

Tuition Exchange Programs

by Marylouise Fennell

As a looming wave of “boomer” faculty retirements forms a cloud on the horizon for colleges and universities without deep pockets, innovative and affordable “perks” to attract and retain the best and brightest faculty – and their spouses, who often follow – come to the forefront of hiring strategies. How to compete with the big schools with huge endowments in a smaller pool that has become a seller’s market?

This dilemma is compounded by the higher salary demands of newly minted Ph.D.s relative to tenured faculty who are about to retire, as well as the growing phenomenon of two-career spouses, both seeking campus-based careers within a give geographic radius.

It’s in this context that tuition exchange programs such as TEP, sponsored by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC); and The Tuition Exchange, both based in Washington, DC, are becoming paramount in luring and keeping key faculty and administrators. With other “quality of life” issues such as state-of-the-art amenities and recreational opportunities, tuition exchange is becoming a highly desirable benefit – one that offers the advantage of adding value to an attractive package without creating out-of-pocket expense for the sponsoring institution.

Tuition exchange is especially helpful for recruiting and retaining highly qualified people to colleges located outside major metropolitan areas, where employment opportunities for accompanying spouses are sometimes limited. “CIC-TEP is a tremendous benefit that allows Tri-State to be competitive in hiring outstanding faculty and staff,” said Earl D. Brooks, III, president of Tri-State University in Angola, IN.

Both exchange programs work similarly. The Tuition Exchange is a reciprocal scholarship program for children and other family members of faculty and staff employed at over 580 participating institutions. Dependent children of faculty and staff are able to access tuition benefits

at the more than 350 CIC-TEP member institutions with a minimum of bureaucracy.

CIC-TEP was planned and developed more than two decades ago with a goal of creating a true-access program, without any costly fees or cumbersome credit-debit limitations. The true-access component is only one of the many special features that the program offers. Participating institutions agree to import a limited number of students on the same admission basis as they accept all other students, without regard to the number of students they export.

The program addresses several needs. First, the program encourages students from employee families of private colleges and universities to attend similar institutions that focus upon student-centered and value-driven higher education. Second, it assists these same families in meeting the partial cost of college attendance. Finally, CIC-TEP establishes an educational resource that enhances each institution’s benefits package.

Wesley College in Dover, DE, has taken this promising concept one step further by becoming one of the only colleges in the nation to include contract employees of vendors such as dining services and the bookstore to participate in both the exchange and the campus-based tuition assistance program.

In the many metropolitan areas including Hartford, CT; Worcester, MA; and Pittsburgh, among others, groups of colleges offer similar benefits within their regions. For example, an administrator with a master’s degree could earn a second master’s or a doctorate at nominal cost at other Ph.D.-granting institution within the consortium.

College CEOs attest to the effectiveness of tuition exchange programs in both retention and recruiting. “As both an incentive and a benefit, the Tuition Exchange Program often makes the

difference in recruiting and retaining good employees with dependents,” said Mary E. Hines, president of Pittsburgh-based Carlow University.

Tuition exchange offers a win-win, not just for faculty with children of college or pre-college age, but for their spouses, and even for faculty themselves who can add value to their CVs by taking courses in another teaching specialty, for example. Strongly recruited faculty tell me that the single biggest reason for turning down otherwise attractive offers is family issues. Spouses (increasingly, husbands, in today’s market) often leave employment and educational opportunities behind when a new faculty member is hired, and a chance to “plug in” through the new college community may determine the choice of offers.

When we think of “recruiting and retention,” we typically envision the student audience. Yet tuition exchange, among other creative perks, is an idea whose time has come. The CIC and similar programs help level the playing field for small colleges when it comes to hiring and retaining promising faculty and their young families.

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