

MINUTES

EDUCATION COMMITTEE, BOARD OF REGENTS
Room 1820, Van Hise Hall, UW-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin
February 6, 2003

Regent Boyle convened the meeting of the Education Committee at 1:30 p.m. Regents Boyle, Axtell, Barry, Brandes, and Mohs were present. Regents Smith and Marcovich joined the meeting in progress.

1. Approval of the minutes of the December 5, 2002, meeting of the Education Committee.

It was moved by Regent Mohs, seconded by Regent Axtell, that the minutes of the December 5, 2002, meeting of the Education Committee be approved.

The resolution PASSED unanimously.

2. Discussion: All-Regent Sessions

Federal Higher Education Reauthorization Act

Senior Vice President Marrett spent some time describing the activities of the UW System Task Force on the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, which was formed in order to coordinate the UW System's response to the congressional request for input into the reauthorization of the Act. In a very short amount of time, the Task Force has developed a set of recommendations, met with members of Congress, committed to working with the Wisconsin Technical College System, and offered to host hearings on the Act in Wisconsin. They emphasized in their recommendations issues that were germane to Wisconsin: such as allowing Wisconsin's successful teacher education initiatives to move forward; and the effort to categorize the UW Colleges as 13 discreet entities, not as one institution where financial aid is concerned. Currently, the UW Colleges receive financial aid for their students as if they were one campus, not 13 separate campuses.

The Committee had a lengthy discussion about the "discounting" or forgiving of loans, a practice for which Regent members expressed support, especially for students in high-demand, but low-paying fields like nursing and special education. Senior Vice President Marrett noted that only a few groups of students are eligible, e.g., medical professionals, for whom educational costs are so high. In response to a question from Regent Axtell as to whether Wisconsin could also pursue this practice, it was noted that the money is available and has even been increasing at the federal level, not the state. While it is still too early to know whether Wisconsin's recommendations will be followed by the Congressional Committee overseeing the reauthorization, Vice President Linda Weimer pointed to Wisconsin's strong legislative participation on this particular committee.

Accountability and Quality in a Time of Budget Reduction

The Education Committee spent the majority of the meeting discussing accountability and how best to preserve quality in a time of budget reductions. As follow-up to the full-Board discussion of the Accountability Report earlier in the day, the Committee set out to explore three questions. Regent Boyle set the goal of developing a set of quality indicators that the Committee could agree upon, present the next day to the Full Board, and eventually deliver to policy-makers. The questions were:

1. What do members of the Education Committee consider the most effective indicators of a quality education in describing the value of the UW System to the state?
2. What would be the consequences of budget reductions on these quality indicators?
3. How can the System and the Board most effectively communicate quality to the public and to political decision-makers?

The ensuing discussion revealed just how complicated the task is of defining quality and identifying indicators to measure it. The Committee reminded itself that quality means different things to different stakeholders, as made clear in a presentation last October from Associate Vice Presidents Frank Goldberg and Ron Singer. Regent Axtell proposed in consideration of the first question four quality indicators: Access, Retention, Graduation Rates, and (one that was not in the Accountability Report) Alumni and Employer Satisfaction.

Discussion moved away from the three questions, however, as a number of Chancellors and Provosts expressed their concern that a summary of the UW System that used the same indicators for each institution, would misrepresent the institutions by not taking into account their individual missions and student populations. Moreover, institutions should be compared to their peers with like student populations, not just to their UW System colleagues. For example, UW-Parkside offers incredible access but the university's graduation rates may never meet the target set forth in the Accountability Report. Compared to Parkside's peer institutions, however, its graduation rate is very good. Likewise, UW-Extension is all about access, but not about retention.

Several Regents countered that, while the differing missions were crucial to evaluating the institutions, *legislatively*, decisions are made at the System level and a united front in how quality is defined and articulated is needed. Associate Vice President Goldberg reminded those present that the systemwide task force that developed the Accountability Report a decade ago worked very hard to achieve balance in demonstrating systemwide accountability and allowing campuses to be measured against their missions and their peers. Regents Axtell and Mohs pressed for specific measures, e.g., those characteristics that make a great university. Regent Boyle queried whether the Committee should consider value and the achievement of excellence, instead of quality, in the effort to be consistent with the Accountability Report, the title of which is "Achieving Excellence."

The discussion moved on to consider what kind of negative impact a reduction in enrollment would have on the local economy and business community for any of the UW System's campuses, and the extent to which that impact is publicly acknowledged. The Committee agreed that if access isn't reduced, quality will be severely compromised, and that the UW System has a priority to protect instruction from budget cuts. Regent Mohs emphasized that if the state cannot afford to fund the UW System, then something has to be given up—most prominently and regrettably access—and that the Legislature needs to hear this message. Regent Brandes expressed the concern for how damaging reduced access would be for most of the institutions. Further discussion followed on what message might be most effective in conveying to the Legislature the magnitude of the threat to quality and access imposed by the impending budget cuts, before, in the words of Regent Barry, the UW System begins a "genteel slide into mediocrity."

In an effort to redirect the conversation to the questions with which the Committee began, Regent Smith suggested that each of the questions has to be answered locally. That is:

- 1) the indicators of a quality education vary from institution to institution, and each institution must decide individually which indicators are most valid;
- 2) the consequences of budget reductions also vary institution to institution; and
- 3) the most effective communication will have to occur at the local level: each institution will

have to talk to their own legislators and policy-makers.

The Committee strongly concurred with Regent Smith, concluding that it would be up to the Chancellors to make arguments locally on the value of their institutions to their communities and municipalities. The Committee also agreed that System Administration would work to craft a message that would tell decision-makers what the System's value is to the state by addressing the factors that the state cares most about: e.g., economic development, brain gain, preparing students for the workforce, etc. In emphasizing those factors most important to the state, the System could also express more concretely the specific consequences of large budget reductions in these key areas. Vice President for University Relations Linda Weimer accepted this assignment, and promised the Regents that a well-crafted message would be forthcoming.

3. Report of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

1. Update on Program Moratorium

Senior Vice President Marrett reminded the Committee that at the December, 2002, meeting, the Office of Academic and Student Services imposed a 3-month moratorium on all academic programs, including requests for entitlement to plan and authorization to implement new academic programs. Associate Vice President Ron Singer then informed the Committee that—given that the magnitude of the budget cuts facing the UW System are not yet known—the general moratorium will be extended. He added, however, that the Office of Academic and Student Services has developed a process for approving exceptions to the moratorium.

Associate Vice President Singer outlined a set of three criteria that would be used to bring new programs forward after February:

- 1) Programs responsive to a demonstrated critical state need, e.g., health care and special education;
- 2) Programs where delay in implementation would place at risk unique, time-sensitive funding and/or collaboration opportunities; and
- 3) Programs with a revenue and cost structure that will result in the enhancement of resources for the institution.

Associate Vice President Singer noted that there are currently 3 programs in the pipeline that meet these criteria and will be brought before the Education Committee this spring.

He continued by commenting that as attention is focused on maintaining quality with less state support, new program planning must be more narrowly targeted to address immediate and compelling state needs. To that end, Associate Vice President Singer also announced that the Office of Academic and Student Services was developing an expedited program approval process. This comes in response to some discussion the Education Committee had at its last meeting. The expedited program approval process will be available to programs that meet certain criteria; be developed in consultation with Provosts and others on the System Program Planning Advisory Committee; and seek to reduce the approval cycle to one semester (or 3 months) from the time the proposal is received by System to the time it is approved by the Board. The expedited process will still maintain the appropriate program array, and meet quality control and faculty governance procedures. The plan is to present a proposal for such an expedited process to the Education Committee at its March meeting.

4. Accreditation

In response to a request for information from Regent Barry at the December, 2002, meeting, Senior Vice President Marrett gave a brief overview of accreditation, citing the differences between the regional accrediting bodies, which perform institutional accreditation, and specialized or programmatic accreditation, which applies to particular programs, departments or disciplines, and professional schools. She noted the topicality of a presentation on accreditation on the same day from which the Committee also heard from David Ward, former Chancellor of UW-Madison and President of the American Council on Education, about some of the ways in which accreditation is implicated in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act.

Provost David Prior of UW-Superior reported on North Central Accreditation, which is the accrediting body that has jurisdiction over higher education institutions in the Midwest, including those in the UW System. Three UW System institutions are currently undergoing NCA review: UW-Superior, UW-Parkside, and the UW Colleges. Provost Prior enlightened the Committee on what, exactly, that means. The NCA sets certain guidelines and establishes criteria that an institution has to meet as part of a 3-part process. The institution develops a self-study, entertains a site visit from the NCA, and then awaits their recommendation and report. He noted that there is some room for individuality in the process: an institution can select a special emphasis on which it is also reviewed in addition to the other, NCA-determined criteria. UW-Superior chose as its special emphasis its identity as a “public, liberal arts college.” He also indicated that there is an alternative to the basic review process: The Academic Quality Improvement Project is a review structured around quality improvement principles.

Despite the huge commitment of time and other resources that must be devoted in order to receive accreditation, Provost Prior pointed to the inherent value of having an external review of an institution’s overall programming. Doing the self-study helps coordinate strategic academic planning, budget planning, and the development of the campus identity. Provost Prior concluded that there will probably always be some tension between the regulatory function of bodies like NCA, and the fact that they provide an opportunity for self- and peer-assessment. But even the specialized accrediting bodies—which have always been viewed as the “heavies” and the apparent drivers of curricular change—have begun to change and become more open to innovative and alternative ways of measuring quality.

The meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.