



Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable Executive Summary of November 16, 2006 Meeting

I. Meeting Logistics and Format

The second meeting of the Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable (Roundtable) took place on Thursday, November 16, 2006 in Pewaukee, Wisconsin at the Radisson Hotel. The meeting convened at 8:45 a.m. and adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

In attendance at the meeting were three of the four Directors, 14 of 26 Mentors, eight of 13 Chancellors, one UW Regent, UW System President Reilly and Executive Vice President Don Mash, Advisors Michael Theo and Jim Wood, and guests Kristine Andrews, Bob Bartlett, Doug Bradley, Provost Rita Cheng, Vice Chancellor William Colclough III, Provost Patrick Farrell, Dr. Ken Frazier, David Giroux, Freda Harris, Louis Maier III, Mickey Maier and Vice Chancellor Stephen Zielke.

The meeting was divided into two main sessions, one focused on the question of the UW's affordability and accessibility and the other examined how the UW envisions its current commitment to the Wisconsin Idea. Each session contained three segments, including: 1) an orientation presentation by Kevin Reilly and UW Chancellors; 2) a group discussion led by pre-selected Directors, Mentors and Advisors; and 3) a discussion about what next steps might make sense for the Roundtable.

The meeting was videotaped and will be made available to Directors and Mentors at the Roundtable web site.

The meeting was preceded by a Board of Directors meeting at which the Board approved a motion to invite Mr. Randy Dimond, Mr. Mike Jones, Mr. Louis Maier III and Mr. Jim Troupis to join the Board.

II. Session Focus and Next Steps

A. Affordability and Accessibility

1. UW System President Kevin Reilly provided an overview of the issues related to access at the UW and presented the System's Growth Agenda. In his remarks, President

Reilly reported that the UW System has a plan to achieve access and affordability for UW students, and boost economic growth for the state called the Growth Agenda for Wisconsin. He said that with modest state investment, the UW System can provide more slots for Wisconsin students, hold down tuition increases to lower than the rate of inflation, and strengthen the state's economy. He noted that the UW, through the growth agenda, would enroll, retain, and graduate more of its traditional students and would also reach out to underserved populations—nontraditional, working adult students, and students from low-income backgrounds. He highlighted two innovative plans to increase this latter access, the “Adult Student Initiative” and the “Wisconsin Covenant.” As a component of the Growth Agenda, the Wisconsin Covenant, developed in partnership with Governor Jim Doyle, would cover tuition and fees as needed for Wisconsin students who fulfill a pledge to prepare themselves for college during their high school years (www.wisconsin.edu/growthagenda/#access).

President Reilly then introduced UW–Whitewater chancellor Martha Saunders, UW–Parkside Chancellor Jack Keating and UW–Madison Provost Pat Farrell, each of whom gave a brief presentation about initiatives to improve access on their respective campuses.

2. Jim Wood presented data from the August 2005 statewide survey indicating public concerns about the cost of a UW education.
3. An extended and spirited conversation ensued that essentially revolved around three issues. The conversation started around the whole question of cost. Some were concerned that rising tuition costs were, in fact, making it difficult for low-income students to attend a UW campus. Others raised questions and concerns about access to the UW–Madison campus.

UW representatives shared members' concerns about rising tuition and reiterated their belief that economic aid made it possible for all qualified students to access the system and pointed out that many students, who are not able to gain admission to UW–Madison in their freshman year, attend other campuses and then transfer to, and graduate from, UW–Madison.

The conversation evolved from a discussion about the cost to students to an equally interesting conversation about the cost to taxpayers and students that focused on the question of how well the UW System is managing its costs. “Our original assumption that higher quality requires higher cost is not consistent with today's reality,” observed one participant. “No one believes that anymore. You have to figure out where costs are coming from and where quality comes from.”

“The real issue here is the total educational investment pie. This is not just a sales question, but the perception that the overall cost of education is astronomical. The entire education system is seen as too expensive,” argued another. Others raised questions about productivity, asking “How many degrees do we produce for the total cost of education?”

President Reilly pointed out that the UW System is highly regarded by the national experts who study higher education management and that the System has provided the Legislature with an Accountability Report that reports on many of the issues raised. This exchange shifted the conversation to a discussion about quality and value. Some thought that too much time was spent on remedial education and that retention was an issue that needed to be addressed. One, for example, said, “Retention needs to be a major focus for improvement of access to the System,” while another argued that “The UW System has not engaged in helping other institutions succeed. We need to view a UW education as a part of the whole education system in Wisconsin.”

The discussion eventually focused on the question of exactly what people thought the UW System should be doing—i.e., “the what” we were looking for from the System, leading one participant to say, “We need a system of accountability. What should our indicators be? The UW Regents need a new system of accountability tied to more flexibility.”

B. Affordability and Accessibility Next Steps

1. The group seemed most interested in focusing in on the broader question of “the what”—i.e., what do we want the UW to do, how do we measure that, and what changes, if any, do we need to make to get there?
2. There was also a continuing interest in the “cost” issue—i.e., is the UW making the most of the dollars it gets?
3. Everyone acknowledged that they had learned something and there was, we believe, a recognition that we needed to work together to find the “answers” to these questions.

C. Affordability and Accessibility Recommendations

1. The Roundtable Advisors would recommend that the Board of Directors consider appointing a taskforce with Mentor and Director members to examine the question of how best to ascertain what Wisconsin businesses think the UW “what” should be.
2. The Advisors would recommend that the UW System make an effort to ascertain what the UW faculty, staff and student body think the “what” should be.
3. President Reilly offered to provide the Roundtable with materials prepared for the Legislature that he believes are relevant to the UW’s mission and use of resources. The Advisors recommend that we make sure these materials are distributed and used as a starting point for our discussions.
4. The Advisors would also recommend to the Board that an effort be made to determine how other major public university systems have addressed their budgetary dilemmas.
5. President Reilly agreed to provide copies of the UW System Accountability Report to inform the ongoing discussion about how the System measures productivity and progress toward operational goals.

D. UW and the Wisconsin Idea

1. President Reilly cited three examples of how the UW serves the state:
 - WiSys is now helping non-UW researchers (for example, at Marshfield Clinic) secure patents for discoveries;
 - The UW libraries have partnered with Google to make more than a half million volumes accessible to the public online; and
 - UW's Academic Health Center brings health services to all parts of the state.
2. Three UW representatives made presentations, including:
 - A presentation by David Wilson, Chancellor of the UW–Extension and UW–Colleges, who pointed out that Wisconsin's outreach organization is unique because the structure makes the research of faculty at all of the campuses available to help solve problems posed by Wisconsin citizens, municipalities or businesses.
 - A presentation by Bruce Shepard, Chancellor, UW–Green Bay, who spoke about UW–Green Bay's work with business, government and education to assure Northeastern Wisconsin's economic success and pointed specifically to the work UW–Green Bay, in concert with UW–Oshkosh and the other campuses serving the region, has done in developing the Northeastern Wisconsin Growth Agenda, a plan for working together to respond to the needs identified by community leaders and partners.
 - A presentation by Ken Frazier, Director, UW–Madison Libraries detailing UW–Madison's recent agreement to join with Google in making many of the libraries assets available online.

The university drew praise from several Roundtable participants and suggestions from others; including:

- Roundtable Chairman José Delgado, president and CEO of American Transmission Company, praised the University for its commitment to the Wisconsin Idea, but suggested that the activities and results are not being communicated to the public. Mike Jones, senior vice president-general counsel and secretary of Miller Brewing Company, agreed that communications is an issue. “It might be a branding problem. You do a great job, but you don't get credit.” In addition, Randy Dimond, chief technical officer of Promega asked, “Why doesn't the health insurance initiative have the UW–Extension brand?”

- “Where’s the leap forward?” asked Jim Wood. “Much of what you are doing is audience-driven, which is a good thing in business, but you should also be looking over the horizon for the things that are coming at us.” Wood questioned whether the university is doing enough to address such critical issues for Wisconsin, as how we pay for K–12 education, how to deal with an aging population and how the state should respond to a changed economic landscape.
- George Lightbourn, senior fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc., said he believes “The biggest, hairiest, sweatiest issue in Wisconsin is the Milwaukee school system. Nothing could improve the state more than improving the quality of students coming through the Milwaukee schools. We need a Vitamin D solution for urban education. We need an all-out assault by the best minds possible and I presume they are at the UW. That’s the Wisconsin Idea to me.”
- Tom Still, president of the Wisconsin Technology Council, called for “a UW-based Marshall Plan for Wisconsin” that would take on the most important issues facing the state. That should include finding ways to make health care affordable, including reducing the above-average medical costs in the state; improving the performance of Milwaukee’s public schools; and creating a plan to bring economic development to rural areas.
- Bill Howard, owner of Imagesetter, Inc. and Apex Printing, suggested that the UW System should try to prioritize research initiatives rather than allowing faculty to choose. “There’s no organized method for allocating scarce resources, so we get the status quo,” he said. For example, he asked if anybody is investigating whether or how electronic technology improves the delivery mechanism for education.
- No matter what issues are addressed by the university, the state Legislature needs to be involved in the decision-making process, cautioned Mike Theo, vice president of government relations for the Wisconsin Realtors Association. “The new Wisconsin Idea must go through the Legislature. Elected officials are different now (than they were in the early days of the Wisconsin Idea), so it’s a different challenge,” he said. At the same time, legislators realize they do not have all the solutions to the state’s problems, so the university has an opportunity to present issues to the Legislature in a new way.

The UW is trying to walk a fine line between serving the needs of today and trying to see over the horizon, responded President Reilly. For example, the UW is addressing current energy issues with its bio-mass initiative and is addressing the school funding question. On the other hand, the UW’s Growth Agenda for Wisconsin takes a much broader and long-term view. That initiative grew out of the visionary Wisconsin Economic Summit, which was initiated by the UW.

E. UW and the Wisconsin Idea Next Steps and Recommendations

1. Chancellor Wiley of UW–Madison has initiated a Wisconsin Idea initiative on his campus. We should gather more information about this initiative and ask all the other chancellors to share any activity they have undertaken in recent years or are undertaking now that would meet the Wisconsin Idea criteria we discussed.
2. We should survey all Roundtable members to develop a list of issues they believe might qualify for some sort of Wisconsin Idea initiative and then ask the UW System to help us identify what sort of academic expertise exists in the areas identified.
3. Ultimately we should work with the UW System to identify one or two specific initiatives that might enable Wisconsin’s business community to collaborate with the UW System in addressing a major Wisconsin need or opportunity.

III. Next Roundtable Meeting

The Board of Directors will meet at the end of January and will determine at that time the date and location of the next meeting. At the moment, we are thinking about a meeting in April.