

27 October 2017

As former UW Colleges campus leaders we are concerned that inadequate planning by the UW System could harm current and future students and jeopardize the large investment counties and municipalities have made. UW System is putting the cart before the horse by announcing a total reorganization without a well thought out and publicly discussed plan.

We are not saying that the concept of “reorganization” with regional campuses is necessarily a bad idea, but rather if it is to work, it must be thought through and discussed publicly before a decision is made. Consider the following:

Regionalization: Only two years ago regionalization within UWC was done in the name of cost savings and increased efficiencies. Now more efficiencies are being sought, this time by dissolving the institution and attaching UWC campuses to various regional 4-year campuses.

Enrollments: Much has been made of campus’ declining enrollment (and the resultant budget problem). But choosing 2010 as the benchmark year is misleading, as it was one with peak enrollment. Moreover, the regionalization forced by state budget cuts three years ago contributed to this decline due to the loss of local campus leaders, community visibility, on-campus services, and on-the-ground recruiters for each campus.

Why do the proposers believe enrollment will not continue to slide at the branch campuses? It’s been stated that branch campus tuition will remain significantly lower than at the 4-yr campus. Given that tuition dollars are crucial to budget, why wouldn’t 4-yr campus recruiters encourage students to enroll at the parent campus and thus reap more financially? Something like this occurred when the Colleges campuses were branches of the 4-yr campuses during the 1970s.

If branch campus enrollments don’t improve (and we think this likely without local leadership and restored student services) there would then be additional pressure to save money, to become more efficient. The chancellors at parent 4-year campuses could see these as a drain on their limited resources and might well decide to eliminate the branch campuses.

Among the many questions deserving answers:

- What would happen to the UWC campuses’ collaborations with the local leadership and to the monetary support provided by County Boards and the UWC foundations?
- How much money will be saved by this reorganization? Won’t those savings come due to eliminating jobs of community members?
- Will the money saved by eliminating UW Colleges administration and perhaps other UWC campus employees be used to support the branch campuses? Or will it be absorbed by the 4-yr campuses and System Administration?
- The UW Colleges AAS degree satisfies general education requirements at all 4-yr campuses. What guarantee is there that branch campus students will be able to transfer freely to any UW 4-year campus, not just to the regional one?
- How can this move increase access for the less-prepared and often older, less mobile students that UW Colleges, the only open-access institution in the UW System, successfully launch to university success? Will the 4-year campuses now take on that mission?
- What would happen to tuition money and fees collected at the branch campuses? Why wouldn’t a regional 4-year campus allocate relatively more resources, including top faculty, to itself rather than to its branches? (In the 1970s, some furnishings and equipment disappeared from some of the “satellite” campuses and reappeared at the “main” campuses.)
- Might the branch campuses be reduced to distant education facilities, with a corresponding loss in the faculty-student contact and community relationships that have made the Colleges so special?
- What will happen to UW Colleges-wide programs that pool the expertise of faculty across the thirteen campuses to offer an on-line Associate’s degree that provides a solid start for students who, for family or employment reasons, are not mobile? The campuses in the Colleges have also routinely shared courses with one another and with high schools across the state through interactive video.

- What assurance is there that four-year degrees (requiring more than double the number of course offerings) will be cost effective for delivery at the relatively low enrollment branch campus? Are facilities adequate to support four-year degrees? (STEM fields require specialized facilities.)

We believe the president, regents and your local legislators should answer the questions before making such a sweeping change, and that a thorough, well vetted plan, be developed rather than a rush to implementation by July 1, 2018.

Roland Baldwin

Campus Executive Officer and Dean Emeritus
UW-Manitowoc
roland.baldwin@uwc.edu

Andy Keogh

Campus Executive Officer and Dean Emeritus
UW-Marshfield/Wood County
akeogh@charter.net

Sid Bremer

Campus Executive Officer and Dean Emerita
UW-Marinette
sid.bremer@gmail.com

James W. Perry

Campus Executive Officer and Dean Emeritus
UW-Fox Valley
jimperry1948@gmail.com

Paul W. Chase

Campus Executive Officer and Dean Emeritus
UW-Barron County
paul.rapptta@gmail.com

Aural Umhoefer

Campus Dean Emerita
UW-Baraboo/Sauk County
pauralum@centurytel.net

Judy Goldsmith

Campus Executive Officer and Dean (Retired)
UW-Fond du Lac
judygold@charter.net