

# 10 Governors Pledge Support for "Virtual University"

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Ten governors in the West who have been talking about creating a "virtual university" ponied up some tangible support for the effort last week. Each of them promised to seek \$100,000 in state money to help finance it.

The 10 also promised to push for changes in state and federal laws on student aid, accreditation, and copyright, so that the new venture -- which would rely heavily on computers and other technology to deliver education -- could offer some courses by fall 1997.

The commitments came during a meeting of the Western Governors' Association in Omaha. The organization, made up of governors from 18 states and several U.S. territories, had backed the project since December.

The institution they envision would not have a campus, but would allow students to participate in distance-education courses from a number of institutions and to learn from CD-ROMs and other technologies.

If their legislatures stand behind the pledges the governors made, the project would still be short of the \$6-million to \$10-million that planners have said they need to start the new venture, now called Western Governors University.

Thomas O. Singer, coordinator of the project, said the governors would seek donations from foundations and corporations. They might also accept money from investors. The virtual university will be a non-profit institution, but may have for-profit subsidiaries.

The governors of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming have signed on. Others may join, although it is uncertain whether they will include Gov. Pete Wilson of California. His state has the nation's most extensive system of higher education.