Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State LEAP Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success

University of Wisconsin Year 3 Report
September 2011

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System Level Outcomes

The Give Students a Compass project has been a game-changer for the University of Wisconsin System’s LEAP initiative. As the centerpiece of the UW System’s LEAP Wisconsin work for the last three years, Compass has had a significant impact in several key areas and in ways benefiting the System as a whole, despite the fact that the Compass project involved only three UW institutions (UW-Eau Claire, UW-Milwaukee, and UW-Oshkosh). Several of these outcomes were stated as goals of the entire Compass project as envisioned by AAC&U; several of them were unanticipated.

Most significant, Compass has led to the system-wide embrace of high-impact practices (HIPs), thus meeting one of the primary goals of the project. This has entailed: deeper understanding by the System’s administrative leaders, faculty, academic staff, and governing board of the learning gains—in particular for underserved students—achieved through participation in HIPs; enhanced HIP offerings at all UW institutions; and greater attention to the participation rates, performance, and impact on persistence for a variety of student populations, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, first-generation, income, and transfer status. The project emphasis on evidence and assessment of underserved student participation and performance in HIPs has motivated other UW institutions to be similarly intentional in how they organize their HIP offerings and ensure more widespread participation across student populations. The UW System’s online HIP repository, featuring UW exemplars, has been “test-driven” and is almost ready to go live (the “go-live” date for the site has been delayed because of staffing challenges, web support in particular). The institutionalization of HIPs that has taken place is sustainable, mostly because institutions recognize how they contribute to strategic goals to retain and graduate more students. At the same time, additional progress will be hampered by the fundamental challenge of how to provide more access to effective high-impact practices for students in an environment of shrinking resources. (See Appendix A for the HIP website front page and url.)

Second, Compass has resulted in the more authentic integration of the System’s LEAP work with Inclusive Excellence, its strategic framework for diversity, equity and inclusion. Compass’s project design intentionally included the Lumina Foundation-supported focus on “making excellence inclusive,” along with the curricular redesign goals funded by the Carnegie Corporation. In fact, in the UW System, these initiatives—initially cast as distinct for multiple reasons (some strategic and some not)—have always been joined at the hip and the Compass focus on HIPs has helped to foreground that. Led collectively by the UW System Compass liaisons and the campus team leaders, this integration has been timely and necessary. And it has resulted in a better understanding of who the underserved students are at each UW: not only low-income and students of color, but also first-generation and transfer students. Compass has helped the System place more focused attention on all these groups of students.

This integration was made visible in the November 2010 Compass Institute, the System’s required Compass conference which took place in year 3 of the project. The Institute program,
including plenary speakers, activities and concurrent sessions, highlighted in multiple ways the extent to which Inclusive Excellence—as theoretical framework, call to action, and end goal—might serve to lead the UW System to the systemic change at the heart of the Compass project (see Appendix B). In the inaugural LEAP States Summit convened by AAC&U in March 2011, the UW System was asked to lead a session on Inclusive Excellence and its relationship to both LEAP and the System’s strategic framework, the *Growth Agenda for Wisconsin* (see Appendix C).

Perhaps the most significant, unanticipated outcome of Compass at the System level, and one that has helped achieve the more robust integration mentioned above, has been the intentional inclusion of the System’s policy-makers in the “consciousness-raising” aspects of the work (to borrow a term from UW-Eau Claire’s report). In the last few years, the System Office of Academic Affairs has regularly placed Compass and related topics on the agendas of the Board of Regents Education Committee (see Appendix D). These presentations included: October 2009 full-Board presentation on the Compass project, featuring Compass leaders from the three beta sites; presentation on equity-mindedness in October 2010; presentation on “Student Success Programs for Populations of Opportunity through High-Impact Practices” in December 2010, featuring the UW-Eau Claire Provost discussing the Compass project and other efforts to advance HIPs on campus, along with the Provost and Vice Provost from UW-River Falls and UW-Madison, respectively; and a presentation on academic quality in the UW System through LEAP in April 2011, featuring the UW-Oshkosh Provost, UW-Milwaukee Associate Dean and Compass team leader Jeffrey Merrick (now retired), and Compass System liaison, Rebecca Karoff. At the highest administrative levels of the System, the decision has been made repeatedly to bring the Compass, LEAP and Inclusive Excellence work taking place at the institutions and supported by System Administration, to the attention of the governing board so that when the policy makers acted on issues related to student access, mobility, engagement, learning and success, and personnel and budgetary priorities (for example), they did so with a deeper understanding of the role of liberal education—and with it of the imperative to make excellence inclusive—in acting as stewards for ensuring and preserving quality public higher education in Wisconsin.

The Compass area which has seen more limited progress is General Education reform, although inroads have also been made at each beta site. There is no mandated or systemwide GE curriculum for UW institutions. The System’s strong culture of faculty governance, with its statutorily granted authority over the curriculum in the hands of the faculty at each UW, continues to make GE reform a challenge and an elongated process. Nonetheless, Compass has allowed for creative and institution-specific redesign, focused on the LEAP essential learning outcomes, and this progress is reflected in the campus reports that follow.

**Beta Site Outcomes**

The individual strengths and challenges particular to each of the Compass beta sites remain in evidence at the end of the project, as they were at the beginning. Following are some culminating highlights (and links to Year 3 Reports) from each of the UW System beta site Compass projects. (See Appendix E for the Compass website front page and url.)
UW-Eau Claire

UW-Eau Claire is a campus that cares deeply about social justice and views higher education as one of America’s most historically powerful avenues for achieving it. The university is a leader throughout the System in how it places equity and equity-mindedness at the center of institutional definitions of excellence. This identity and culture have been in evidence throughout Eau Claire’s Compass project, as the campus’s final report makes clear. Primary outcomes include: progress on General Education redesign, featuring “bundled” courses (integrated groups of courses taken in concert, organized around a common theme); and data-driven expansion of HIPs, especially undergraduate research opportunities that reach out to underserved first-generation students and the nascent development of programs targeting transfer students of color, another population identified as underserved through Compass-motivated examination of NSSE data. The campus has successfully leveraged additional funding, from its differential tuition-derived Blugold Commitment and a Department of Education Title III grant designed to reform undergraduate general education, in the service of its Compass goals, extending their reach and impact. The full Year 3 Compass Report for UW-Eau Claire may be found at: http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/compass/beta/projects.html.

UW-Milwaukee

UW-Milwaukee is one of two doctoral, the second-largest, and the most diverse institution in the UW System, with over 25,000 undergraduate students. Its size contributes to a more decentralized approach to systemic reform and the campus’s Compass project has had to confront an entrenched General Education curriculum, in which GE courses tend to be revenue-generating, large-lecture classes “owned” by departments. Nonetheless, what UW-Milwaukee has accomplished through the Compass project in the last few years is remarkable. Under the framework of the General Education Task Force, Compass leaders and team members engineered a shared conversation and adoption of LEAP essential learning outcomes where there was none, and a proposed, outcomes-based redesign of GE wending its way through governance. UW-Milwaukee’s Compass work on HIPs, an integral part of its overall curricular redesign, has focused on first-year seminars, learning communities, and undergraduate research. In particular, the Compass project has had an important impact on how the campus engages students in their first-year experiences by developing institution-specific solutions to challenges in enlarging the campus’s strong first-year seminar program in the face of limited resources. UW-Milwaukee has also integrated its Compass work into other reform efforts underway, most notably the campus’s college-completion “Access to Success” initiative. The full Year 3 Compass Report for UW-Milwaukee may be found at: http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/compass/beta/projects.html.

UW-Oshkosh

UW-Oshkosh is remarkable for the institution-wide engagement with liberal education reform, one initiated by the Chancellor and Provost, yet that has reached into every corner of the institution with remarkable buy-in. As UW-Oshkosh’s final report makes clear, its Compass project has taken a lead role in this larger reform effort, its goals coincident with the institution’s strategic goals. The infrastructure put in place to ensure the success of liberal education reform has led to focused, institution-wide support of the campus’s Compass project. This infrastructure
is unique, unlike not only the other two beta sites but any other institution in the UW System (and presumably most other universities and colleges in the country). Oshkosh outcomes include a revised General Education curriculum working its way successfully through faculty governance, impressive number of HIPs being institutionalized, a phenomenal integration of academic with student affairs, and a strong commitment to assessment of student learning and evidence-driven reform. Oshkosh has also been not only a partner in, but also a driver of the systemwide integration of LEAP with Inclusive Excellence, described above. The full Year 3 Compass Report for UW-Oshkosh may be found at: http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/compass/beta/projects.html.

Conclusions

All of those working on the UW System’s Compass project would second UW-Eau Claire’s statement that “it would be premature to think of this as [the] Final Compass Report.” Compass remains a work in progress. While every one of the Compass project sites and state systems have proven the project’s working hypothesis that the state system can serve as a generative catalyst for change, there is still a lot of potential transformation to be realized.

The University of Wisconsin System Administration and the three Compass beta sites would like to express their appreciation to AAC&U, the Lumina Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation for the remarkable opportunity to participate in “Give Students a Compass.” It has been a privilege to be a part of Compass project, so artfully designed by AAC&U to help the UW System—and the other Compass systems in Oregon and California—solidify, integrate, and fulfill their own strategic goals. It should be clear that, as important as Compass has been as a discreet project, it has also helped raise the profile of the UW System’s LEAP work, not only with the institutions but also with the System’s governing board. This has been critically important to the UW System, in that LEAP has become a vital part of the System’s Growth Agenda for Wisconsin, and the blueprint for how academic quality and excellence are defined in the System, definitions that include equity and diversity. And—it is hoped—this has been important, too, to AAC&U in the exciting efforts to ramp up the engagement and activity of other state systems in advancing the nation’s college completion agenda through quality, liberal education.
Appendix A – Front Page of UW System HIP Website
http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/hips/

High Impact Practices

- High Impact Practices
- What Makes a HIP
- Why HIPs Matter
- Access to HIPs

High Impact Practices (HIPs) in the UW System

High Impact Practices are:

- intellectually engaging and effective educational practices;
- shown to deepen student learning and engagement;
- shown to raise levels of performance, retention and success for all students.

As a set of purposeful learning experiences, HIPs have the potential to lead students to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and habits of mind that are essential for life and livelihood in the 21st century global society.

Research shows that high-impact teaching practices (known as HIPs) are especially effective at helping students reach those learning outcomes valued most by the academy, including University of Wisconsin institutions in particular.

HIPs embody the hallmarks of a quality education and they lead to more and better-prepared graduates from UW institutions.

For more information on how the UW system characterizes quality education, go to LEAP Wisconsin.

Inspired by George Kuh and the AAC&U

This site draws from the work of educational researcher George Kuh and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), who have taken the lead nationally in establishing the importance of high-impact practices. In the AAC&U monograph *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, George Kuh presents data on HIPs from the National Survey of Student Engagement and relates the pivotal role HIPs play in providing a 21st-century liberal education.

More on HIPs

- AAC&U HIPs Overview
- HIPs & UW System
- HIPs at UW Campuses
On November 10-12, 2010, approximately 110 higher educators came together for the UW System’s Compass Institute. The participants comprised faculty, academic staff, and administrators from the UW System’s 14 campus-based institutions, and UW System Administration. Also present were colleagues from the System’s national partner, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U); the two other Compass state systems, the California State and the Oregon University Systems; and workshop leaders from Massachusetts, Oregon and New York.

The Compass Institute was convened as a part of the grant project *Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success*. The Compass grant is one of the UW System’s signature projects in its collaboration with AAC&U on the LEAP Campaign (*Liberal Education and America’s Promise)*.

The Institute was designed to feature, celebrate, and advance the good work in which UW System institutions are engaged on: Curricular Redesign; Inclusive Excellence; High-Impact Practices; Underserved Student Success. In general, the Institute brought people together to dialogue on how we can work together to make sure all our students persist and graduate from our institutions with as relevant a 21st-century liberal education as we can give them.

The program included an intentional balance of presentation and interactive sessions featuring UW System people, as well as colleagues from beyond Wisconsin to bring a valuable external perspective to the work we are doing. In addition to keynote addresses from Estela Mara Bensimon, Professor and Director of the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California, and Ken O’Donnell, Associate Dean in the California State University Office of the Chancellor, the Compass Institute featured sessions on inclusive curricular transformation, high-impact practices, the politics and pitfalls of change initiatives (led by AAC&U’s Susan Albertine), and outcomes-based assessment (led by nationally recognized consultant Peggy Maki).

The program also included “team time.” Each participating UW institution submitted proposals for a team and a project working towards Compass goals. Embedded in the Institute schedule for the two-plus days was dedicated team time, during which campus teams worked on their projects, including the development of next steps towards implementation upon return to their home institutions.

In the end—at the heart of the Compass project—is the working hypothesis that state systems can serve as generative catalysts for change, in collaboration with, and supported at the campus level. Judging from the participants’ high energy, commitment to student learning and success, and willingness to engage with the big questions and challenges that continue to vex higher educators, the Institute affirmed that working hypothesis while also confirming that, in the end, this is all a work in progress—Compass, LEAP, and Inclusive Excellence—and we still have a lot of work to do!
Ken O’Donnell from the California State University System delivering his keynote presentation on *Mobilizing Change in Higher Education*.

Panel on **Student Voices: Are We Listening?** – Pictured from left to right: Moderator: Ashley Finley, Director of Assessment and Research, AAC&U; Brianna Belmore, Student at UW-Eau Claire; Vince Tripi, Student at UW-Milwaukee; and Aaron Brewster, Student at UW-Eau Claire,
Panel on *Lessons Learned from Compass: Changing Business as Usual through a Culture of Inquiry* – Pictured from left to right: Susan Turell, former Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, UW-Eau Claire; Jeff Merrick, Emeritus Professor of History and Associate Dean of Humanities, UW-Milwaukee; and Carleen Vande Zande, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Curricular Affairs and Student Academic Achievement, UW-Oshkosh.

Jeff Merrick’s tie.
Closing Session **Gallery Walk** Poster from UW-La Crosse Compass Institute Team.

*The Compass Institute was made possible through the generous funding of the UW System Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, AAC&U, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Lumina Foundation.*

*The full agenda may be found at: INSERT WEB LINK or PDF*
APPENDIX C – Making Excellence Inclusive in the University of Wisconsin System

As 2011 begins, the University of Wisconsin System is just past the half-way point of its participation in AAC&U’s ten-year Liberal Education and America’s Promise or LEAP Campaign.

**LEAP Wisconsin** is:
- a shared conversation throughout the UW System and parts of Wisconsin;
- the means to an end, the end being the goal of full participation by America’s populace in quality higher education and all that it has to offer—both as a private good for individuals, and a public good vital to American civil society and democracy;
- a broad and coordinated set of activities, delivered statewide through campus action and public outreach and advocacy.
- to learn more, go to: [http://liberaleducation.uwsa.edu/](http://liberaleducation.uwsa.edu/)

In the vision of AAC&U, the LEAP Campaign calls for higher education institutions to act as catalysts for educational, social, civic, and economic transformation.

Only then can the goal of full participation in quality higher education—what we call inclusive excellence—be realized.

**Inclusive Excellence** as the watermark that needs to be visible and present in all that we do as a public system of higher education.

**Inclusive Excellence** is:
- the UW System’s emerging strategic framework for its engagement with diversity and equity;
- a belief that there is no excellence without diversity, equity and inclusion;
- a process, a philosophy, and an end goal.

**Inclusive Excellence** entails:
- a dual focus on building greater structural diversity and improving the learning environment and institutional culture;
- comprehensive, widespread institutional engagement and commitment;
- close attentiveness to the student experience;
- equity-mindedness; and
- the joint pursuit of equity and excellence as core to mission and a shared responsibility.

The central premise of **Inclusive Excellence** holds that UW System colleges and universities need to intentionally integrate their diversity efforts into the core aspects of their institutions—including academic priorities, budgeting, leadership, quality improvement initiatives, decision-making, day-to-day operations, and organizational cultures—in order to maximize their success. Institutional and campus plans are under development and implementation throughout the System.
Inclusive Excellence informs and is in dialogue with other, major UW System initiatives:

- the *Growth Agenda for Wisconsin*, the UW System’s strategic framework offers a blueprint for developing the state’s human potential, creating new jobs, and strengthening the local communities that sustain citizens and businesses alike. It calls for a series of actions that will educate a wider and deeper cut of Wisconsin’s population for life and work in the 21st-century global society. (http://www.wisconsin.edu/growthagenda/)

- the *Equity Scorecard*, an action inquiry process developed by Estela Mara Bensimon at the University of Southern California’s Center for Urban Education. The Equity Scorecard is a data sense-making tool, a cultural practice, a leadership approach, and a theory of change. Thirteen of the UW System’s 15 institutions have participated or are participating in the Equity Scorecard, conducting fine-grained analysis of student data, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, to determine equitable practice in terms of access, enrollment, retention, and completion. The process develops goals and benchmarks towards the achievement of equitable outcomes for students of color. More than any other initiative in which we have been involved, the Equity Scorecard has helped us learn that transformation cannot be achieved without inquiry and practice informed by *disaggregated* data. It has also led us towards overcoming the inclination to blame the student as the problem to be fixed, and instill equity—in outcomes not just access—as the gold standard for measuring student success.

- In 2009, the UW System signed on to the Education Trust/National Association of System Heads initiative *Access to Success* and, concurrently, identified a second phase of the *Growth Agenda—called More Graduates for Wisconsin*—establishing the goal to increase the number of Wisconsin residents who have college degrees to 80,000 by 2025.

- The *Give Students a Compass* project, a signature component of LEAP Wisconsin, and a model for how best to strategically coordinate and integrate the change work at the heart of LEAP and Inclusive Excellence. Three UW institutions—UW-Eau Claire, UW-Milwaukee, and UW-Oshkosh—are each focusing on particular high-impact practices (HIPs) and under-served student populations in the effort to meet the curricular redesign goals of the project. At this point in time, every UW campus is engaged in Compass-like work. (http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/compass/ )
Appendix D

The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents and LEAP

At the April 2011 meeting of the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents, the Board’s Education Committee heard a presentation entitled “Academic Quality in the UW System through LEAP Wisconsin.” As the presentation title suggests, the UW System’s LEAP Wisconsin initiative has become synonymous with its quality agenda, an agenda that has taken off mightily throughout the UW System, despite the challenges of political uncertainties and budgetary reductions. Indeed, that was the topic of the robust discussion among the Regents, System staff, and Provosts from the UW System’s 15 institutions, who were invited to the table to participate.

This was not the first time the UW System’s Regents have undertaken discussion of LEAP and all that it signifies. The University of Wisconsin System has been involved in the LEAP Campaign since its beginnings in 2005, and even before through a systemwide initiative focused on the “currency” of liberal arts education. One intentional feature of this work has been the engagement of the Board of Regents in LEAP. Governing boards have a critical role to play in advocating for quality, inclusive excellence, and the learning outcomes essential to participation in a globally interdependent world. As ambassadors, stewards, and the policy-makers for Wisconsin’s public higher education system, the Regents are in a position to provide critical leadership for how the System articulates, implements, and measures quality student learning in the 21st century.

The UW System’s Board of Regents has placed LEAP and LEAP themes on its agendas repeatedly since November 2004, when AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider was invited to address the full Board. These agenda items have included: a presentation to the full Board on the System’s LEAP work in October 2007; a presentation to the full Board on the System’s participation in the AAC&U Give Students a Compass Project in October 2009; and a presentation to the Education Committee on high-impact practices in December 2010. Individual Regents have attended and spoken at AAC&U’s national meetings; and one Regent, former Regent President Mark Bradley, serves on AAC&U’s National Leadership Council. Regents have also played key roles in other UW System conferences, including a Wingspread conference held in April 2008 convening Wisconsin leaders from education, policy, business, media, and non-profit sectors to discuss higher education as the key to a vibrant, knowledge-based state economy; and a systemwide professional development conference in November 2008 focused on the topic of “Liberal Education and Wisconsin’s Promise: A Unifying Mission for the 21st Century University.”

Finally, the Board’s Education Committee has instituted a session at each of its meetings featuring institutional work focused on LEAP/Inclusive Excellence. The System’s integration of LEAP with Inclusive Excellence—what were initially two separate initiatives—is another
important piece of the story. Since adopting *Inclusive Excellence* as the frame for the System’s work on diversity, equity and inclusion in 2009, the Board of Regents has also heard multiple presentations and engaged in discussion of the difficult and essential change work embodied in *Inclusive Excellence*, including a deeper understanding of equity and equity-mindedness.

Making LEAP core to the work of the UW System—its central administration, its institutions, and its governing board—has taken place more broadly and deeply through its integration into the System’s strategic plan, the *Growth Agenda for Wisconsin*. That strategic framework includes what might be called tributary initiatives and those include *LEAP, Inclusive Excellence*, and participation in the national *Access to Success* agenda, all of which are focused on equitable access to—and success in—the best educational opportunities the UW System can provide.

*Revised 8/18/11*
Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success

Is there a true north for student learning? One direction towards which all students should be pointed to ensure their success in college? Probably not. At the very least, however, we can give students a compass to guide their learning throughout their university educations.

Through the Give Students a Compass Project, the University of Wisconsin System is working to:

- Make general education relevant for the 21st century;
- Provide students with the high impact practices we know to be most effective; and
- Advance Inclusive Excellence by ensuring that those students who have been historically underserved have access to the best our institutions can offer.

There may not be a true north, but there are cardinal points on the compass, directing students to the kinds of learning that will ensure their readiness to enter the world of life and work beyond the university upon graduation.

The Compass Project is one of the UW System’s signature programs in its collaboration with the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) on the LEAP Campaign.

**COMPASS INSTITUTE**

November 10-12, 2010 at the Wintergreen Resort and Conference Center in the Wisconsin Dells. Post Institute write up

**COMPASS STATE PARTNERS**

- California State University System
- Oregon University System

**RELATED LINKS**

- LEAP Wisconsin
- High Impact Practices