A Passion for Learning
in the Service of Wisconsin and the World:

The Kauffman Seminar – 2006

INTRODUCTION

Our University is deeply rooted in the Passion for Learning that is a distinguishing characteristic of the people of the State of Wisconsin. With roots deep in the land grant tradition, the University of Wisconsin-Madison rose to greatness on the guiding principles of the Wisconsin Idea. We have educated many generations of our best and brightest, we have contributed to our economy through our discoveries and our outreach activities, and as the UW system has evolved, we have served as a flagship on national and international stages.

Recent attention to our University has been dominated by financial challenge and administrative controversy; however, as the Chancellor has pointed out, such issues do not characterize our institution. We continue to graduate very talented and successful undergraduate classes with ever-increasing administrative efficiency; our research efforts continue to grow and contribute to the well being of humanity; and our alumni and other donors continue to support our expanding knowledge enterprises through donations and a broad range of volunteer efforts.

Discussions in the Kauffman seminar over the last few months have often focused on the challenges that face our institution, but at the heart of our conversations has been a shared belief that the University is an essential element of our society. Participants come from all parts of the University and this commitment clearly runs deep.

Just as the passion for learning runs deep in the culture of Wisconsin, the democratic culture of shared governance runs deep within the University. That culture constrains the rate at which change occurs and often produces a sense of change emerging rather than being lead. The seminar has debated the virtues and pitfalls of this “edge of chaos” state of affairs to no firm conclusion save the fact that good or bad, it is the way we do things here.

With that in mind we have asked ourselves, “What is it that unifies the broad spectrum of people who work in our institution?” We conclude that it is the passion for learning that unifies us, that passion which in turn should serve as an organizing principle in our teaching, research, learning and management. More simply put, we believe that if we organize our actions and decision-making around a passion for learning, then paths through, around or over many of the obstacles we now face may be better illuminated.

... IN THE SERVICE OF WISCONSIN AND THE WORLD

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is a great university. As the flagship of the UW System, we draw outstanding students from across the state. As a premier public university, we attract excellent students from across the nation. And as an internationally ranked research university, our campus draws the finest minds from around the globe.

The prestige that our university enjoys has grown out of the deep-seated value our local cultures place on education and learning and on the particular ethos characterized by the Wisconsin Idea.
The magnitude of our learning reflects more than learning for its own sake, embracing learning to improve quality of life. Enriched, inspired and equipped, educated individuals employ personal realization in community-building service. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, we believe that a citizenry who can grapple critically with complex issues and can find answers to hard questions is the foundation of a strong democracy, both here and abroad.

Historically, “far and wide” meant the northern counties or perhaps Minnesota. The meaning of “far and wide” has evolved, but our commitment to a style of learning in which the boundaries of the university are porous and in which knowledge is built upon interactions among members of the formal university community and members of communities beyond our boundaries remains. The learning accomplished in these dialogs comes alive because it is done for a reason.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is a state institution; thus service to the state is our responsibility. In this light, our global preeminence may be seen as superfluous and 100 years ago, that may have been true. In a world of globally distributed communications, commerce, and disease, our global character is vitally important to the state as well as to other regions of the world. Service to the state must include knowledge of how evolving information technology, distant economic opportunities and livestock epidemics will affect our state and our region. Our best and brightest must be prepared to advance the interests of our rural north in the urban business districts of Europe and Asia. Service to the state requires service to the world.

**Some Challenges We Face**

Through out the course of this year’s Kauffman seminar we have articulated a broad set of challenges faced by the University. In the following section, the “Passion for Learning” theme is applied to these challenges as a filter through which they might be addressed.

**Maintaining a Commitment to Teaching & Learning: Balancing Adaptability and Innovation with Tradition and Public Obligation**

**Key Issues and Questions:**

- How can we tap into the potential of ALL members of the university community to provide a stimulating and productive climate for learning?
- What are the latest technologies and best practices for student engagement?

Perhaps most straight forward of all, if a passion for learning permeates the atmosphere of our campus, then our commitment to teaching and learning should be clear and its quality should continually improve. Learning is not limited to our students, but should be considered a part of what everyone in our community does.

**Public Access to Higher Education: Providing Educational Opportunities for a Wide Range of Students No Matter What Background or Origin**

**Key Issues and Questions:**

- As the mean household income of the UW-Madison freshman class increases are we becoming elitist?
- What does elitist mean and when is it something to be concerned about?
• How can we define and maintain high academic standards while offering access to all who are willing?

Teaching our next generations is at the core of all of the campuses of our University. Concern about access to our University reflects, at least in part, the continued life of a strong belief in learning that characterizes the cultures of our state. As the flagship campus in our system, our commitment to learning must be reflected in our policies delineating access and the demographics of our student body. We must find ways to ensure that we maximize the number of students to whom we provide a quality education. We must also acknowledge that that number is finite and may be less than demand; in this case our commitment must be to ensure that our passion is shared throughout the campuses of the rest of the system.

**Faculty Retention: Competition for Top Talent**

*Key Issues and Questions:*

• How can we retain and recruit talented faculty when our start-up packages, salaries, domestic partner benefits, and political climate seem to be unattractive in the national marketplace?

The *Built to Last* greatness of a university is inextricably linked to the greatness of the Faculty of that university. Indeed it is the faculty who instill their passion for learning into our students who in turn carry it into our communities and our future. Conversely, if our faculty members begin to feel the passion seeping out of the atmosphere here in Madison, they will seek to leave and our best will easily find new homes. There may be no other areas where instilling institutional fire into learning is more important. Many of our competitive disadvantages with respect to direct and indirect compensation can be offset by an atmosphere that is electric with the excitement of learning and discovery.

**Changing Budgetary Picture: Shift from Public to Private Funding**

*Key Issues and Questions:*

• Why is the state funding only part of the university’s budget, yet the state retains full oversight?

• What voice do other financial stakeholders have in governance?

• What is the tipping point for citizens of the state to demand funding for higher education?

As we make decisions about how we allocate resources and develop strategies for evolving our portfolio of sources, asking ourselves how our decisions will amplify the passion for learning in the campus environment should be a guiding principle. We must also be clear in our articulation of how decisions beyond our control affect the campus learning climate. We must be strong in our prioritization regarding allocation of existing resources and clear that one of our dominant public purposes is the dissemination of a passion for learning.

---

Administrative Efficiency and Effectiveness: Reduced Resources, Higher Expectations

Key Issues and Questions:
- Why does “administration” have such a negative connotation?
- How can administrators better communicate what they do and why it is important to the functioning of the university?

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is blessed with a remarkably talented and committed staff. Many members of our community forego higher salaries elsewhere so that they can work in an atmosphere of intellectual excitement. While that value has served us well, we must remember that it does not put bread on the table. Many of our staff have learned how to do their jobs with increasing efficiency and this element of our learning should be communicated to our critics. It is not true that universities run themselves; high quality learning by our students requires dedicated staff members to admit and house them, keep their records, protect their health and safety, and launch them into their adult lives upon graduation. Similarly new discoveries require infrastructure to submit and manage proposals and finances, to ensure safety and compliance and to ensure that new knowledge is disseminated.

Unfavorable Political Climate: Improving Relations with Legislature and Public

Key Issues and Questions:
- Comparison between current political climate and past- what has changed and why?
- Does UW have a plan or strategies for improving relations with legislature?
- What are the most effective levers (citizens, legislators, organizations) to positively influence the image of the university?

A great deal of the current political tension regarding State support for the University is reflected in the “us versus them” climate that has developed. This antagonistic environment has overshadowed the passion for learning that is deeply rooted in the cultures of Wisconsin. We need to find ways to access that deep cultural feeling; indeed, if that learning were no longer valued in our society, it is not likely that so many of our future leaders and citizens would strive for an education from our campus.

Internal Communications: Sharing Information with Campus Community in a Timely, Thorough Manner While Respecting Due Process and Relationships

Key Issues and Questions:
- What is the best way to make sure campus community has been made aware, and ideally bought-into, campus wide messages, strategies?
- Centralization vs. decentralization of decision making and planning. Which is better or do we need both?

If a passion for learning is to be a real asset and one that people value as part of their employment at UW-Madison, then that passion must be nurtured in our internal communications. In particular everyone who leads, from the chancellor through our myriad supervisors, must share an understanding of our mission and be able to relate the importance of what they do to the fostering of learning in our students, staff and faculty. Communiqués should be constructed not
only as messages, but also as parts of a larger pedagogy. Our passion for learning should be expressed in our every management act.

Research, Intellectual Property & Technology Transfer: Managing Conflicts of Interest; Contributing to State Economic Growth

Key Issues and Questions:

- How can we encourage the cultivation of services and products from the many ideas being developed all over campus?
- How should/can it be best communicated that UW Madison is a critical engine of economic growth for the state?
- What steps need to be taken to ensure that researchers do not have significant conflicts of interest while employed at the university and other (private) ventures?

The relationship between research, intellectual property and technology transfer is complicated in all universities. Being a land-grant university in a time of financial stress greatly increases the complexity of the equation. Discoveries that are made by our researchers can have great value both in terms of benefit to society and in terms of revenue generated through their commercialization. Such revenue streams have become an important source of funding for innovation and quality improvement throughout our campus. There is concern that the potential for revenue may cloud the openness that characterizes the refinement and propagation of ideas in academia. Returning to the touchstone of our passion for learning can provide a compass to guide as we find our way forward.

A UNIVERSITY CONGRESS – UNLEASHING OUR PASSION FOR LEARNING

One suggestion for renewing our passion for learning is to hold a campus-wide congress. As a lead up to the congress, every member of our community would be asked to give time to thinking about “How do we improve the University?” Staff members would be given time on their normal hours to consider and record their conclusions. Their suggestions would be compiled and the compilation distributed. The compilation would serve as the foundation for a campus-wide Congress whose outcome would be a synthesis of our community’s ideas and input and a renewal of our collective Passion for Learning.