

# CHARTING A NEW COURSE: HIGHER EDUCATION IN OWENSBORO AND DAVIESS COUNTY, KENTUCKY

FOR THE CITIZENS COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
SEPTEMBER 2005

## THE STUDY AT A GLANCE

*(The full report, "Charting a New Course" and the Appendix are available at [www.nored.us](http://www.nored.us))*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Establish a community Higher Education Advocacy Association to coordinate efforts and direct a campaign to increase higher education participation and attainment levels.*
- *Adopt higher education participation and attainment rates comparable to those of Fayette County as goals to be reached by 2020.*
- *Seek authority and funding for contractual relationships with accredited independent colleges and universities for enrollment spaces in programs that accord with the community's economic and higher education goals.*
- *Join forces with WKU and other institutions to bring new programs in the Technical, Science, Engineering, Agriculture, and Health areas to Owensboro.*
- *Promote the elevation of the WKU Extended Campus program in Owensboro to a full-fledged Branch Campus.*
- *Create a community higher education facility in which interested local institutions may offer courses and share facilities cooperatively and collaboratively and in which there could be cross-registration, a shared library, special programs, and programs offered by individual institutions.*

CNC: TSG 9/26/05



The study was prepared for the Owensboro Citizens Committee on Education in response to a research request that called for an examination of higher education needs in the Owensboro/Daviess County Kentucky area; the degree to which existing institutions are positioned to meet such needs; and the extent to which they are doing so.

The study “[would] seek ways to complement and enhance existing institutional interests even as it seeks to identify collaborative opportunities, perspectives, and actions that enhance the entire community’s interests.” It also would provide recommendations for alternative and practical ways of filling any gaps identified through the research.

*The report identifies a number of higher education and economic indicators for Owensboro and Daviess County that show the concerns that led to the call for the study are well founded.*

**DISQUIETING MARKERS**

With a population of 54,000, Owensboro is the third largest city in Kentucky. Daviess County, in which Owensboro is located, comprises about 2.25 percent of the state population. Combined, the three largest Kentucky counties – Jefferson, Fayette, and Kenton -- contain more than 27 percent of the population.

In terms of population, Daviess County is in the second tier of counties in the ranking, along with Hardin, Warren, Boone, and Campbell, each of which is of comparable size (c. 90,000).

Daviess County’s population of 92,540 ranks it seventh in size among the state’s 120 counties.

There is a gap in the population totals between these eight most populous counties and those that follow in the county rankings. The eight most populous counties (“The Big Eight”) represent a set of peers for understanding Daviess County’s comparative indicators and aspects of its future.

In order of size the eight peer counties are Jefferson, Fayette, Kenton, Boone, Hardin, Warren, Daviess, and Campbell.

In terms of 1990-2000 population growth, Daviess ranked seventh among the eight, but it trailed the average growth rate for the state as a whole.

<b>Kentucky’s Eight Most Populated Counties Ranked by 2003 Population Estimates</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>2003 Population Estimate</b>
Jefferson	699,017
Fayette	266,798
Kenton	152,287
Boone	97,139
Hardin	96,052
Warren	95,778
<b>Daviess</b>	<b>92,540</b>
Campbell	87,970
 Kentucky	 4,117,827

Source: Census Bureau, April 9, 2004 data release

**Population Change 1990 – 2000**  
**Eight Most Populated Kentucky Counties and State Average**  
**2000 Census**

	<b>2000 Population</b>	<b>Change From 1990</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Boone	85,991	28,402	49.3
Warren	92,522	15,849	20.7
Fayette	260,512	35,146	15.6
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>4,041,769</b>	<b>356,473</b>	<b>9.7</b>
Kenton	151,464	9,433	6.6
Campbell	88,616	4,750	5.7
Hardin	94,174	4,934	5.5
<b>Daviess</b>	<b>91,545</b>	<b>4,356</b>	<b>5.0</b>
Jefferson	693,604	28,667	4.3

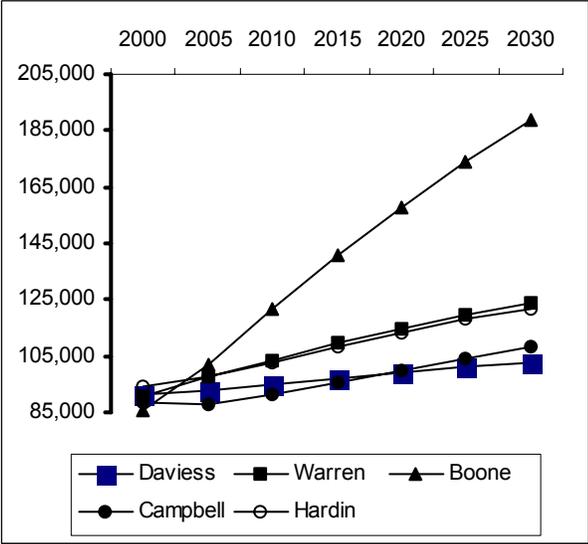
Source: Kentucky State Data Center

The population of Daviess County is expected to increase 8.62 percent over the 20 years between 2000 and 2020, and 12.19 percent between 2000 and 2030.

The projected increase for Daviess is less than the state average in both cases, and it is less than all but Jefferson and Kenton, both with a much greater population base.

Daviess, which in 2000 was third from the bottom of the peer county group in population, by 2030 is expected to drop to last place among the peers.

**Population Change Between 2000 and 2030**  
**In the Five Smaller of the Eight Large County Peer Group**



Data Source: Kentucky State Data Center

According to the last Census, Daviess County’s domestic migration rate, the difference between those coming into the county and those that left, has been negative, ranking it third from the bottom among its peer counties and those counties in which Kentucky’s public four-year institutions are located. (Kentucky’s public four-year institutions are located in Fayette, Warren, Jefferson, Rowan, Franklin, Madison, Calloway, and Campbell Counties. These eight counties, “the public university host counties,” comprise a second peer group used to compare with Daviess County in the report.)

**Migration of Kentucky Residents 1995-2000**  
**Eight Most Populated Counties and the Host Counties of Kentucky Public Four-Year Institutions**  
**2000 Census**

(\* Denotes Host Counties of Public Four-Year Institutions)

Boone	10.52
Fayette*	10.5
Madison*	10.5
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>8.4</b>
Rowan*	6.9
Calloway*	5.55
Warren*	5.1
Franklin*	3.25
Kenton	-0.036
Campbell*	-1.62
<b>Daviess</b>	<b>-2.76</b>
Jefferson*	-2.9
Hardin	-5.47

Data Source: Kentucky State Data Center

- Daviess' comparatively low showings continue in the numbers describing the County's higher education attainment and participation rates, both of which rather consistently suggest sub-optimal performance in this vital sphere.
- Among all Kentucky counties, Daviess County ranks ninth in the percent of adults (18-24 year olds) with a high school diploma, below its place as seventh in population.
- At the higher education level, Daviess County's year 2000 share of adults (age 25-34) with a bachelor's degree or higher was 18.6 percent, which placed it 18<sup>th</sup> among the counties of the state.
- It ranks below the statewide average and seventh among the eight large counties in percent of adults with a bachelor's degree.
- The picture does not improve when the subject turns to the share of 25-34 year-olds with a graduate or professional degree. Daviess ranks both below the state average and last among the Big Eight peer counties in this regard.

Because of the presence of OCTC in the County, Daviess does better when the subject is percentage of adults with an associate degree: it ranks first among the eight peer counties.

When Daviess County's education attainment figures are compared with those of the host counties of Kentucky's public four-year institutions the patterns continue. Daviess scores below all of the host counties and below the statewide average in attainment.

- Daviess County ranks last in this group of counties in percent of population with a bachelor's degree.
- Daviess also comes in last when the measure is graduate and professional degree holders among county residents.

With respect to participation, percent of the population enrolled in higher education, Daviess continues to trail the large county peer group.

- The County’s higher education participation rate, enrollments in all certificate and degree programs, ranks it below the state average and all of the counties in the large county group except for Boone County.
- Daviess ranks at the bottom of this peer county group and below the state average in enrollments in *public* institution baccalaureate and graduate and professional programs.

With two private four-year institutions in the community, Daviess County rises in the rankings when the subject is *private* college participation, in this case to the top of this group of counties. It is next to last, however, when the issue is enrollments in private college graduate and professional programs.

Fayette	42.4	UK
Calloway	30.8	MSU
Jefferson	30.7	U of L
Campbell	30.0	NKU
Warren	28.5	WKU
Madison	26.1	EKU
Rowan	25.6	Moorehead
Franklin	23.3	KSU
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>20.8</b>	
<b>Daviess</b>	<b>18.6</b>	

Data Source: www.higheredinfo.org

Rowan	19.21
Calloway	17.26
Madison	13.80
Warren	11.35
Fayette	9.85
Campbell	5.30
Franklin	4.92
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>4.47</b>
Jefferson	4.40
<b>Daviess</b>	<b>3.92</b>

Data Source: Kentucky State Data Center

- Daviess County continues to trail when its figures are compared with those of the public university host counties. For example, in terms of total college enrollment, Daviess County ranks below all of the host counties and the state average.

- The pattern continues into graduate school. When the question is total enrollment in graduate and professional programs among residents of Daviess and the host counties. Daviess County is at the bottom of the rankings.

During the 2000 Census, seven Metropolitan Statistical Areas [MSAs] were identified in Kentucky, two of which – the Owensboro MSA and the Lexington MSA – were located entirely and exclusively in Kentucky. The Owensboro MSA consisted of one county, Daviess, and it was the only Kentucky MSA composed of one county. The MSAs are prominent urban and economic centers and the other six represent Daviess County’s economic competitors; they represent a third peer group in the report. The patterns continue: when it comes to higher education participation and attainment, Owensboro does not compare well with them.

All of the MSAs except for Owensboro have one or more public four-year colleges located within the boundary, although not all are Kentucky institutions (several MSAs cross over into other states).

- For people in the Owensboro MSA, the closest public four-year institution is in Evansville, about 40 miles away. This is the longest commute to a public institution for people in the Kentucky population center of any MSA of which Kentucky is a part.
- Among the MSAs, Daviess County does well at the high school and “less than one year of college” attainment levels, ranking second and third, respectively. It drops to fifth among the seven in percent of adults with an associate degree.
- It slips to seventh among the seven MSAs in the bachelor and master’s degree categories. Kentucky’s Lexington and the Louisville MSA counties persistently outscore in the higher degree level categories.
- With respect to participation, percent adults enrolled in higher education, Daviess ranks second in *private* undergraduate college enrollment among the MSAs, an achievement no doubt involving its independent institutions – Brescia University and Kentucky Wesleyan College.
- In the undergraduate and graduate enrollments categories, it ranks fifth and fourth, respectively, among the MSAs.

With respect to other indicators, the average personal income for residents in Daviess County increased nearly 29 percent between 1995 and 2000, from \$19,638 to \$25,310 (28.8%), but this was less than the rate of increase for Kentucky as a whole (33.7%). The average weekly wage [year 2003] of workers in the Daviess County area was \$552.04, below the statewide average of \$607.24. Daviess ranked sixth among the eight peer counties on this measure.

Unemployment rates in Kentucky and each of the large peer counties increased between 2000 and 2003. The annual average 2003 rate for Daviess was 6.2 percent, tied with the state average. The Daviess County rate, however, ranked it seventh among the group of eight peer counties. Although the number of families in poverty in Kentucky has been declining generally; Daviess ranked sixth among the eight peer counties.

With respect to the role that higher education can play in all of this, the Office of Employment and Training notes that “Many factors go into determining one’s success in the future workplace of Kentucky. [Education, however] will continue to be one of the most [crucial] factors in gaining employment in a chosen field. While there are many reasons other than money for selecting a career, traditionally, the more education you have the more money you can earn. In fact, the value of education has increased during the past 20 years.” The present general monetary value of education is shown on the following table:

**2003 Average Annual Kentucky Wage Estimates by Training Category**  
**Source: Office of Employment and Training**

<b>2003 Median Wage Estimates for US and KY</b>	<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>United States</b>
Postgraduate	\$47,780	\$54,830
Bachelor's Degree or Bachelor's Degree & Work Experience	\$45,080	\$52,340
Associate's Degree or Postsecondary Training	\$35,095	\$35,960
Work Experience in a Related Occupation or OJT	\$25,500	\$37,000

**SOURCE:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics

These are some of the reasons why Daviess County officials have made education, workforce development, and improving human capital the center of the County’s economic development program.

### **OWENSBORO’S HIGHER EDUCATION ASSETS**

Three higher education institutions have home campuses in Owensboro. A fourth, Western Kentucky University, has an extended campus there. Each of their mission statements stresses rigor, methods, and values, but none speaks specifically and forthrightly to the higher education needs of Owensboro and Daviess County or to a role for them as a locally situated comprehensive regional university.

- Brescia University and Kentucky Wesleyan College are independently governed liberal arts institutions;
- Owensboro Community and Technical College, a public institution, is a “two-year institution” offering programs to the associate degree level;
- Western Kentucky University maintains an “Extended Campus” in Owensboro. This is still a relatively small presence in the community;
- Daymar College, a proprietary institution, also offers work force training programs in the city.

The presence of these institutions notwithstanding, there is a more limited range of programs and higher education services than one might expect for a community of Owensboro’s prominence and its higher education complex.

***Degree programs, associate, bachelor’s and master’s, are offered in some 25 fields, but together they account for less than six percent of the programs or majors implicit in the official USDE higher education program taxonomy.***

Degrees, associate, bachelor’s or master’s, are offered in some 25 fields. Although there is not much overlap, there are multiple program offerings in about 18 fields, some of which can be expected as part of an institution’s “core curriculum,” e.g., English, Biology, Chemistry, Art, History, etc.

Six fields are represented at the master’s degree level in the community. Master’s degree programs

represent one of the areas of greatest perceived need among people in Owensboro.

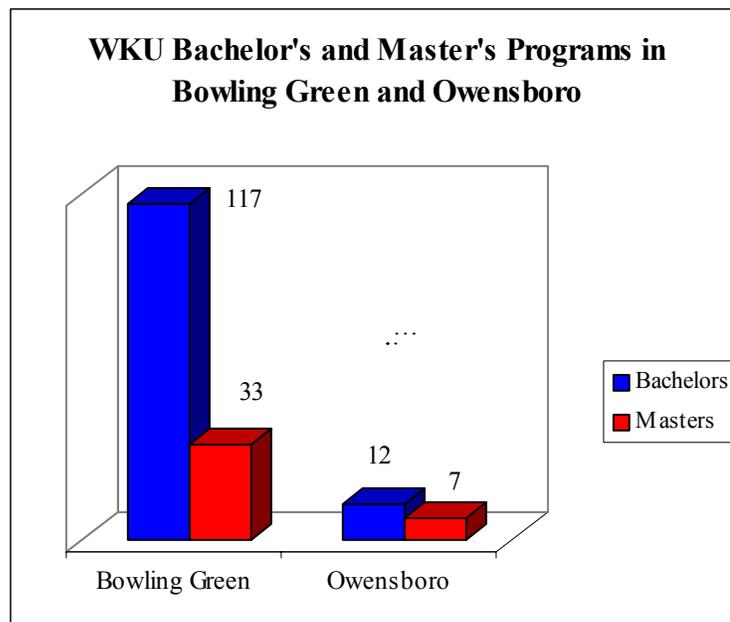
## **WHAT SEEMS TO BE MISSING**

Program fields that are not available or well represented in Owensboro include:

- Agriculture.
- Natural Resources and Conservation.
- Architecture.
- City, Urban, and Rural Planning.
- Landscape Architecture.
- Area Studies.
- Engineering.
- Foreign Languages (a BA in Spanish is the only listed program in this field).
- Computer and Information Sciences (There is some activity in Computer and Information Sciences [two BS and one AS programs], but most of the specific majors in this area are not available.
- Mathematics and Statistics are completely open.
- Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Studies, except for a Physical Fitness program, are vacant.
- The Physical Sciences (Two Bachelor of Science programs in Chemistry account for Owensboro's entire baccalaureate program presence in the Physical Sciences).
- The Health Professions area is a very important potential area of specialization for Owensboro, but the vast majority of programs conceivable in this field are not offered in the community.
- The number of available master's programs is small, and there are no doctoral programs of either the professional or research type.

Except for the majors leading to associate degrees and certificates available in Owensboro's comprehensive community/technical college, the area is underserved with respect to higher education programs. Some changes may be in the offing. In their strategic plans, both Brescia and Kentucky Wesleyan have indicated intentions to offer some new programs.

By virtue of its Extended Campus, Western Kentucky University is the public university most directly responsible for the higher education needs of the community. Most of its efforts, however, are concentrated at the home campus in Bowling Green. Western provides about 120 bachelor programs and 35 master's programs on the home campus. It offers twelve bachelor programs and seven master's programs in Owensboro.



Most of the program fields conventionally associated with advancement in the global economy that are offered by Western in Bowling Green are not offered by it in Owensboro. These include Agriculture, Natural Resources, Computer and Information Sciences, Engineering, Foreign Languages, Biology and Biomedical Sciences, Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and, for the most part, the Health Sciences.

Other variables may be influencing the numbers, but it would be difficult to ignore the strong possibility that Daviess County's comparatively low education attainment figures correspond with the absence of a comprehensive public program presence.

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A few observations can be offered about Owensboro's higher education assets:

- First, Brescia University and Kentucky Wesleyan College offer a number of important programs. They are vital resources. They are not comprehensive regional universities, however, and they cannot be expected to do it all.
- Second, there are significant program gaps; the community needs to look to the public higher education sector, notably Western, for assistance in this regard.
- Third, Western is a comprehensive university, and Owensboro is within its service area. It is the public university most directly responsible for addressing the community's higher education needs. It must be encouraged and allowed to do so.
- Fourth, there are program gaps in Western's inventory, and Owensboro's strategic higher education aspirations cannot be fulfilled completely by this institution alone. Just as

the local independent institutions and Owensboro Community and Technical College must be part of the response, so also must other Kentucky public universities.

## **HIGH HOPES AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

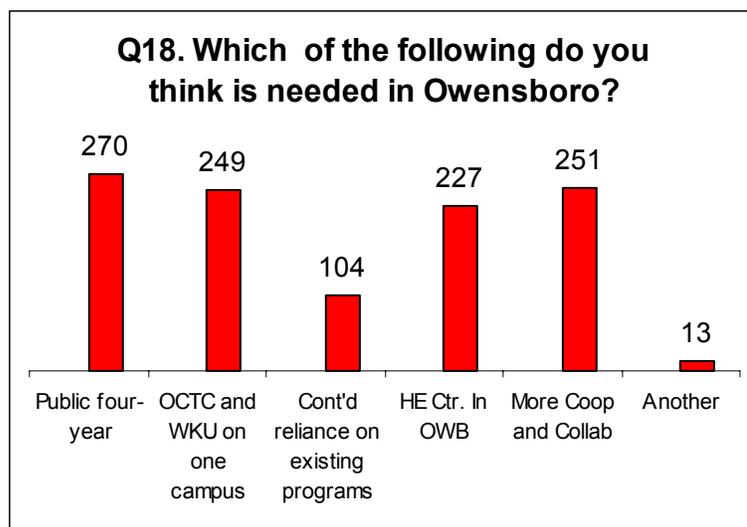
Many in Owensboro believe there is need for more local higher education opportunities. The survey research component of the study (composed of on-site interviews, small group meetings, community forums, and questionnaires, many distributed with the assistance of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*) sampled local attitudes on the sufficiency of available services and opinions about needs and alternatives. Employers and residents were the principal groups.

- All agreed on the importance and need for additional programs and a stronger higher education presence in the community.
- Nearly 70 percent of the employers agreed that a public four-year institution was needed.
- Sixty percent also indicated there is need for more cooperation and collaboration among the institutions now serving the area.
- Community residents agreed in virtually equal proportion with employers – 71 percent – that Owensboro needs a public four-year institution.
- Similarly, community residents also agreed that more collaboration and cooperation were important.
- The presence of a public higher education provider appears to be particularly important to the community resident respondents, as 69 percent indicated they would be happy with another Kentucky public institution increasing services in the County (possibly an indirect reference to WKU-O).

Respondents were asked to comment on five alternatives listed in the community questionnaire:

- A public four-year institution,
- A collaborative WKU-OCTC relationship on one campus,
- A collaboratively shared downtown higher education center,
- More overall collaboration, and
- Continued reliance on the programs in place.

Each of these, except for the last, aroused about equal levels of support in the surveys. The last, which is in effect continuation of the status quo, drew little support. The consensus seems to be that people in Owensboro are willing to consider almost anything other than indefinite reliance on the status quo.



## CHARTING A NEW COURSE: STRATEGIC OPTIONS

The study's recommendations concentrate on new higher education goals and strategies.

### HIGHER EDUCATION GOALS

A higher education participation rate and an education attainment level comparable to those reported for Fayette County in the Year 2000 Census are offered as desirable and challenging goals for the people of Daviess County.

*A higher education participation rate and an education attainment level comparable to those reported for Fayette County in the Year 2000 Census is a challenging but achievable goal.*

- This would require a 250 percent increase in Daviess County's projected undergraduate participation rate by the year 2020 (from 3,868 to 9,756) and a 500 percent increase in its graduate and professional program participation rate (from 527 to 2,675).
- The gradients would level somewhat after this plateau were reached, and the Year 2030 goal would add another 320 undergraduates and 87 graduates to the targeted levels.
- Other participation and attainment goals also might be considered – e.g., the Kentucky State Average and the Large County Peer Average – as they provide alternative goals of lesser magnitude, representing low and medium targets respectively. The Fayette County rate is the high standard.

### A COMMUNITY HIGHER EDUCATION ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION

A firm and persistent commitment to a higher education goal accomplishment campaign is essential. This could be accomplished through the creation of a community advocacy association to guide it. Such an association should be broadly representative of the community's civic, education, and business sectors. Its functions and responsibilities would include:

- Establishing the benchmarks to be used for measuring progress toward the goal, assessing need, planning, organizing, and pursuing initiatives -- including an expanded WKU branch campus and a downtown higher education center -- and
- Acting on behalf of the community to obtain the services of providers of higher education programs, including Kentucky's research universities, from outside of the area to address specific needs.

The association would seek state and institutional policy adjustments and the legislative authority necessary to accomplish the goals. It also should be authorized to seek private gifts and contributions for its purposes.

The association would not provide programs itself but would rely on brokering, contracting, and coordinating the programs of institutions, public and private, to accomplish the goals. Authority to contract for programs and services with private colleges and universities should be part of this.

The association would facilitate the organization of courses of separate institutions into synergistic new programs designed to address future economic conditions, develop a common integrated community institution course/program catalog, and promote cross registration and resource sharing.

The association also should work to bring additional needed programs into the community, particularly master's programs and possibly the WKU cooperative doctoral program with the University of Louisville. In its program planning efforts, it should stress the potential of "sequential cohort" programs that could be offered periodically on an as-needed basis in Owensboro.

## **A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY BRANCH CAMPUS**

A related strategy centers on acquiring a more comprehensive public four-year services in Owensboro. Kentucky presently does not include "branch campuses" among its types of institutions, but the "extended campus" and "university center" concepts it does employ, and which characterize Western's Owensboro presence, are too limited for this community.

*Owensboro's long-term interest lies in the direction of a more comprehensive presence of public four-year programs in the community.*

- Owensboro's long-term community interest lies in the direction of a more comprehensive public four-year program presence, defined in the near-term as a full-fledged branch of a comprehensive 'mother' or 'parent' Kentucky university, viz., WKU
- The branch campus could have a special program character, possibly as a regional center for the provision of programs in the health sciences in conjunction with the regional hospital, reinforcing Owensboro's character as a regional health center for this part of the state.

- The association also would work continuously with WKU and other institutions to bring needed programs in the Technical, Science, Engineering, Agriculture, and other similarly absent program areas to Owensboro.
- Special attention should be directed to accomplishing a conjoint Bachelor of Applied Technology program that articulates with OCTC's Associate of Applied Science and other associate programs by bringing WKU's program to the OCTC campus and the preparation of students for careers in jobs of the future.

## **CONTRACTING FOR PROGRAM ENROLLMENTS WITH INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS**

Authority and funding for contractual relationships with accredited independent colleges and universities should be sought for the purpose of acquiring enrollment spaces in programs that accord with the community and state's strategic plans. This could be a cost-effective approach to expanding higher education opportunities and avoiding the prospect of duplication and competition in vital program areas.

## **A HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER**

A higher education center under association auspices should be established to provide a facility in which cooperation and collaboration, particularly among local providers, can occur.

- This would be a place in which all of the interested local institutions could offer courses and share facilities and resources.
- There could be programs composed of the courses of several participating institutions, cross-registration, a shared library, and full programs offered by individual institutions, including other Kentucky public institution providers and those contracted for throughout the country.
- It would be a center for the provision of Kentucky Virtual University and other institution degree programs offered via distance education.

*Owensboro needs more than what it has. Filling in the higher education gaps will take time and commitment, but the trip is worth the making.*

Essentially the Center would be a multi-institution facility housing articulating academic and technical programs at the upper-division and graduate levels. It also would serve as a site for endowed professorships, such as the St. Louis "Des Lee's Vision" program, which seek to bring higher education's expertise to bear on community issues and problems.

The facility would have an instruction mission centered on community needs, and the program focus would be academic and technical, with instructional programs suited to area needs; a heavy emphasis would be placed on fully integrated ("seamless") lower- and upper-division programs.

In summary, the strategic program centers on these:

- Participation and attainment rate goals,
- A community higher education organization,
- A branch campus,
- Contracting for programs,
- A community higher education center, and
- Strengthened services of regional universities.

They align with the spirit of the Kentucky CPE's draft Public Agenda and the state's interest in expanding the stewardship role of such regional institutions as Western.

There may be other higher education solutions to the needs of Owensboro and Daviess County. Whatever these may be, the case for action is compelling. Owensboro needs more than it has. Pursuing a new course will take effort and commitment, but the trip will be worth the taking.