

Team 5: Building a Welcoming, Respectful, & Empowered UW Madison Community

Executive Summary

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Background and Rationale. Team 5 of the 2009 UW-Madison Reaccreditation Project was charged with addressing the question of “How can UW Madison best meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society and community to build a welcoming, respectful, and empowered community?” This question provided the opportunity to engage the campus community in a conversation about the experience of being at UW-Madison. This is particularly timely, as concerns about recruitment and retention of faculty and staff increase in urgency and importance.

In this study, we sought to address the simultaneous opportunities and challenges associated with the changing racial, political, ethnic, geographic, ideological, and economic profile of the campus community by focusing on engagement and community building. The UW-Madison community includes some 41,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and more than 16,000 employees, including over 6,100 academic and instructional staff, 4,900 classified staff, 2,400 graduate assistants and 2,000 faculty. Members of the UW-Madison community are distributed across some 400 degree programs in 12 schools and colleges. This represents a huge change in the past 20 years, and while we may not know what changes the future will bring, we believe that we have an obligation to shape an environment where members of our community can do their best work. As a result, we focus on the experience of being at UW Madison, as much as what we *do* when we are here.

Vision. The campus community we envision is one where we intentionally build community through common purpose, engagement in campus and broader community activities, and awareness of and respect for the various roles played by our students, staff, faculty, visitors and alumni.¹ We envision a campus where all members are aware of and respect the rights and responsibilities associated with being part of the campus community, and where campus social and physical structures empower community members to have a voice and to uniquely contribute to collective as well as individual goals. We propose that attention paid to community building and fostering/encouraging inclusion will lead to improved climate, higher retention, and enhanced productivity for all campus community members.

Challenges and Recommendations. In order to create the vision above and meet our goals for the next decade our team identified two major challenges to address and a set of key recommendations. In particular is the challenge of building both a dynamic community and a ‘flat’ campus; how can we balance the incredible opportunity and simultaneous difficulties associated with being as large and as decentralized as we are?

¹ Compare to Peter Senge’s concept of a “learning organization” in *The Fifth Discipline* (Doubleday, 2006).

CHALLENGE #1: INTENTIONALLY BUILD COMMUNITY WHILE NURTURING DIVERSITY

The primary challenge in creating a welcoming respectful and inclusive campus is that of building community while also nurturing diversity and individuality. Building community requires that the members believe they have something in common and that in a meaningful way they share an identity of some kind. That commonality is important, but we also ask how can we foster a sense of shared purpose and core principles without going so far as to suggest that newcomers should be assimilated into an existing and static community?

Recommendation 1: Deliberate attention paid to **being welcoming**. First experiences, whether the first day on the job, or the first semester as a student, or the first months as a tenure-track faculty member, can set the tone for a person's entire experience. A critical part of building community is creating experiences that fully introduce and welcome new staff, students, and visitors as well as support the transitions of continuing community members.

1. Initiate campus campaign similar to 'We Conserve': 'We welcome, it's what we do.' Track success by surveying new employees and students as to their level of feeling welcome.
2. Create new orientations that are 'developmentally appropriate', that begin prior to arrival on campus, and that provide a stepwise orientation to campus and their role here. This includes our 2nd and 3rd shift workers. We further recommend:
 - a. Spread out the orientations appropriately
 - b. Focus not only on the cognitive but the affective aspects of orientation – provide the concrete details and parking permits and 'how to' log in etc, but ALSO provide the experiential aspects of orientation. Show new people the ropes, what are the expectations, where am I now? How do I do my job? Who can I talk to, rely on, be friends with?
3. Develop and sustain support systems and resources for new employees: e.g. provide adequate and appropriate mentoring, as well as training for mentors and supervisors.
4. Designate a 'welcome person' within each department, unit and dormitory to serve as the point person providing welcome and information for those interested. Make this person's name and contact information publicly available.
5. Provide activities and programs to introduce new people to campus and campus to them. For example:
 - a. Bucky-book for campus: every new employee (and each employee who reaches 5, 10, 15... years on campus) receives a book of coupons for free admission to a performance, a free meal in one of the dining halls, a free game of pool in the union, free parking for a day, etc.
 - b. Social networking opportunities (interest groups that are not job-related).

Recommendation 2: Foster and encourage activities that positively **enhance the ‘Wisconsin Experience’ for each of us.**

1. Cross-unit visits to learn more about how the campus as a whole operates.
2. Interest groups that are not ‘job-focused’.
3. Opportunities to participate in service learning, research, outreach etc. for our students, staff and faculty alike.

Recommendation 3: Institute policy of **regular climate surveys** for formative and summative assessment purposes.

CHALLENGE 2: CREATING ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

In any institution of this size, creating a sense of shared purpose and responsibility and a culture of engagement presents a challenge. It is quite possible to identify those individuals who belong to our “university community,” but this definition obscures the complexity inherent in this group. When we lack a clear and compelling identity, divisions along departmental, or racial, or hometown lines are apt to loom large.² For students, at least, full participation in an institution of higher learning should involve being open to new perspectives, activities, and ideas – should not the same be true of faculty and staff? And yet, how might it be possible to nurture this openness while also fostering a common vision? In addition, how can we provide each member of the campus community with a voice in the community?

Recommendation 1: Initiate and institutionalize a **policy of inclusion and engagement.** Just as ‘We welcome’, ‘We engage and we include’.

Recommendation 2: Mandate a **statement of civility and values** be publicly posted and distributed. Just as there is a Code of Conduct for students and for classified staff, so too should we all ascribe to appropriate conduct (related to the rights and responsibilities associated with being here). Embedded within this are ideas about our core values as a campus. What is the Wisconsin Idea for the next century? What is our common purpose? This type of campus-level self-awareness is a critical component in defining who we are as a community.

1. Begin process to collectively generate a statement of campus community values to be disseminated to every new and current campus community member.
2. Institute programs to foster cultural competency (see full report for additional detail).

Recommendation 3: **Track ‘engagement’ of faculty, students, staff, visitors, and alumni** using a modified version of the National Survey of Student Engagement, which would ask about employees’ involvement in furthering the Wisconsin Idea or participation in shared governance, for example.

² For more about what makes some ideas continually compelling while others slip away unnoticed, see Chip & Dan Heath, *Made to Stick*, <http://www.madetostick.com/>.

Recommendation 4: Focus on the ‘Wisconsin experience’ for all. Every person that visits, works, or studies here is having a “WI Experience,” whether they are aware of it or not – indeed, everyone here contributes to the WI Experience, whether they recognize their power or not. We propose that we be intentional about what it means. What is it that makes this place unique? What does it mean to be at this campus versus another?

Final Thoughts. The type of high-functioning community we envision doesn't happen by accident. Over and over studies have shown that true community requires intentionality on the part of its members. To move forward as a great public university in a rapidly changing world we must declare our commitment to building community and we must continually nurture that community's development at all levels. Because a strong community implies a shared identity, we need as a campus a bold statement of who we are and what it means to be here. In addition, because the membership of our community is constantly changing, we need to consistently invite new members to participate in shaping and furthering that identity. “Engagement” and “dialogue” are key elements in building and in gauging community. Just as we encourage all undergraduates to shape their Wisconsin Experience by participating in more than the bare minimum of activities required to earn their degree, so too should we encourage all faculty and staff to shape their own Wisconsin Experience through engagement that goes beyond narrow focus or a specific job description. Team 5 itself represents a powerful example of the benefits that can come from diverse groups working together toward a common purpose. This project and the consensus it represents would not have been possible without broad and active participation from a wide array of groups and individuals on campus. Every bold generalization about what community looks like on this campus was challenged by the breadth of experience and context brought by the members of this team, leaving us confident that the claims that remain have proven valid across campus. We have been changed, included, and engaged by the process. Our final recommendation, therefore, is to make use of the very human resources and community that has been built in this process.