

Team 3: Creating an Impact and Shaping the Global Agenda

Executive Summary

A. The Challenge

Growing population ... globalization of the economy ... diminishing energy resources ... changing patterns of climate ... new challenges to governance ... loss of biological diversity ... increasing numbers of dispossessed people and refugees ... losses of traditional cultures ... emerging diseases ... mounting concern about rogue states, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction ... growing potential for international conflicts over disparities in resources and living conditions ...

The history of the twenty-first century—and the ultimate success or failure of our civilization—will be defined largely by our collective response to these challenges.

Although we recognize the importance of these pressing global problems, U.S. universities have been slow to confront them. When looking across the major research universities of the United States, the most visible initiatives one sees are focused on more immediate, market-driven problems, such as those stemming from breakthroughs in biotechnology, drug research, nanotechnology, and information systems. While these are all critical areas of research and inquiry, they do not directly address the most pressing concerns listed above – including those linked to poverty, environmental sustainability, security, terrorism, climate change, global hunger, and human rights.

Why aren't U.S. universities making these global challenges a top priority? Where are the university institutes and departments on human rights? Terrorism? Security? Sustainability? Hunger? If we are not making these a top priority, who will?

B. Our Response

Where most universities have failed to accept the most pressing challenges facing the world, the University of Wisconsin–Madison is poised to succeed.

At the UW–Madison, many faculty, staff, and students are already working on the cutting edge of these important global issues—not only in expanding our understanding of our changing world, but also in connecting this understanding to decision making, public policy, and real-world practice. More than nearly any other university, our faculty, staff, and students are personally dedicated to pushing the frontiers of interdisciplinary research, and to using this new knowledge to make the world a better place. The Institute for Research on Poverty, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, La Follette School for Public Affairs, International Institute, and the Division of International Studies have established themselves as leaders in these arenas. These are tremendous strengths to build upon.

Here we propose a major initiative for the university to address pressing global problems. This strategic investment will propel the UW–Madison to the forefront of applied problem solving, and engage the university broadly in the global arena.

C. *Our Approach*

Over the course of three separate retreats during the winter of 2007–08, our team met to discuss what it meant to this campus to “Create and Impact and Shape the Global Agenda.” Drawing upon these discussions, as well as other conversations with hundreds of experts, across the university community and beyond, we compiled a vast list of “urgent global challenges.” It is a daunting list, ranging from climate change to disappearing cultures, from emerging infectious diseases to civil rights, from nuclear terrorism to bioethics. Such a list can initially appear disjointed, or simply a roster of gloom and doom.

But we were able to discern a short list of underlying patterns behind the diverse global challenges. In fact, our team defined *four major, overarching themes* that embodied the broadest, most exciting, and most relevant areas where the university can act as a global agenda-setter for the twenty-first century:

- *Sustaining the Human-Environment System.* As we learn more about the changing nature of the global environment, we find that the conditions of our ecosystems and natural resources—including the air, water, land, and biological diversity we depend on—are deteriorating rapidly. It has become especially clear that understanding these global environmental changes requires attention to the interconnections among social and ecological systems across scales, from the village to the globe. At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, we have a rare opportunity to transcend disciplinary divides to make a more meaningful impact on global environmental issues. Already, UW–Madison has pursued new experiments in cross-disciplinary institution building in this critical area, and is poised to do much more.
- *Improving the Human Condition.* The world faces tremendous challenges to public health, international peace, security, education, and prosperity. Many of the world’s poorest people already face immediate, life-or-death threats from disease, water scarcity, food shortages, environmental pollution, conflict, and violence. Additional concerns about international equity and justice increase dissatisfaction with the current distribution of power. Given these pressures—combined with increasing concerns over terrorism, globalization, and human rights—we must improve our understanding of the underlying drivers of human health, security, and conflict.
- *Reimagining Governance.* Old ideas about the geography and institutions of governance no longer capture the complexity of today’s experience. A more modern approach takes three interrelated views to the study of governance: (1) new studies of governance must cross traditional state boundaries and revisit assumptions about state sovereignty; (2) emerging forms of global governance will alter definitions of citizenship; and (3) reforms and research in global governance are encouraging new forms of experimentation. The

UWMadison is uniquely poised to reimagine the role of governance, and its many changing forms, in today's world.

- *Using Ethics and Meaning to Guide the Future.* A strong, self-conscious commitment to *values* must underpin the newest and most important work in universities. These values will grow from conversations between technical and humanistic thinkers at all stages of the research process—conceptualization, analysis, publication, and application. An emphasis on values will seek to assure a deep connection between the global and the local, including attention to diversity. An emphasis on values will deepen the applied dimension of our research, ensure that our work advances ideals of justice and equity, strengthen our sensitivity to social and cultural identities, and keep the importance of serving *the greatest public good* foremost in everything we do. Without a focus on values as the glue that holds the multiple dimensions of the university's work together, we cannot have the global impact we seek. With clear-eyed attention to values and meanings in our research we have an opportunity to make our work serve a broader and more enduring public audience.

These themes are ambitious and practical, scholarly and policy-relevant. They bring the university to the globe, and the globe to the university.

D. A Call for Institutional Transformation

Our university is filled with pioneering scholars in very diverse disciplines. Although these scholars consistently produce groundbreaking research, their work is frequently completed in near isolation from the work of colleagues in other disciplines. Similarly, researchers on campus often operate with little connection to the policy institutions, businesses, and other groups outside the academy that have non-academic uses for their knowledge. Specialization—within disciplines and between the university and other parts of our society—has limited the global reach of our research on campus.

At this juncture, reinvigorating the Wisconsin Idea requires new institutional incentives for both interdisciplinarity and real-world problem solving. We need to nurture careers that mix specialization and generalization, academic rigor and pragmatic application. We need to make contributions to global human flourishing—not discipline-centered metrics—the long-term standard for our faculty and staff, our students, and our institution as a whole.

E. Investments in Intellectual and Human Capital

We believe that the university should make critical investments in intellectual and human capital, which will require clear priorities and strategic decision-making.

Our university does not have the resources to do everything. Many of the successful investments in intellectual capital from prior years are not entirely appropriate for the global agenda of the university in the twenty-first century. In particular, we believe the university needs to give more attention to investments in activities that encourage broader interdisciplinary collaboration, deeper partnerships between academic researchers and outside

stakeholders, and more extensive intellectual risk-taking.

Our team suggests several such investments:

- **A Transformed Sabbatical Program.** One relatively easy program to implement would be a new “internal sabbatical” system. This system would encourage faculty and academic staff to take sabbaticals *on campus* in groups, focusing on new, cutting-edge, collaborative areas of work, and, in many cases, launch major, new UW–Madison-based projects.

Faculty teams would apply as a group for this innovative program. Successful proposals should show potential for creativity, truly collaborative activities, long-term institutional benefits, and a commitment to engaging in outreach and other real- world outcomes.

To make the internal sabbatical system effective, the university must provide central space for sabbatical faculty and academic staff, so that they may work on (or near) campus, but away from their regular offices. Furthermore, basic administrative and IT support would be provided to each team. In the early stages of the program, the internal sabbatical program may choose to focus on targeted, innovative research themes—perhaps leveraging investments made in the cluster-hiring program, or priorities highlighted in this document.

- **Shift Allocations of Annual Graduate School Fellowship and Research Competitions.** Aiming high requires a more strategic allocation of internal research funding and graduate fellowships. We believe that the Graduate School should set aside a fraction of its graduate fellowships and annual research competition funds from WARF for *specific thematic research priorities*, initially matching those in this report. These themes should be explicitly interdisciplinary, covering the entire campus, and designed for broad and deep global impact. The themes should change over time.

We believe the Graduate School should use these global themes to guide its initial strategic investments of resources. For example, the Graduate School might consider disbursing some graduate fellowship money as small *graduate training grants* to groups of faculty working on dynamic projects that address research priorities and promise to recruit some of the best Ph.D. students—in organized cohorts—to UW–Madison.

We also believe that a more strategic Graduate School research vision will help to encourage the Wisconsin Alumni Research Fund (WARF), outside stakeholders, and others to increase their resource allocations to the campus as a whole for intellectual development. By targeting research resources we can also expand research resources for everyone.

- **Advanced Leadership Training.** Another critical element of investing in our human resources is to provide in-depth leadership-training opportunities to our faculty and staff. Such a program would allow for new kinds of professional opportunities—especially in linking our faculty and staff to colleagues in media, government, business, and the nonprofit sector.

Many faculty and staff, especially those in midcareer and senior positions, would greatly benefit from advanced leadership training, helping them to extend their work beyond the university and connect to outside partners. We envision a program that would involve two major, weeklong units: one focused on leadership, public communication skills, and media relations; the second focused on building partnerships across government, industry, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

F. Investments in New Institutional Structures: The Wisconsin Alliance for Global Solutions

The global societal challenges discussed above are very complex. To address them successfully, we must understand their causes and consequences clearly, and we must confront them directly. As repositories of knowledge and agents of discovery and innovation, universities can lead the way. Yet when persistent problems evolve and new ones emerge, our traditional funding sources—government and private foundations—are often slow to react, and valuable time is lost. Even when funding is timely, we lack mechanisms for translating the fruits of research—good ideas—into action. We need a *new institutional structure for mobilizing and publicizing our most innovative and exciting global research*. We need a new institutional structure to make our university *the* place for global solutions in the twenty-first century.

We propose the creation of a new institutional space on campus explicitly committed to engaging in, and solving, the world’s most challenging problems—the *Wisconsin Alliance for Global Solutions (WAGS)*. A primary purpose of this organization will be to nurture the kinds of cooperation among scholars that would not occur otherwise, and to build long-term partnerships between the university and our outside partners in business, media, government and civil society. The Alliance will not focus on one particular project, but instead focus on evolving research themes (initially those listed above, but changing every several years to reflect new global challenges), and aim to create long-term partnerships across the campus and beyond.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Global Solutions will be a hub for truly interdisciplinary innovation and external engagement. That is our deepest goal—to nurture innovative answers to the pressing problems of our new century.

We believe that WAGS will:

- make the UW–Madison the world’s “go-to place” for solutions to our most challenging global problems;
- make the UW–Madison the key, trusted “matchmaker” for innovative partnerships—among academia, government, industry, and civil society—to solve specific global problems;
- and make Wisconsin a respected incubator for energy, engagement and creativity among students to change the world, unleashing a new generation of leaders to solve these great societal challenges.

If successful, WAGS will make the University of Wisconsin–Madison *the* place for finding and sharing new global solutions in the twenty-first century. The innovations emerging from WAGS will draw attention and application around the globe. They will also inspire more work of the same kind around campus. Most significantly, WAGS will not become a single-issue think tank, but continually remake itself to encompass new research and address new problems. This, after all, is the deepest mission of a great university.

The Challenge

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The history of the twenty-first century—and the ultimate success or failure of our civilization—will be defined largely by our responses to these issues.

Although we all recognize the importance of these pressing global problems, most U.S. universities have been slow to confront them. Looking across the U.S. academic landscape, the most visible initiatives are in two different arenas. The first is focused on breakthroughs in technology-driven science and engineering, particularly in biotechnology, nanotechnology and information systems. The other is focused on maintaining the core areas of traditional scholarship within the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. (At many universities, there is an increasing tension between these two foci, especially where resources for traditional scholarship are drying up.) While these are all critical areas of research and inquiry, they do not directly address the most pressing concerns listed above—including those linked to poverty, environmental sustainability, security, terrorism, global hunger and human rights.

It is an interesting paradox that intellectual leaders across the country clearly recognize the urgency of pressing global challenges, yet many of our top-tier universities are not making them a highly visible priority. Why aren't all U.S. universities making these global challenges a top priority? Where are the university institutes and departments on human rights? Terrorism? Security? Sustainability? Hunger? If we are not making these a top priority, who will?

One possible reason for the failure of U.S. universities to focus on these critical global problems is the lack of broader societal and market support for them. Most funding agencies, private foundations, corporations and legislatures—with some notable exceptions, such as the Gates Foundation and Google.org—have not made these issues a high priority either.

Another reason for this failure is that many of these global challenges are complex and rapidly changing. They defy our traditional disciplinary approaches to knowledge. Given these circumstances, how will higher education, and the UW–Madison in particular, rise to meet these challenges?