offering institutions to travel to Roanoke to offer the courses, and to supervise limited use of adjunct faculty;
- to insure that adequate library resources be available for the degree programs and courses offered;
- to document need for any new program brought in, including both projected numbers of students and an estimate of the length of time that that need is likely to persist.

The staff further recommends that Jefferson High School not be renovated to serve as a site for a graduate center in Roanoke. A large capital investment does not appear necessary at this time to meet the graduate education needs of Roanoke and surrounding communities.

This plan should be implemented July 1, 1987, and be in effect for three years. At that time an analysis of the program should be made to determine whether it should be terminated, continued, or expanded. One of the primary objectives is to make the center responsive to the Roanoke community, particularly as it is embodied in the advisory board. Criteria will be developed by which both the center's responsiveness to the community and the community's participation in the center will be measured.

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA -- 1986 SESSION

## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 59

*Requesting the Secretary of Education and the State Council of Higher Education to study the feasibility of establishing a center for graduate study.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 27, 1986

Agreed to by the Senate, February 25, 1986

WHEREAS, as the trends for employment continue to shift throughout the Commonwealth, there is an increase in the need for advanced studies at the graduate level; and

WHEREAS, the City of Roanoke's Economic Development Office found that the Roanoke metropolitan area, the largest SMSA in southwest Virginia, was the only such area in a six-state Mid-Atlantic region that does not have a public four-year institution; and

WHEREAS, new business and industry which are considering locating in the Commonwealth, consider the availability of graduate education programs an important incentive in making such a decision; and

WHEREAS, a graduate education center in the Roanoke area would enhance economic development opportunities in southwest Virginia; and

WHEREAS, such centers have proven to be successful endeavors for other states, attracting industrial development and enhancing the quality of life; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Secretary of Education and State Council of Higher Education are requested to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a graduate center at Roanoke.

The Secretary and Council shall complete this work prior to November 15, 1986, and submit their findings soon thereafter.

