

WORKING GROUP ON RE-DEFINING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Minutes of the Meeting

November 6, 2003

10:00 a.m.

Lowell Center, Room B1B

Madison, Wisconsin

Present: Regent Fred Mohs, Chair, Regent Elizabeth Burmaster, Regent Beth Richlen, Regent Emeritus Pat Boyle, Chancellor Richard Wells, Interim Chancellor Virginia Helm, Chancellor Julius Erlenbach, Senior Vice President Cora Marrett, Provost Peter Spear, Provost John Wanat, Kris McGrew, UW-Extension, Greg Wypiszynski, UW-Oshkosh, Cliff Abbott, UW-Green Bay, Kory Kozloski, UW-Milwaukee student, Associate Vice President Ron Singer

Absent: None

Opening the meeting, Regent Mohs introduced Regent Gottschalk, Chair of the Charting a New Course project. Regent Gottschalk provided a timetable and requested that the working group fill in specific topics to be considered in the months ahead so that these plans could be shared with interested stakeholders.

Regent Mohs indicated that the working group has been discussing what basic elements are understood to comprise quality. The next steps concern what can be done to maintain quality in the face of resource reductions, for which each campus will need to determine appropriate steps. Dr. Marrett added that the group is looking for shared understandings and indicators that are important to different audiences.

Dr. Singer summarized discussion at the last meeting and distributed an expanded draft of a statement of vision, indicators of access, student engagement and value-added student outcomes, and guiding principles for defining and achieving quality education. Noting that the document is still evolving, he indicated that the institutions can use this type of framework in considering what steps to take and that leading indicators can be used to show where quality may be slipping.

Turning to faculty and student perceptions of quality, the group discussed its meeting with students from UW-Oshkosh, UW-Green Bay, UW-Fox Valley and UW-Marshfield. A written summary of that meeting was provided, and Regent Mohs noted that the strongest message from the students was their high level of interest in quality of teaching. Students also commented on the importance of learning that takes place outside of the classroom and of the quality of the first-year experience.

Regent Mohs reported on discussion of quality that he had with faculty representatives at UW-Oshkosh and UW-Madison. Oral and written comments by faculty focused on the impact of budget cuts on teaching and learning.

Christine Flynn Saulnier, of the Office of Academic and Student Services, reported on focus groups that she had conducted with faculty, students and community people regarding the meaning of quality in public higher education. Her findings show that understandings of quality are complex and vary by constituent group and organizational level.

Faculty perceptions of quality on the higher education and system levels include: a broad liberal education, career preparation, value added education, creative thinking and problem solving skills, research and scholarship in a variety of fields, and quality hiring. At the institutional and program levels, faculty perceptions of quality include student access, meeting needs of employers, a program array centered on institutional mission, undergraduate involvement in research, the centrality of teaching to the faculty role, small and interactive classes, service learning, and a well-rounded curriculum.

Student perceptions of quality on the higher education and system level include diversity in the faculty and student body, a strong liberal arts array with emphasis on writing and critical thinking skills, contribution to the state's economy, highly knowledgeable advising, including advising that can match students to institutions that meet their needs, and broad access for students. At the institutional, faculty and program levels, students value small class sizes in which faculty get to know their students, internships, diversity, ability to graduate in a timely way, a balanced curriculum that provides some flexibility, excellent teachers who are excited about their subjects, and low faculty/student ratios. While students at comprehensive institutions tend to select a campus on the basis of its mission and programs, it was noted that students at doctoral institutions would likely place a higher priority on reputation.

External constituents in the focus groups commented that quality includes a climate that provides physical and psychological safety, protection against discrimination, support for cultural expression, a wide array of activities, and high expectations for students coupled with nurturing. Their perceptions of quality include diversity in faculty, staff, administrators and students, a representative curriculum, and widely available mentoring programs.

Working group members noted the importance of employing differing measures for these varied perceptions and of focusing on key role of service to students.

Maury Cotter, Director of the Office of Quality Improvement at UW-Madison made a presentation on work she and others have done on institutional quality. Ms. Cotter noted that the range of stakeholders includes those related to teaching/learning activities, such as students, parents, alumni, employers, and graduate schools; those related to scholarly and research activities, such as professional peer groups and funding agencies; those

related to outreach functions, such as community and state agencies, legislative groups and donors; and those who relate to universities in other ways, such as vendors and residents of the community adjacent to the campus.

She discussed various frameworks for measuring quality and recommended a simple framework with specific measures determined at the local level. In that regard, she indicated that individual stories can be powerful when linked to strategic directions.

Working group members commented on the need to focus on how value is added for students when considering how to measure quality and how that also connects to serving other constituencies.

Referring to the working group's draft statement of quality, Ms. Cotter suggested that a framework might focus on protection and improvement of access, student engagement and value-added outcomes.

Chancellor Wells distributed a process chart that could provide a framework for the group's work.

It was agreed that staff would incorporate the vision document with the process framework and that at the December meeting the working group would review a set of quality indicators that would provide early indications of quality concerns and assist institutions in ongoing quality improvement. It was noted that connections should be made with what is being done by other working groups.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.