

Strategic Planning Workgroup: Serving the Public Good

Preliminary Report

Overview

UW-Eau Claire has been a leader in community engagement in the past; other universities have used us as a model for collaborative research and service learning. We feel strongly that UW-Eau Claire needs to continue to play a leadership role in the future. Failing to meet the educational needs of community members may result in them going elsewhere for solutions. It may also result in the university not receiving the financial support it needs to thrive.

Our workgroup accomplished the following during the months of June and July:

- We identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as it related to community engagement from our perspectives.
- We reviewed the university's mission for clarification and direction as to what serving the public good meant from a UW-Eau Claire perspective. (For example, does it include graduate programs and baccalaureate degree completion programs for non-traditional students as well as Continuing Education programs, internships and service-learning? Conceivably, everything we do as a public university could be viewed as "serving the public good".)
- We started a list of potential model programs which we have listed in this report. This list is hardly complete and further research is needed.
- We developed a list of regional key constituents that should be contacted for ideas and feedback regarding current and future community engagement.
- We developed focus group questions and an online survey to capture information from those unable to attend a focus group session. Survey information will be used by our work group as well as the university's Higher Learning Commission's Engagement and Service subgroup. Our next step is to conduct focus groups.

The following report highlights our work to date. We have only just begun to wrap our hands around the notion of community engagement.

UW-Eau Claire as an Engaged University

UW-Eau Claire is already actively engaged within the “community”. Students, faculty and staff participate in service-learning, joint research opportunities or community service throughout the city, region, state and nation. Continuing Education reaches out to the community through conferences, seminars, customized training, personal enrichment experiences, and one-on-one consulting opportunities. Through the services provided by Career Services, employers gain access to prospective interns and employees. Alumni Relations hosts special events and informational luncheons (“Let’s Do Lunch” series) that bring “town and gown” together. The university also serves the community through a number of established and emerging collaborative programs such as the NanoSTEM Initiative, Materials Science Center, Human Development Center, University of Wisconsin MBA Consortium, UW-Eau Claire Marshfield Satellite Nursing Program, UW System Collaborative Nursing Program, Center for Communication Disorders and UW-Eau Claire Physics and Engineering Dual Degree Program. This list is by no means exhaustive. It is probably safe to say that every UW-Eau Claire unit engages in some sort of community outreach.

While the university has always had numerous community focused programs and initiatives scattered across the institution, it has lacked a strategic, university-wide approach to engagement. The engagement workgroup wisely recognized that meeting the needs of the external community involves more than just adding a program here or there. Sustainable engagement must be linked to the university’s mission and strategic plan as well as every dimension of campus life -- faculty roles and rewards, campus culture, curriculum and pedagogy, distribution of resources, and community relationships. (Holland 1999).

Our workgroup was very pragmatic. While we all had our own favorite community projects we would like to see the university embrace, we understood that a number of barriers within the university must be overcome first if greater sustainable community collaboration were to occur. These barriers, which we identified in our SWOT analysis, were as follows:

- **Institutional inertia**, which has produced a culture that tends to embrace the “status quo” and is risk adverse.
- **Lack of focus.** Too often, we try to be “all things to all people”.
- **Lack of funding.** Money is needed to develop new curriculum and/or programming and support the hiring/retraining of faculty and staff for new ventures.
- **Increased competition across units caused by limited resources.** Collaboration and real change is difficult as units are more protective of what resources they have.
- **Inability to move resources (financial, human) quickly to respond to community requests and needs.** Our workgroup perceived that Chippewa

Valley Technical College and UW-Stout were able to react much quicker than we could.

- **Inadequate facilities.** Limited office space, limited conference space and aging and obsolete labs and technology make it difficult to add new programs. Identified a need to improve our infrastructure.
- **Limited communication across units.** Faculty and staff know what is happening in their areas but lack knowledge as to what others are doing so collaboration is limited.

Our workgroup also believed the university needed to address the following community perceptions:

- **Difficulty in accessing services.** University services scattered throughout the campus making it difficult for community members to locate them. Confusion exists within the community as to who to contact when needs occur.
- **Lack of interest in non-tradition students.** UW-Eau Claire does a wonderful job addressing the needs of traditional aged students; however, the university falls short when addressing the needs of non-traditional students. We believe the community perceives other area educational institutions, such as Chippewa Valley Technical College, Cardinal Stritch University, Lakeland College, St. Mary's of Minnesota, and UW-Stout, as more receptive to non-traditional, working adult students.

These perceptions were anecdotal as our workgroup wasn't aware of any university-wide longitudinal studies of external constituents that have been conducted at UW-Eau Claire.

Comments and Preliminary Recommendations

Sustainable engagement requires leadership, institutional infrastructure, and financial support that smoothes the path for faculty and students and continually attracts more individuals to participate and contribute. (Percy, Zimpher, Brukardt, 2006). UW-Eau Claire has an opportunity for reinvention and innovation due to recent changes in administrative leadership. We need to do a better job identifying those things that make us distinctive. Priorities need to be set and tough decisions need to be made regarding programs and resources. We need a mindset and structure that allows us to proact to demographic, economic, technological trends.

The following preliminary recommendations are the result of our initial discussions and research within the workgroup. We anticipate that this initial summary of ideas will be revised and expanded significantly as we secure additional input from external stakeholder groups through scheduled focus group meetings.

Institutional Infrastructure

- **Develop a strategic, university-wide approach to community engagement.** Define what community engagement means at UW-Eau Claire and identify institutional priorities or key areas of focus. Update the university's mission to reflect this focus and communicate it via the university's website, and other communication vehicles.
- **Develop a protocol for analyzing potential community engagement programs and projects.** Possible guidelines developed by the workgroup are as follows:
 - Fit and/or appropriateness given the university's mission
 - Ability to connect the campus to the community and have visibility
 - Measurable impact within the university and the community
 - Supporting trends and data
 - Cost of the project
 - Availability of funding and revenue sources (matching grants, fees)
- **Create an inventory of community engagement projects to aid communication and further collaboration.** Develop a strategy for communicating success stories to internal audiences and external constituents (general public, donors, media, legislators, etc.)
- **Develop a resource directory.** Maintain and promote the Regional Business Assistance Resource directory, a web-based portal developed through the Regional Education Consortium that lists the collective resources and programs available to businesses through regional public higher education institutions.
- **Develop an on-going program assessment process.** Assess community engagement programs/projects to determine if they are serving the university's mission and meeting community needs. Further research on assessment tools needs to occur. A possible resource may be the National Center for the Study of University Engagement at Michigan State University.
- **Develop a longitudinal community survey.** Survey community partners to determine their interests, assets and needs as it relates to community engagement. Maintain survey results in the university's Office of Instructional Research so results can be accessed freely by interested parties. To begin this process, the workgroup is conducting focus groups of key constituency groups with the HLC subgroup.
- **Create a "front door", "umbrella organization" or "coordinating unit" that makes it easy for community members to interact with and access university resources.** The proposed UW-Eau Claire unit would relocate campus units that serve external constituents into a single, convenient off-

campus location possibly in downtown Eau Claire. Databases, administrative and program support, and meeting facilities would be shared resulting in better and more consistent service for customers, and cost savings and greater access to resources for campus units. Potential units for partial or complete relocation could include Alumni Relations, Center for Service-Learning, Continuing Education, Entrepreneur Program, Center for Leadership (College of Business), Career Services, Center for Health and Aging Excellence, Materials Science Center, and Small Business Development Center.

One possible model is the Solution Center at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, which provides a single "front door" to IUPUI for people in the Central Indiana region. The Center seeks to develop partnerships, create professional internships, and expand linkages between the community and faculty, drawing on existing assets and creating new capacities when necessary, through a customized approach to community clients. In addition to serving as a broker between the community and the campus, the Solution Center use funds from a \$1.7 million grant as "venture capital" to invest (as matching money) in worthy projects that may not have sufficient money. The money in the fund is held in trust for the benefit of the community and is available to the community to "buy" goods and services from IUPUI schools, faculty, students, and staff, with priority given to economic development opportunities in one of the university's six strategic clusters.

- **Establish a student center that expands the current base of programs and improves access for non-traditional students.** This center could include non-traditional student services, graduate studies, representatives from the academic colleges, and Continuing Education (personal enrichment, professional development, business outreach services, other.) A possible model to explore is Millard Fillmore College (MFC) at the University at Buffalo which has served adult non-traditional students since 1923. MFC offers a variety of courses and programs -- including traditional on-campus, online, and off-campus options -- for working adults and other nontraditional students. On-campus classes meet in the late afternoon or evening, and are typically held once per week for three to four hours. Select courses are offered on weekends.

Millard Fillmore's University Study in the Workplace, is an innovative partnership with employers that brings college credit courses to the workplace in a variety of forms (live on-site classes, web-based classes, and combinations of these modalities). University Study in the Workplace staff customizes each program to fit organizational goals and employee educational needs. Student support and advising services are available for each student. Program benefits include affordable tuition and fees,

convenience, and quality instruction from campus faculty and expert practitioners

Financing Considerations

Our workgroup didn't give much consideration to funding support due to time constraints. However a number of comments regarding funding surfaced from our discussions that we wish to share:

- **Seek strategies for gaining greater financial independence.** We must continue to seek grants and private funds to support programs. We must renew our efforts to work with legislators to seek more control over decisions regarding tuition and other state funding.
- **Leverage the university's reputation to form strategic partnerships that expand our reach and influence with other UW comprehensive campuses and generate new revenue streams.** A number of possible models exist: University of Wisconsin MBA Consortium, Materials Science Center, Center of Health and Aging Services Excellence.
- **Explore the possibility of sharing facilities with community partners.** Possible projects: a larger performing arts center or a better athletic arena. Possible models include the community performing arts center at the South Dakota State University in Brookings, South Dakota.

Closing

Our workgroup will continue our efforts in assessing the University's impact and influence in this area. Next steps include the administration of a series of audience-specific, focus groups which will serve to broaden our net in the collection of data related to general perceptions of, experiences with and recommendations for the University. Stakeholder groups represented will include business, economic development, music and the arts, downtown redevelopment, nonprofit, diversity, healthcare, education, sciences and non-traditional students. These meetings will occur in late summer and early fall and should include some valuable, content-rich discussions and result in a wealth of information from which to draw additional recommendations and provide direction for future planning.

References

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