

Assurance Argument
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay - WI
8/2/2017

Introduction

Dear Higher Learning Commission Peer Review Team:

On behalf of our faculty, staff, students, and community, I am pleased to introduce you to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB). UWGB is a regional comprehensive university with exceptional facilities, a dynamic atmosphere, and a campus-wide commitment to student learning. Founded in 1965, UWGB enrolls about 7,000 students. We are best known for our commitment to interdisciplinary education, excellence in teaching, innovative academic programs such as Engineering Technology, opportunities for student research and applied learning, co-curricular programming aligned with the campus' mission, and a welcoming, friendly campus community.

Innovative problem solving is at the institution's core. The solutions to society's most challenging problems require a multi-dimensional understanding of the world, and UWGB delivers a transformative educational experience that teaches students to think using multiple perspectives and viewpoints and that connects students to exceptional faculty, many of whom are internationally recognized scholars. The opportunity to apply their learning to real-world problems through traditional and online classes and degree programs, and to pursue internships, research, and independent study, prepares students for rewarding lives and careers.

The Higher Learning Commission visit this fall occurs at an exciting and transformational time in the relatively short history of UWGB. Three important transitional forces have affected the institution in the past three years:

1. the beginning of new campus leadership,
2. extraordinary resource retrenchment and policy reconfiguration within the UW System and the State of Wisconsin, and
3. the completion of a comprehensive community strategic planning process (sponsored by the Greater Green Bay Chamber of Commerce) that calls for the significant reshaping of the higher education assets – most especially UWGB – in the Green Bay area community.

The scope and tempo of these challenges and opportunities called for a strategic planning process in which both strategies and tactics were set into parallel motion. This compact approach to strategic planning enabled both the development of the institution's vision for the future and rapid response to changes in the institution's external landscape. In the next several pages, I describe the specifics of how UWGB has addressed several critical issues in its recent past.

Campus Leadership Transition

When I arrived in Green Bay in the summer of 2014, the UWGB Strategic Plan, which was approved after extensive campus discussion in spring 2012, was a year from expiration. My original plan was to engage the University in a year of self-reflection and planning, ending in a revision of the existing strategic plan. Thus, in the early fall of 2014, we initiated the *Invent the Future* process, an effort to engage the campus and community in a discussion of strategic challenges, opportunities, and priorities. In addition, to increase planning transparency and establish a consultative structure to work alongside shared governance in the strategic plan revision, I established the University Planning and Innovation Committee (UPIC), a group of faculty, staff, and students nominated by their respective shared governance groups.

Community involvement in recruiting the new chancellor elevated a couple of key opportunities, which also were important to the UW System President and key members of the UW System Board of Regents. The most important of these was a desire to have UWGB more actively engaged in the economic dynamics of the region. UWGB is the third smallest university in the system but operates in the third largest city and one of the most important manufacturing sectors in the upper Midwest. Emerging early in the *Invent the Future* process were discussions regarding reorganizing UWGB for this purpose. Thus, late in the fall of 2014, in parallel with the *Invent the Future* initiative, we began discussions about reorganizing the university from two colleges to four. This process also began our development of a new long-range vision for the university, a process that was completed in the summer of 2016.

My original plan changed dramatically near the middle of my first semester at UWGB.

State and System Dynamics

In the very early fall of 2014, it became painfully clear that the UW System would suffer unprecedented budget reductions in the coming biennium. Moreover, these budget reductions would be accompanied by extensive revisions in state policy regarding tenure, program discontinuation, post-tenure review, and several other fundamental policies regulating academic life in the UW System. Adding to these challenges, internal analysis at UWGB revealed significant weaknesses in the way the institution had been tracking and responding to enrollment declines.

Taken together, this suite of challenges created a situation where immediate action was required. To ensure the full focus of UWGB's leadership on the proximate challenges, I asked the *Invent the Future* work groups to complete their work by the early spring 2015 semester. The *Invent the Future* Steering Committee reviewed these reports and compiled a summary report presenting numerous suggestions for future development.

However, it also was clear that any immediate response to the budget crisis and policy changes would not position us for the future unless we made significant organizational and procedural changes to reorient UWGB for growth. Thus, I elected to continue the work toward reorganization – a theme of the *Invent the Future* results – and initiated a broad set of reforms in our enrollment strategy and financial processes. The work on those initiatives continues.

The budget reductions that the institution applied during the 2015-2017 biennium were insufficient to bring expenses in alignment with revenues. Although our enrollment strategy stopped the decline, it was necessary to plan for expense reductions in each of the next two years despite a somewhat more favorable state budget. On a positive note, we are now seeing encouraging positive changes in all our enrollment metrics. With the planned addition of new high-demand programs (e.g. engineering, nursing, business, cybersecurity) in the coming years, we believe we are positioned to grow our enrollment.

We are currently planning for the 2017-2019 biennial budget. As this memo is written, the state legislature and the Governor have not agreed on a state budget, and thus, the state is operating within the parameters of the last biennium. However, the proposed biennial budget for the UW System has been approved by the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC), the state's legislative budget writing group. If the JFC's recommendation is approved by the full legislature and Governor, additional appropriations for UWGB are expected. There is also hope of compensation increases for university employees.

There is continued uncertainty about how new appropriations will be distributed within the UW System. The current plan of the UW System president calls for new funds to be apportioned via an

internal RFP process to seed a new performance-based funding system. However, the details of how this will work are yet to be developed. Therefore, it is expected that most new funds will arrive to campuses in the second year of the biennium, as the first year is used to develop the new performance-based system.

Community Strategy

Fifty years ago, the Green Bay community fought with uncommon vigor and persistence to win approval for a four-year University, thereby demonstrating the community's consistently strong support of the University. Community support is one reason UWGB is the only comprehensive university in the UW System to sponsor NCAA Division I athletics, and UWGB has a close relationship with the Green Bay Packers. All the significant non-academic additions to UWGB's physical plant – the Weidner Center for the Performing Arts, the Kress Event Center, and the University Union – were obtained largely from private support in the community and support from the student body. For nearly twenty years, the UWGB Council of Trustees (COT) has provided important material and political support for UWGB. In recent years, the COT Advocacy Committee has played a key role in promoting the significance of UWGB to the economy of Northeastern Wisconsin, one of the most important regions of the Wisconsin economy, and the COT Program and Initiative Advisory Committee has played a key role in helping UWGB develop support for academic programs as they progress through UW System's approval process.

Until relatively recently, community support turned mostly on the strong view of a commonwealth value of higher education rather than the more utilitarian value proposition of comprehensive universities we are now experiencing. Thus, while the community was delighted to have a university in their midst, they were also happy to defer to founding Chancellor Ed Weidner's vision and that of his successors of how a university should be configured and operated.

National views of the value of higher education now focus on the economic impact of talent production and the articulation of academic programs with workforce needs often at the expense of the liberal arts and sciences. These are now the predominant public perceptions of higher education in Wisconsin. Thus, the community's expectations of UWGB have changed dramatically.

In May of 2017, after more than a year of intensive work, the CEOs of all the major corporations, not-for-profit organizations, and private and public education enterprises in Green Bay and Brown County in collaboration with the Greater Green Bay Chamber published an exhaustive economic strategic plan for the area. The plan was developed in collaboration with TIP Strategies of Austin, Texas and focused on talent development and retention.

One of the most important recommendations of the plan is to enhance the higher education assets in the Northeast Wisconsin region. The plan calls for UWGB to revise its mission and become a larger, more research-oriented university with an expanded array of academic programs, particularly in STEM, health, and business. The UW System President, local legislators, key members of the Board of Regents, and the UWGB Council of Trustees are all urging UWGB to meet these new expectations.

This represents a unique opportunity for UWGB. We sit in a vibrant, dynamic, growing, and internationally branded city with large economic sectors in manufacturing, health care, professional sports, and the service industries. Green Bay is a very different place 50 years after UWGB was founded. The confluence of difficult economic times, innovative thinking in the community, and the need to address important imperatives (e.g., degree attainment, middle class wage decline, emerging regional diversity) present UWGB with an uncommonly large set of unique opportunities. Recognizing these opportunities requires a progressive kind of university partnership, and the community is asking us to reexamine ourselves with respect to the new realities of our region.

Corresponding with these developments, in fall 2016, UWGB adopted a new vision that emphasizes an access-driven, urban-serving comprehensive university that provides a world-class education and promotes economic growth, sustainability, as well as health, wellness, and social equity in Green Bay and the surrounding areas through a commitment to interdisciplinary learning, scholarship, and problem-solving. The vision statement lists several priorities, including student success, enrollment growth, diversity, interdisciplinarity, and innovation.

Given these constraints and activities, and in view of an anticipated new performance-based budget approach for higher education in the UW System, our strategic pathway in the coming two years will include the following steps:

- Complete revision of the expired 2012 strategic plan.
- Initiation of financial and academic strategies to accommodate performance-based funding.
- Initiation of an exercise to revitalize UWGB's mission, in collaboration with the UW System Board of Regents and the Higher Learning Commission, based on the community's strategic plan and long-term vision of UWGB.

This is a time of great change in Wisconsin higher education and for UWGB. We appreciate the partnership of the Higher Learning Commission as we work to execute an innovative and flexible strategic approach to navigating the choppy waters ahead.

Sincerely,

Gary L. Miller
Chancellor