

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

of the

BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

River Falls, Wisconsin

Held in the River Room, Rodli Commons

University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Thursday, May 10, 2001

1:40 p.m.

- President Smith presiding -

Present: Regents Alexander, Axtell, Barry, Benson, Boyle, Brandes, DeSimone, Gottschalk, Gracz, Krutsch, Marcovich, Mohs, Olivieri, Randall, Schneiders, and Smith

Unable to attend: Regent Klauser

President Lyall introduced the presentation, which was a follow-up to discussion of information presented the preceding October on access to the UW System for Wisconsin high school graduates. That information showed that:

- 1) Overall access to the UW System is high, with more than 94% of applicants admitted somewhere in the System.
- 2) The proportion of Wisconsin high school graduates enrolling in UW institutions (service rate) is 33%, (or 28% without the UW Colleges), which is among the highest in the country
- 3) The service rate is the result of the interaction of application decisions by prospective students, admission decisions by UW institutions, and enrollment decisions by students.
- 4) Differences in the service rate by gender and race/ethnicity were identified.
- 5) Differences by gender could be primarily attributed to fewer high school males taking the ACT test and applying to college, resulting in a freshman class that is 56% female and 44% male.
- 6) Differences by race/ethnicity occurred at the beginning (application stage) and the end (enrollment stage) of the process, so that the proportion of high school graduates of color enrolling at UW institutions is lower than white high graduates.

Further research was conducted to answer Regent questions raised by these data. The presentation at this meeting is the first of a two-part compilation of research conducted to date. The questions to be addressed are: 1) Why do fewer males take the ACT test? 2) Why is the application rate for students of color lower than for white students? 3) Why do students of color have a lower yield rate than white students? 4) How can the application and yield rate for students of color be increased? 5) What are current recruitment efforts for students of color?

President Lyall introduced Associate Vice President Frank Goldberg to make a presentation of follow-up activities that had been undertaken.

Dr. Goldberg indicated that these activities included:

- 1) Focus groups of pre-college students at UW-Milwaukee Pre-college Academy
- 2) Survey of high school guidance counselors
- 3) Review of campus recruitment programs
- 4) Examination of the impact of family income on the UW System service rate
- 5) Survey of high school juniors and seniors.

While none of these studies was designed to provide a definitive causal analysis, he observed that, taken together, they provide a rich source of data to inform policy discussions.

He referred to data that showed the ACT taken during the sophomore year by 27% of white males, 37% of white females, 22% of male students of color and 27% of female students of color; during the first half of the junior year by 37% of white males, 38% of white females, 30% of male students of color and 35% of female students of color; during the second half of the junior year by 29% of white males, 15% of white females, 34% of male students of color, and 25% of female students of color; and during the first half of the senior year by 1% of white males, 0% of white females, 9% of male students of color and 6% of female students of color. These data show that white females tend to take the ACT earlier than any other group; that white males and female students of color demonstrate similar patterns of later test taking; and that male students of color tend to take the test later than any other group.

In response to the question of why fewer males take the ACT exam, guidance counselors' perceptions indicate that: 1) Males tend more than females to favor short-term rewards and are more likely to be opportunistic. 2) Males are more inclined to enter the labor force because of the availability of jobs that satisfy their immediate needs. 3) Males are more inclined to participate in recreational activities; females are more inclined to participate in social activities. 4) Females are more likely to start planning for college early.

Pre-college Focus Group perceptions concerning this question were that: 1) Females believe lack of support from family and friends and lack of determination may explain why a student does not consider college. 2) Males may want "immediate satisfaction" available through sports, music, or other lucrative careers. These findings, Dr. Goldberg noted, are consistent with what is found in the literature on gender differences in college attendance. However, he added, they point to the fact that social and cultural factors explain gender differences and that changes in outcomes will need to be directed at these underlying causes. In terms of addressing factors that influence particularly male students of color, UW pre-college programs provide a mechanism to reach students at an early age and have an impact on underlying social and cultural factors.

Concerning the question of why students of color have lower application and yield rates than white students, guidance counselors' perceptions indicated that: 1) white males are more likely to see college as affordable than male students of color. 2) male students of color tend to think about taking the ACT exam later than white males; and 3) white males are more likely to have positive encouragement and role models. Focus group comments included regret about not planning earlier for college and indication that family members, especially parents, play a key role in encouraging students to think about college. The group considered the most important factors in determining college-going decisions to be: tuition, financial aid, and availability of majors.

With respect to current recruitment efforts for students of color, Dr. Goldberg explained that UW recruitment activities include: recruiting materials, personal contacts, networking, student recognition, and student identification. Institutions identified direct and personal contact as the most effective recruitment strategy, and 2000-01 budget dollars are being used to hire additional staff to expand existing recruitment efforts. All UW institutions have established performance measures for assessing recruitment activities. Focus group participants indicated that they prefer personal communication and that they value meaningful and honest representation of diversity on campus.

Noting the importance of the way in which students of color are recruited, Dr. Goldberg said that efforts must be focused on maintaining a direct relationship with these students throughout the application process. Surveys had shown that UW institutions are using their resources in a variety of activities designed to maintain personal contact with prospective students. To recruit students of color: 1) Recruitment activities should be focused to the early high school years; 2) parents must be an integral part of pre-college programs; 3) career planning needs to be an integral part of pre-college programming; and 4) early and targeted pre-college programs for male students of color should focus on academics and psychological skills needed for higher education.

In discussion following the presentation, Regent Axtell suggested that this issue would be a perfect assignment for PK-16 local councils. Noting, for example, that young people are much impressed by their peers, he thought one idea might be to have recent high school graduates speak to younger students about the value of a college education and of preparing for a career.

Adding that parents also are an important influence, Regent Brandes pointed out that there still are a large number of students who would be the first generation in their family to attend college. She suggested that parents of these students have a special need for accurate information about cost and about what the college experience is like.

Regent Benson asked how many additional students the UW System could enroll. President Lyall replied that in EM21 plans, the UW had indicated that it could take up to 4,000 or 4,500 more students system-wide if there were state base funding of two-thirds of cost to match the tuition share. The gender imbalance, she noted, is traceable to the front end of the process, with fewer males taking the ACT, and is not the result of admission processing or differential yield rates. She thought the suggestions made would be helpful in that regard.

Regent Mohs observed that lack of participation by men can be compared to increasingly successful participation by women. The lower rate of participation by men, he noted, is occurring at the same time that there is an increase in the divorce rate and in single parent families, mostly headed by mothers. He thought it might be worth examining whether a father in the household has a positive impact on higher education participation rates by young men. If that did turn out to be the case, there might be ways to offer helpful solutions.

Regent Randall pointed out that the profile of guidance counselors in the study did not match the profile of students being studied and that most counselors did not interact with students of color. He found offensive their perception that African American males tend to focus more on careers such as sports and music, rather than careers that require a college degree. He would be more comfortable, he commented, with conclusions that come from a study of students and particularly students of color. In future studies, he urged that there be a better match between those being studied and those being interviewed.

Regent Randall noted the difference between readiness and recruitment activities, with readiness activities involving all those that help students become prepared for college and ready to be recruited. He thought a great deal of resource should be devoted to readiness activities and that these activities should begin in the middle schools since many students make the decision to drop out of school in the 8th grade. From middle school on, students need to begin thinking about careers and college, and they should be monitored and counseled to take math, science, foreign language and other courses that will prepare them for college.

Remarking that these types of programs also should be better coordinated, he felt PK-16 Councils are the right place for this type of coordination to occur. For example, some school districts are putting in place career plans that are being developed in cooperation with parents for students in middle school and early high school years. These plans should be accessible by high schools and higher education institutions, so that progress could be monitored and students could be helped along the way no matter which pre-college or other programs they attend. This is the type of activity that he felt

could be done on a system-wide level to encourage more young people to be prepared for college.

Dr. Goldberg indicated that the following month there would be a report on a survey of high school juniors and seniors, which would have the same racial makeup as the high school population. He agreed that the sample of guidance counselors was representative of the population of guidance counselors but not of the population of students.

Regent Randall felt it would be helpful to know what the perceptions of guidance counselors are with regard to their role in counseling students to be better prepared for college. While the survey indicated that they spend about one-third of their time counseling students, he felt the number may be exaggerated given that counselors have told the Board they sometimes spend less than 15% of their time on counseling, due to the heavy burden of other responsibilities that they also bear.

Regent Schneiders commended the vastly expanded opportunities that have led many more women into higher education. She suggested that economic trends be studied to see to if they might affect changes in the mix of male and female students, as they had some times in the past.

She also suggested that the UW play a role in educating people about the affordability of a UW education, so they do not become discouraged by media reports on how expensive college is becoming. Noting that in the UW there are different tuition levels, including the highly affordable two-year colleges, she urged that there be a marketing program to show people that, with scholarships, work-study and financial aid, a UW education is very possible, even for those without substantial savings.

Regent Marcovich agreed with Regent Randall that early intervention and counseling in lower grades is very important in encouraging students to go to college. Many who do not plan to go to college, he observed, very likely are from families without a tradition of higher education. Therefore, to be effective, programs also should educate families about the value of higher education.

Noting that 4,500 students is less than 3% of UW System enrollment, Regent Marcovich observed that an increase in students of color that would grow UW enrollment by even 5% would mean that resources would not be adequate to serve that many additional students. In speaking with legislators, he urged that attention be given to Plan 2008 so that the money needed will be there when the students participating in these programs are ready for college.

Regent Alexander concurred with the distinction noted by Regent Randall between pre-college programs and recruiting students in the later years of high school. While he supported reaching students earlier in the K-12 system, he commented that there are some existing campus culture issues that deter students of color from enrolling at UW institutions. He supported President Lyall's decision to create a uniform system to measure success for Plan 2008 programs around the state. He hoped there also would

be a system to measure accountability at the campus level to make sure that the UW is getting the most from the dollars invested in these programs over the years.

Regent Olivieri commended the development of a list of specific actions to be taken and asked that the list include a communication strategy to stress the affordability of Wisconsin public universities and the positive return on investment in higher education.

He observed that yield rates for students of color is an area that the UW can affect directly through recruitment and addressing the issue of how the university is perceived by students and families. On the other hand, he noted, it would be much more difficult to have an impact on societal issues that may influence whether boys take the ACT test. At this point, he had not seen data showing that fewer boys or a lower percentage of boys are taking the test. What the data show is a widening gap between the percentage of girls and boys taking the test. During the last decade's economic expansion, he pointed out, boys might have made rational economic decisions based on having more opportunity to get well-paying jobs without a college degree.

On the other hand, he was concerned that only 58% of boys take the ACT at a time when the state and society as a whole need a better-educated populace. With that in mind, he would prefer to have high demand, along with the inherent issue of how to finance those additional students, rather than a society in which not enough people participate in higher education.

Regent Krutsch agreed with Regent Axtell's idea that this would be an excellent project for local PK-16 councils. She felt the UW could make a valuable contribution to their work by providing ideas and information that would be helpful to them. For example, she suspected that many high schools might not recognize the disparity between percentages of boys and girls taking the ACT. If it were brought to their attention through local councils, actions could be taken to strongly encourage or even require the ACT. Another area that might be communicated to local councils, she suggested, relates readiness issues such as findings that the more vigorous the high school curriculum, the more likely students will attend and succeed in college.

Another way to encourage college attendance, she continued, is an existing program that brings high school juniors to campus to receive intensive instruction on the process of applying to college. This would be especially helpful for students from families in which there is not a tradition of participation in higher education.

In thinking about access, Regent Krutsch pointed out that it is important to include access to the Technical College System, as well as the UW. She suggested that it would be helpful to have data for access to both systems and to continue improvement of transfer policies.

Regent Benson pointed out that Wisconsin ranks first in the country with a composite ACT score of 22.2 and has held that ranking for the past eight years. Sixty-nine percent of the class of 2000 took the ACT, in addition to some who took the SAT.

This percentage, he noted, is far larger than the percentage of students who actually will go to college. Students with a family income of less than \$18,000 had a composite score of 19.7, compared to students with a family income of \$50,000 or more, who had a composite score of 23. Boys had a composite score of 22.5 and girls had a composite score of 22.4.

Regent Benson encouraged transferring the initiative to the state and local PK-16 Councils, so that it is put in the hands of local school superintendents, CESA administrators, deans of education, and others. These groups could examine what effect this information will have on teacher and counselor training and they could seek opportunities to strengthen current teachers, counselors, principals and other staff. There are many other topics, he commented, that local councils can address effectively with leadership from the state level.

Regent Brandes commented that the number of boys who take the ACT may be a symptom of other problems, rather than something that by itself warrants university involvement. Among the factors that may have influenced lower rates of test taking by boys are low unemployment levels and relatively high paying jobs that involve apprenticeships and other forms of education. The unemployment rate is not higher for men than for women, and she did not perceive that men faced an unemployment problem due to lower rates of test taking. Another factor, she observed, may be that more girls are taking the ACT because they need more education in order to get ahead and reach the same career and economic levels as men.

Chancellor Wells observed that, of the three factors of access -- readiness, recruitment, and retention -- retention is the one that is most within the university's control and that has the greatest impact on the other two factors. Noting that retention is an indicator of the quality of the student experience, he commented that much still needs to be done to improve that experience and that more should be invested to increase retention.

Chancellor Zimpher observed that the best way to affect access and pupil achievement is to ensure that they have quality teachers, a link that could be made through PK-16 policies that will be brought forward to the Board.

Discussion was completed and the meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Judith Temby, Secretary