



WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research

Memorandum

TO: Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Committee
FROM: Gary L. Miller *GLM*
DATE: February 27, 2009
RE: Reducing, Reshaping and Rebuilding: A Broader Context

As we have discussed, the current deep recession will require the university to reduce expenditures in the current fiscal year and to construct budgets for the coming years that are substantially less than current levels of funding. Recent legislation requires us to take a 4.3% decrease in the current year (FY09) budget. Previous planning and strong enrollment will allow us to handle this reduction centrally. As I indicated in my recent memo to the faculty, the current year budget reduction will delay important initiatives in honors education and globalization. The legislature is only now beginning serious talks about the budget reduction for FY10. However, we expect it to be significant.

In our recent meetings and in my short presentation to the faculty senate on February 9, I outlined a process I call *reduce-reshape-rebuild*. This process involves immediate budget reductions in FY09 and FY10, followed by strategic reallocation of resources (within and among colleges) toward critical university priorities. The deans and their faculty leaders have already made significant progress on the very difficult task of developing preliminary plans for reduced FY10 budgets, using primarily vacant faculty lines and reductions in non-instructional units. Once the legislature determines the final level of the FY10 reduction (late spring or early summer), we will be prepared to construct the budget.

The second part of our work is the obligation to reshape and rebuild the university once the initial reductions are made. This is essential in order to avoid damaging the fabric of the university by memorializing deep cuts that will occur by chance in certain units in FY10 owing to large numbers of unfilled faculty and staff lines. This will be a multi-year process. We have agreed that the Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Committee will be the primary point of interaction between my office and the faculty in this process. I am extremely grateful for the extraordinary level of professionalism that you have brought to this important and difficult task in our early conversations.

February 27, 2009

Page 2 of 7

With your indulgence, going forward, I will from time to time formalize some thoughts that I hope will inform our discussions. I will send these in memo form to you with copies to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and others and post the memos on the Provost web page. My intention is to be as transparent as possible about my thinking regarding our challenge. I hope these thoughts will enrich the discussion.

Below are my initial ideas regarding the current budget situation.

Since coming to Wichita State nearly three years ago, I have emphasized the importance of casting our work in the context of the entire enterprise of American higher education. To build models that address the transcendent challenges of higher education is, in my view, the best way to serve students and the hallmark of the very best universities. Thus, as we confront the proximate challenge of reducing the FY10 budget and begin the long-term task of reshaping and rebuilding the university, it is important that we remain mindful of the broader context within which we operate. American higher education entered the global recession already facing significant challenges and under close public scrutiny. To our most strident critics, the budget reductions that we endure will be viewed as a necessary pruning (or *haircut* in the vernacular of Wall Street). The enterprise also enjoys enormous opportunity to gain credibility and public support in this disruptive period. To do so, we must successfully implement exciting innovations in learning and extensions of research toward economic stability and critical societal needs. We must reduce, reshape and rebuild in a way that continues to address uncertainty about higher education and puts us in position to take advantages of future opportunities.

So, what are some of the more important forces for change in American higher education that affect our work to reduce, reshape and rebuild Wichita State University?

I want to use this memo to reflect on three of these and to comment on their importance to our work: An increasingly skeptical populace; the new epistemology related to the global technology revolution; and, the ancient tension between professional and liberal arts education. My goal is to summarize the issues and to draw a connection between the national discussion and our immediate challenge. I do not suggest a desired outcome on each issue, though I will be more than happy to discuss my views at an appropriate time.

An increasingly skeptical populace — I have commented in several venues about the contemporary critiques of American higher education¹ and the issue is widely discussed among higher education leaders. The public and, most especially, its legislators, question the cost of higher education, the effectiveness of its programs of learning, the limitations of access for those who have been historically underrepresented among graduates, the ability of the enterprise to meet critical workforce demands and, most disturbingly, the ethos of academic freedom and its derivative: simple and precious discovery. The overall social benefits of having a highly educated populace are now eclipsed by the stronger conviction that the college degree is primarily an individual good, standing in partial explanation for the precipitous decline in state funding for higher education over the past decade.

There are certainly plenty of data to fuel this public skepticism. The now widely cited report of the *Commission on the Future of Higher Education* – the Spelling Report – decries the poor preparation of the

¹Memorandum to the Faculty and Staff. November 27, 2007.

students who exit American colleges and universities.² A slew of other recent studies support this finding and sound a clarion call for immediate and dramatic change.³ A new accountability movement rides the tidal crest of the tsunami of disparaging reports about higher education, inundating state houses and sloshing into the halls of Congress. The skeptical public wants higher education to contain costs, increase access, and make sure students learn. One of the most important dimensions of the new accountability is the sense that, ultimately, America's competitiveness in the global technology-based economy turns on meeting the workforce challenge,⁴ a key strain in the already uneasy relationship between vocational and liberal themes in higher education, a topic I will return to below.

The force of a skeptical populace directly influences our environment in Kansas. The Kansas Board of Regents is considering a set of strategic questions that directly address national concerns about student learning, retention, graduation rates and access. Their work will no doubt determine performance benchmarks for the universities for years to come. The Board's program review and new program proposal processes are driven more and more by efficiency values that turn on the fundamental assumption that university curricula are over duplicative. The Regents universities are currently undergoing a legislative post-audit, the null hypothesis of which seems to be that university faculty members are underperforming. And, of course, there is plenty of skepticism about higher education in the Kansas Legislature, as evidenced by individual legislator requests for data about teaching loads, remedial courses, course sizes, and a myriad of other important – but generally out of context – metrics of higher education “efficiency.”

The importance of understanding this dimension of our environment cannot, in my view, be understated. Critics who see the contraction of higher education funding as a necessary adjustment will not be assuaged as regards their other problems with the enterprise. We will still be required to demonstrate that students learn, that faculty work and that we meet workforce needs. Our response to this component of our environment will require us to actually add value even as we reduce and rebuild, a challenge that will, no doubt, require the best of our creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

The new epistemology — A second major force shaping the higher education environment is what Tim Clydesdale aptly called the new epistemology:⁵ the new paradigm of learning that accommodates and leverages the digital adaptations of Generation Y (AKA: the net generation, millennials, echo boomers, the iGeneration, or digital natives). These offspring of post World War II baby boomers, especially the offspring of Generation Jones (born from 1954 to 1965), are demonstrably different from the previous generation of students (and from many of their professors) in their ability to read visual images, visual-spatial skills, preference for inductive discovery, need for rapid responses and a much more dynamic attentional deployment strategy (resulting in frequent shifts in attention and extreme multitasking). They come to college digitally

²U. S. Department of education, *A Test of Leadership Charting the Future of U. S. Higher Education*. Washington, D. C., 2006.

³Here is an example: *Tough Choices; Tough Times: the report of the new commission on the skills of the American workforce*. 2007. A report of the national Center on Education and the Economy. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

⁴Kirsch, Irwin, Henry Braun, and Kentaro Yamamoto. 2007. *America's Perfect Storm: Three forces changing our nation's future*. Educational Testing Service. *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*. Committee on Prospering in the Global Economy of the 21st Century: An Agenda for American Science and Technology, National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine. 2007.

⁵Clydesdale, Tim. 2009. *Wake Up and Smell the New Epistemology*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 23, 2009.

literate, fully connected, and highly social in their digital world. They are remarkably tolerant of diversity, open to experimentation and comfortable working in teams.^{6,7} There is considerable evidence that non-traditional students, those a bit older than the Generation Y are also highly adept and comfortable in the digital world.

These digital natives represent the leading edge of public skepticism about higher education. Clydesdale points out that today's students arrive on campus highly adept at accessing the knowledge world and fully aware of the nature of competing authorities. Unlike our generation, they are dubious of both institutional and individual professor's claims of knowledge, feeling more comfortable with their own authority. Clydesdale writes: "*Of course, this new epistemology does not imply that our students have become skilled arbiters of information and interpretation. It simply means that they arrive at college with well-established methods of sorting, doubting, or ignoring the same.*" They are also well aware of the economic benefit of a college degree and, so, they accept the traditional pedagogies that they deplore and, in keeping with the more or less compliant disposition of their generation, politely attend class (most of the time at least) and profess a general satisfaction with their college experience. The result is a high level of disengagement that is often the source of blame for poor student engagement and lack of academic success.

Clydesdale suggests that rather than blaming students for their polite detachment, we should embrace and respect their extensive though unformed knowledge skills and leverage them more creatively toward learning. Such an approach of mutual respect would certainly inform our discussions about how best to respond to the techno-orientation of the contemporary and future student.

There are several reasons that Clydesdale's ideas are important, but one strikes me as most important to us in this time of budget reduction. Clydesdale's thinking transcends the rather routine consideration of what kind of technology we should buy that consumes much of the time we deploy toward meeting the challenges of the digital age. By accepting that students already have extensive experience with the world of knowledge – albeit frequently unformed and unenlightened – we recast the essential role of teacher from conveyor of content to interpreter of interrelationships, a transition I would suggest is more conducive to learning by all participants, including faculty. It is also a transition that focuses outcomes on learning rather than on buying stuff. To be sure, we will still have to find ways to keep up with the technology students expect to use. But, if we work with a key characteristic of our students instead of against it, we might advance in the absence of a technology arms race.

A final word about technology is appropriate. It is an open question whether our discussions at Wichita State University have given us a clear understanding of how we can use technology to our advantage in meeting the challenges ahead. Although our technology infrastructure is excellent – among the best in the Regent's system – our use of technology in course delivery (near and far), student interactions (e.g., advising), and other important functions is still emerging. Assuming that we will rebuild within a far more economically constrained environment (at least for next few years),

⁶Howe, Neil and William Strauss. 2000. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Vintage Books, Random House, New York.

⁷Oblinger, Diana G. and James L. Oblinger (Eds). 2005. *Educating the Net Generation*. Educause E-book.
<http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/pub7101.pdf> [last referenced 2\10\09]

it will be critical that we ramp up our consideration of how we will accommodate the new epistemology for greater efficiency and more learning.

Historical inertia— A third major force with which we must contend is the tension between professional and liberal arts and sciences education. This is a tension present at the genesis of American higher education. The years following the Civil War stand as one of the most dynamic periods of experimentation and transformation in the history of American higher education. By 1900, many of the precursors of the contemporary system were evident and sown were the seeds of many of the current internal disputes regarding academic focus and approach. The view of research as an organizing principle and the advocacy of liberal arts stood as the most prominent and opposing points of view about the purpose of higher education. Little love was lost between the advocates of the view that universities should be primarily about professional training and those who advocated education in the liberal arts and sciences traditions.

The modern manifestations of this early debate, including a good measure of the animosity, are still with us and take many forms. The general education movement, for example, can be traced to efforts to reestablish a common foundation of liberal arts in response to specialization and the unfocused nature of the elective system.⁸ The segregation of so-called “skills” courses from courses putatively imbued with the goodness of the traditional discipline is a contemporary expression of this uneasiness. Shadows of the uncomfortable cohabitation of specialization and the liberal arts can also be seen in national discussions of the nature of the academic major, student engagement, institutional effectiveness and student learning.

Public skepticism intersects with the tension between professional and liberal arts education in the context of the current workforce imperative. Faced with critical shortages of health professionals, accountants, engineers, and teachers (especially science and math teachers) and in the face of evidence suggesting that college graduates possess few of the skills needed to succeed in work, the question whether higher education should focus its considerable resources more intentionally on preparing people for work is commonly raised in statehouses around the country and is a matter of some concern among higher education leaders. Derek Bok, president emeritus of Harvard, observed that while three quarters of entering freshman believe that preparing for a career is the *most* important reason for going to college, sixty percent of liberal arts and sciences faculty do not believe that preparing for work is an important goal for undergraduate students.⁹

Arts and sciences faculty resist the career model because they question the academic rigor and intellectual content of vocational courses and worry that acceding, lemming-like, to the needs of workforce preparation will put the curriculum on a slippery slope toward mere vocational training. Meanwhile, in recognition of the importance of career, virtually every university has embraced professional education and established vocational majors in its arts and sciences unit. Bok suggests all this is quite possibly detrimental to the liberal arts and sciences itself:

⁸Levine, Donald N. 2006. *Powers of the Mind: The reinvention of liberal learning in America*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

⁹Bok, Derek. 2006. *Our Underachieving Colleges: A candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. [Bok's observations draw on data from two reports: Levine, Arthur. 1985. *Career Education: A prospective, a retrospective, and a few guesses*. In Mary Ann Rehnke (ed.) *Career Programs in a Liberal Arts Context*; Pascarella, Ernest T. and Patrick T. Terenzini. 2005. *How College Affects Students, Vol 2: A Third Decade of Research*.

Liberal arts faculties have paid a heavy price for their ostrich-like response to the demand for practical courses. Given a choice, students have deserted the traditional disciplines in droves. Today 60 percent of all college seniors are majoring in a vocational program. Whereas substantial majorities once chose a liberal arts concentration, only about one-third do so now. The rest must often make their way through programs that receive little help from Arts and Sciences faculties to ensure that the courses students take outside their vocational majors afford them the full benefit of a first-rate liberal education.¹⁰

Of the three components of our environment I have discussed here, the effective and appropriate local resolution of this challenge is the most important to us at Wichita State University for a number of reasons. First, with respect to academic program mix, program impact (measured by external funding, community engagement, etc.), historical development, and mission niche, Wichita State University is oriented primarily (but not exclusively) toward professional education. This orientation is appropriate for the urban serving research mission. Secondly, ultimately, our success in this mission depends *both* on the efficacy and quality of the liberal arts and sciences core *and* the vitality of those liberal arts disciplines included in the program mix.

As a product of the liberal arts and sciences traditions, I am comfortable in saying both that we must reinvent the liberal arts for the modern world and that such a reinvention will not be easy. This has been eloquently discussed in a book by Donald Levine, another student of the liberal arts, who calls for a new rationale for learning that reconciles the seeming impossibility of hanging on to the liberal arts traditions while, at the same time, letting them change for the times:

Modern society has come to rely on occupations requiring a range of specialized skills, and the modern university has come increasingly to serve as a training ground for such skills. Beyond that function, universities continue to be haunted by a dimly recalled sense of mission to provide an educational experience that transcends these mundane concerns. It does so by addressing a realm of freedom against that of practical necessity and by connecting persons to a realm of ultimate concern. All of these senses have been involved historically in the concept of liberal learning, and it is in the evolution of that notion that we find the philosophical grounds for articulating a rationale for learning in our time.¹¹

How we will remodel our liberal arts and sciences program to connect our students to the *realm of ultimate concern* is, perhaps, the ultimate interdisciplinary challenge. I very much look forward to a discussion about this.

We must keep in mind each of these three major forces as we respond to the new economic realities. The force of public skepticism represents an important background resistance to the effectiveness of traditional arguments about the value of higher education. In the new world of accountability, benchmarking, continual quality improvement, and outcomes assessment trump the more nuanced and, in my view, more enduring constructs of the inherent value of learning and the intangible nature of knowledge. The force of the new epistemology reminds us of the need for relevance of approach rather than content in the new world of unbounded and universally accessible knowledge. And, to optimize and extend our mission, we must advance a vigorous and supportive liberal arts and sciences model.

¹⁰IBID, at page 283.

¹¹Levine, Donald N. 2006. *Powers of the Mind: The reinvention of liberal learning in America*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

February 27, 2009

Page 7 of 7

These three components certainly do not fully describe the multidimensional environment within which we work. We might also consider important issues related to role of research, the controversy surrounding political bias on campus, the role and future of university foundations, athletics, student learning and engagement, faculty work life, emerging financial models and many others. There will no doubt be another opportunity to discuss those.

The challenge to reduce and the opportunity to reshape and rebuild will both test our resolve and nurture our creativity. As always, I welcome your comments and I thank you for your great work.

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