

PREPARING THE FUTURE

MID-YEAR REPORT OF PRESIDENT BRUCE SHEPARD

Western Washington University

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Introduction

Cyndie joins me in extending a warm welcome to you all. And, a genuine “thank you,” for the warm welcome you have given us.

An initial word of warning: my normal rule is to never make formal remarks longer than 25 minutes. However, these are not normal times. You have invested, collectively, several thousand hours in my education. As I report back to you today, that investment is deserving of greater depth and more thought than would be permitted in 25 minutes.

Preparing the Future

“Preparing the Future” – I have chosen that title for several reasons. One is obvious: along with universities the world over and across a tradition that spans many centuries, that has been our calling. And our responsibility.

We are in a period of transition in American higher education. You, and I heard this loudly and clearly, are committed to leading that transition rather than being pushed along by it.

We are also preparing the future of Western Washington University. That will be my primary theme. And, I think it *particularly* important that we stay focused on that topic as we go through a period of budget retrenchment.

We must focus on where we want to be for any number of reasons. In so doing, we will gain insights into how the university and its programs should – and should not – be altered in response to immediate budget considerations. We will position our university to make significant leaps forward if, as the budget situation most certainly improves, we have the vision, the strategies, the commitments, the understandings, and the relationships in place to take Western where we want it to be. Most importantly, though, it is a focus that can help keep us together. And, if we fail in staying together, whatever else we might do is worth little.

Listening

For me, leading is always best done by listening. It began this summer with introductory meetings and a widely circulated “stakeholders’ survey.” At opening convocation, I reported “preliminary findings.” In my remarks, I promised to expand, sharpen, and correct these first impressions through a process of meeting with all of you. And then report back. This afternoon, I make that report.

My remarks today are a “next stage” in a cycle of listening, learning, feeding back, and then listening and learning again. A cycle that will continue so long as I have the privilege of serving you.

As expected, the process of listening took all of Fall Quarter with January thrown in. I believe there were opportunities for all 2,200 of the faculty and staff, and student leaders - to meet together in about 90 listening sessions. In addition, there were opportunities to listen and learn from meetings with student groups, neighborhood associations, community organizations, university boards, electronic forums, newspaper editorial boards and even one call-in radio show. Further, my calendar shows about 200 smaller, usually one-on-one meetings with alumni leaders, donors, elected officials, leaders of the communities of color that enrich our state, colleague presidents, union leadership, and leaders in various sectors at the state level.

I learned so much and thank you for taking the time to educate me. What was my greatest lesson? I learned, face-to-face with each of you, just how excellent this university is.

Abstractly, I knew of Western’s excellence; I got to see – and know – the people who define that excellence, who are that excellence. Personally, it was very energizing. And, I recommend it if you are feeling down or discouraged: get out and rub elbows with people on our campus whom you do not currently know.

At most listening sessions, we began with an ice breaker in which people were asked to share a “tidbit,” about themselves that nobody else in the room likely knew. These exchanges demonstrated the ease with which faculty and staff from widely disparate parts of the university could come together and laugh and connect with each other. We heard, perhaps, 2,000 “tidbits.” My very favorite, among many? The colleague who simply said, and I quote: “I have spent time in a foreign jail For something I did not *necessarily* do.”

Common Themes

We must keep our sense of humor going. So, I start my report back to you with a major announcement. The most frequently mentioned topic, spanning campus and community and faculty, staff and students alike, is parking. We believe we have a solution to aspects of the problem: Red Square will be made into a centrally located parking lot, thereby also eliminating another genuine concern: pedestrian/bicycle/skateboard issues in the Square during class changes.

At most listening sessions, a colleague kept track of the subjects raised, and those were placed on the web, unedited and unpolished. In preparing for my remarks today, I reread every page of those department-by-department comments and made my own summary notes on themes common to more than one listening session.

My summary of common themes ended up with exactly 100. Time does not permit me to cover the full richness of even those subjects in common let alone the many important particulars relevant in a specific departmental context. Should you be interested, though, in that level of detail, I have put my notes, my personal summary of the 100 shared listening session on my listening website. Let me know what I missed for I know well more eyes allow clearer vision. The “raw data” (the notes from each listening session) are on the web along with a community

forum where I now encourage you to comment on what I got right. And, what I overlooked or misunderstood.

My remarks today do not target the immediate months ahead and our budget. The processes and criteria for addressing our budget have been established and will proceed openly and with your engagement. Later this afternoon, I will be giving a presentation on the budget: to our Trustees; and, to you should you choose to listen: We will audio-cast that report.

Today, we will look further out. And, it will be your vision, your strategies, and your concerns that I have the privilege to now report.

Preparing Tomorrow Today

Ours is the premier public comprehensive university in the Pacific Northwest. Your vision is to be the best in the country. And, this is the question I asked of myself as I reviewed the notes from the listening sessions: of all the common themes, which provide opportunities for us to be working together, even in difficult times, preparing to reach that vision? What can we be doing right now, that we must be doing so that, as the economy turns around, we are in a position to take a dramatic leap forward? Things that don't necessarily take dollars. And that, even if they do take dollars, are of such critical importance that we must focus on them now.

What are we? What are we to be?

At the top of the list is simply this: when we say we will become the best, we cannot begin to figure how until we have agreed on "the best of what?" There are other ways to ask the same question. Best of class? OK, what is the class? What are the universities we are competing with? How will we know when we get there, how do we measure our progress?

It is clear what we are *not*. We are not a "private college education at a public university price." We are far better. Outstanding and expensive liberal arts colleges deliver a very special brand of education suited to certain students. We, though, have a richness of curricular choices, a quality of faculty across all programs, cutting-edge equipment, and a depth of academic and student support services that would be the envy of any of those private, liberal arts colleges.

We are not a regional college, at least not of the type with which I am familiar. Regional colleges do not have 10,000 applications for a couple of thousand openings, those applications coming from across the state. Regional colleges do not have the national and international reputations for program, research, and scholarly excellence that so liberally infuse our campus.

While a good deal of high-level research and creative work is done here at Western, we are not a doctoral-research university. In my meetings with people they acknowledge that we are not and won't be a doctoral-research university, but they express concern that there isn't an appreciation for what the hard-working faculty and students do in this area.

We are not a "public private," a research comprehensive, or a regional. But, looked at differently, we are the best of all three. It is the special, "hands on," deeply caring commitments

of faculty and students working with a liberal arts-centric approach that is the cornerstone of what we call engaged excellence and which is the hallmark of private, exclusive liberal arts colleges. While not a regional university, we care deeply about the region we call home, seek in many ways to meet its needs, and to be exemplary stewards of place. And, while not a doctoral research university, our engaged excellence rests firmly upon providing our students with personal learning opportunities provided by “Big U” faculty that, ironically, these students would not get, at least not as undergraduates, at a “Big U.”

We are the best of all three.

How will “best” be measured? Going into our listening sessions, I had no clue. I knew it was not magazine rankings. But, what would it be? This idea you shared with me: we will know we are best when people from around the country come to us to see how to do it, whatever “it” is. Preparing English majors, taking care of our region, living “sustainably,” enjoying the benefits of a more diverse faculty, staff, and student body, serving the many needs of students that arise outside our classrooms, cleaning our buildings using model “green” practices, working together with our unions in ways that are the envy of the rest of higher education,

We have a period of time to figure this out. And, it does not take a budget initiative to do it. It does take our best talent. It requires a lot of real, genuine, and challenging dialogue. Most importantly, it takes a continuing belief in the relevance of our vision to be the best in the nation.

Marketing

Figuring out what we are is the first step in another obvious need you identified: to do a better job of marketing in a myriad of ways. Marketing sounds suspicious to many: trying to sell something we are not. Effective marketing takes the opposite approach: critically understanding, first, just what it is that we are and are especially good at.

This has a critical connection to a pressing issue: having the resource base to continue to do what we do so well. We have to figure out how to effectively communicate what we are – the best of all three, private liberal arts, research comprehensive, regional – because the resulting education, while of high value, also costs more. We cannot sustain it let alone reach nationally recognized prominence at the level of funding of a regional university. Again, to get to where we eventually want to be, it is critical that we use the current period of retrenchment to figure out our marketing strategies.

We already do a lot of marketing. Right now, the issue of marketing does not require that we find more money. No, it means that we create a clear marketing strategy, one that integrates all the marketing that we currently do. Under the leadership of Vice President Swan and involving all interested components of the university, this integrated marketing initiative is now underway.

Risk Taking

Closely related to being best is the need to take risks. In a number of sessions, I heard of a culture on campus that was averse to taking risks. I also learned of a number of real institutional barriers to trying new approaches. I heard frustrations resulting from both the culture and the institutional barriers.

To me, it is self-evident: we cannot be the university others wish to emulate if we are unwilling to follow paths others have not yet tried. We need to take risks, knowing we will sometimes fail but trusting in our ability to learn and adjust.

There is another reason to encourage risk taking. Across the country and as state support shrinks across decades past and decades coming, universities and their faculties and staffs are striving to become even more entrepreneurial.

We have a long, proud, and successful record of this spirit in places we do not always think of as entrepreneurial: it is the pursuit of extramural support for scholarly and creative endeavors. There risks are taken regularly and in a highly competitive “marketplace.” Quality is the first ingredient to successfully compete in that arena and it will remain central as talented colleagues take risks and see entrepreneurial opportunities more widely.

Our current significant success becomes a liability in this context. Who wants to change a winning game? But, we cannot attain or sustain a position of leadership by simply doing more of what has worked to this point. Institutionalizing a capacity to change is the only way I know for organizations to attain stability in a dynamic environment.

There are any number of opportunities we have available to untie our hands, and they do not take further resources. Indeed, it is precisely in tough budget times when we must carefully scrutinize practices and policies that stand in the way of organizational change. For example, does it make any sense as we seek to diversify our revenues, to actively discourage faculty from pursuing research and contract support that would require their buying out their time? Yet, several departments reported that being the situation. It is but one example of a responsibility we all share: to question – and, as appropriate, change – current practices.

There are other ways to encourage risk taking. I heard, on a number of occasions, of ideas colleagues had – on the academic side, yes, but also across the university – that required a front-end investment. Imagine a “program innovation fund” upon which colleagues could draw to try programmatic ventures. There would have to be a clear plan that included the cost side but also something we are not too good at considering in universities, the revenue side – how the program would eventually generate the revenues to cover the costs through whatever means: fees, tuition, improvements in retention, increases in international students paying out-of-state tuition, And, there would have to be another requirement that is not commonplace in universities: an exit strategy if the revenues do not work out as projected.

Graduate Programs

One of the most common topics I heard among academic departments was the question of what the role of graduate programs should be at Western. Comparing our enrollment profiles to peers,

there is no question that we have de-emphasized graduate programs. A more positive way to say the same is to note that undergraduate education has been emphasized and that clear, strategic focus is what has helped us to become the premier university that we are.

I heard strong agreement on one principle: what we do in the area of graduate programs must not be achieved by reducing the quality of our undergraduate programs. And, indeed, I repeatedly heard that the graduate programs we currently have are making essential and multiple contributions to the quality of the undergraduate experience, and that there are opportunities to realize even further synergies.

Answering this question – what should the role of graduate programs at Western now become? – is precisely the sort of collective activity that we must engage in as we prepare to become “best.” It does not require any budget allocation. It does require creative thinking and attention to both the revenue and the cost side. And, the fact that graduate programs at Western are currently underdeveloped is a potential asset. We can be designing for the future – stepping ahead of the rest of our “class” as we innovate program by program – without the inertia that would burden competitors that have full-blown programs. Provost and Vice President Murphy has directed Dean of the Graduate School Ghali to lead an examination of the role of graduate programs at Western.

International Programs

I heard widespread interest in expanding our attention to international programs. I learned of the excellence and the variety in that which we already do. Many see opportunities to do much more and spoke of the significant value in so doing.

Discussions covered the traditional subjects of study abroad and attracting more international students to our campus. Conversation also extended to imaginative approaches for curricular enrichment, international internships, engagement of international alumni, and partnerships with other institutions, including our community college neighbors.

Perhaps as with graduate programs, this is an area that, necessarily, has not been fully developed as we focused upon reaching eminence through engaged excellence. It is now time, though, to ask how we can hope to move from regionally best to nationally esteemed without fully developing and reaping the benefits of vibrant international programs.

This again, requires careful, thoughtful, strategic, collaborative consideration. What is most important to do first? What can we experimentally do that others have not yet thought to do? This is precisely the kind of creative activity that we can pursue even as budgets tighten and that we must do if we are to effectively move ahead as the economic outlook improves.

Extending Degree Programs

In a number of listening sessions, I heard of successful efforts to serve the needs of people off our campus and where they are in their lives, in their careers, and in Western Washington. Considering the university as a whole, our combined efforts in this area are less fully developed than one might expect at a university of our size and with our complexity. This again follows, so you told me, from our successful strategy to achieve premier status by focusing upon excellence

in more traditional, largely undergraduate residential education. And, I did hear, once or twice, from those who worried that further ventures into extended degrees risked diluting our “brand.”

Recognizing that important consideration, it is paramount that any programs we offer at a distance are of demonstrably high quality. That must remain the competitive edge in all we do. We also must make sure that any such efforts add to rather than draw upon our resource base. And, even as the listening sessions were going on, departments and colleges were expanding efforts to serve needs off campus. Such explorations can go forward during times of budget retrenchment because there is the potential to fully recover costs. Indeed, one college is looking at opportunities here as a way of meeting critical state needs yet also reducing the impact of budget reductions, being able to keep teaching assistants and adjunct colleagues that, otherwise, it would not be possible to support.

Such efforts are best explored program by program. But, should this be – and the question is entirely open in my mind – an avenue by which we also seek to establish ourselves as “best of class,” then there would need to be a significant shift in our understanding of our mission. And, not just among academic departments. From Financial Aid to Admissions to the Library, across all student and academic support services, there would need to be acceptance and accommodation to the fact that there are only Western students, wherever they may be located. And, as these students can be more costly to serve, there would also be budgetary impacts.

Having noted that these decisions need to be made at the program level, with the support of expertise centrally located, there are strategic reasons to pay attention to needs not being well served in our area. Politically, we establish valued allies, people whose support is necessary if we are not to see our state water down the higher education soup by adding campuses that have tenuous educational justification. The current recession has such efforts on hold. Our contribution to meeting the actual, demonstrable needs out there may help forestall shortsighted commitments at the state level when things turn around.

Research and Creative Activity

On several occasions, usually in the context of discussion of what kind of university we aspire to be, I heard faculty express concerns about possibly downplaying the importance of scholarship. I think it must have been the observation that we will not be a Carnegie I doctoral research comprehensive that generated the concerns. Well, that is a clear fact, to me. But, in the way I heard you define the excellence of our education, we must have all our faculty at the cutting edge. The only way to stay there is through sustained programs of research and creative activity, involving students in the process as appropriate.

To say we will not be a Carnegie I does not mean that we do not do Carnegie I scholarship. We do. I saw it everywhere I visited on campus. I have spent most of my career at a doctoral comprehensive and so know of what I speak. Our challenge, and it is part of the marketing initiative, is to make clear that we must sustain Carnegie I caliber faculty who are here, in part, because of the value they attach to engaging students in the excellence of their professional commitments. Further, and also a marketing challenge, is to help the state understand that its future (economic, social, culture) does not derive solely from the research activities taking place 90 miles to the south of us. The state’s investment in Western comes back many times over and not just through graduates; we are doing research and scholarly activities both here on campus

and at special facilities such as Shannon Point Marine Center that are having positive impacts statewide, and across the nation and world as well.

So, there is something for us to work on right now. But, there is more. I repeatedly heard of disincentives to do funded research. Several seem to flow from university, college, or departmental practices. Others stem from the culture of a particular unit: e.g., does a major grant proposal count at all or count as much as a publication in a refereed journal? Departmental culture is in the hands of colleagues but the policies can be addressed top down.

Most importantly, during times of budget reductions, it is all the more important to emphasize and enable extramurally supported research and creative activity.

Decision Making

One of the most frequently heard observations, wherever I went, were expressions of appreciation for the open and regular communications on our budget challenges. More generally, there were comments about the need to assure open and transparent decision making as well as views that we are making progress toward that objective.

We did discuss the progress we have yet to make. For example, in several departments and even though we have promised otherwise, people reported not having any idea where the college was in formulating the “bottom up” SWOT analyses and principles that would then guide open consideration of decision making. My reply was fairly simple: processes are easily changed but culture also has to change. That cannot be done top down. It is a responsibility we all share, and those not currently seeing the progress we might like need to help assure that it happens.

I heard something else that might seem to contradict the emphasis on transparency. People want our university to actually reach decisions. I certainly do agree that decisions must be made. I suspect an important component in reconciling these concerns is to make clear to all, after a decision is made, how it follows from the principles that were transparently developed to guide decision making.

We will never get it exactly right. But, what we will do, after each cycle, is to meet with appropriate governance groups and other bodies to do a post mortem in order to identify improvements we can put in place for the next time. This, again, is an area where we can make progress, where we must continue to make progress, even in hard budgetary times.

Resource Allocation

The best budget processes in the world do not generate another nickel to support the many ideas and real needs out there. And, I heard of many, many needs. About the best I could promise was an open process where we could see the alternatives, the choices made, and whether or not those difficult choices reflected departmental, college, and university priorities, needs, and chosen strategic directions.

Across the university, people said they are feeling stretched very thinly. People ARE stretched. Wherever we look. I believe we must guard against thinking that, if only some other part of the university were not so favored, the problem could be solved. That is, in my view, the same sort of “magical thinking” that uninformed citizens or elected officials sometimes engage in by

saying that we could solve the higher ed budget problem by eliminating administrative waste and fat, by getting underworked faculty to work fulltime, and by cutting the president's salary. Here, it would be my hope, that opening up our budgeting process will help us avoid such dysfunctional and damaging thinking.

At a number of sessions, people asked – sometimes with a hint of anger – why we are building buildings at the same time we are cutting budgets. All questions are always appreciated and it gave me an opportunity to explain the distinctively different budgeting processes. Capital budgets are for buildings and such. We can take the dollars, or not. We cannot take the dollars and use them for operating expenses. The state would say, and they would be entirely correct, that we would be acting fiscally irresponsible. It would be like taking a mortgage out to build a house and then deciding not to build the house but, instead, to pay the grocery bills. Now, some banks have done some pretty stupid things lately but none would countenance that. Why? The capital budget is really not actual, current dollars that the state has annually collected from taxpayers and that, therefore, could be used to cover annual operating needs; it is an obligation placed on people over the next 20 years or so to come up with the dollars.

I also heard of a number of departments, academic and not, with documented and significant increases in students being served with no concomitant increase in the resources available. Ratios, formulas, and data do not make decisions, of course. We must make resource reallocations with our brains, values, and understandings firmly engaged. Still, seeking closer alignment of resources and demands is something we can work toward whatever the budget situation.

Institutional Research

Yes, data do not make decisions, people do. But, data and analysis of the data can help us make better decisions. If we lack such analyses, we are running blind. If the data we have is not carefully defined and collected, reliance on such information can actually lead to worse decisions.

Over and over in the listening sessions, I heard of frustrations in getting data needed by departments and programs to enable them in doing a better job. I saw two examples where the data, had it been relied upon, would have led to incorrect conclusions and bad decisions because the data was collected and categorized in ways not suited to our decision-making needs.

I think there is a vicious circle here. While we collect lots of data and issue reports, those reports are usually devoid of analysis. The data are not, then, routinely used to inform, say, resource allocation decisions. And, because the data are not used, we have not attended to the quality of the records we maintain and its thoughtful and routine analysis.

Here we need to make major changes. I expect this will require a redeployment of the resources we currently allocate, across the university, to Institutional Research. First, we need to get the numbers right. Then, we need to make sure the analyses we routinely do are directed not by “what we have always done” but, rather, by what we now need to know as decisions are made, and to incorporate outcome-based planning and analysis where appropriate. That does mean, by the way, that those with IR talents are an integral part of the budgetary and other decision-making processes.

There is progress being made. With leadership from our Trustees and under Provost Murphy's guidance, an amazingly versatile set of "dash board indicators" has been developed. You are also starting to discuss how we will participate in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). This is a joint initiative of both AASCU (American Association of State Colleges and Universities) and NASULGC (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges) and, frankly, we are well behind many other universities here. It would be my hope that VSA can effectively support our collective capacity to make better decisions about that which we care most: the quality of our programs, recognizing that the data will never measure all we care about and that we must keep our brains in gear. Even if that is not the case, we will not get to "best of class" if we stay at the back of this parade; VSA was developed by our associations, in part, to ward off mandatory systems of accountability emanating from Washington, D.C. with the D's as interested as the R's; and, of course, in any system that allows people to compare universities, we will shine, establishing another way to break out of the "regional university" pack.

Diversity

Western must become an institution that offers access and opportunity to those who have been systematically excluded from the resources and rewards of our economy. We will never help address this basic tenet of justice, we will never reach national prominence – indeed we will not retain our status in the Pacific Northwest – if, in the years ahead, we remain as white as we currently are. We have made some progress but, in terms of the diversity of our faculty, staff, and student body, we are basically and squarely in the middle of the pack. I know, for I heard it many times: you expect far better of Western.

I begin by focusing on diversifying the composition of our faculty and staff. That is the right thing to do, of course. Period. But, it is also an important means, through both recruitment and retention, of diversifying our student body.

It will take money and that is one of those commitments we are going to have to continue to make and increasingly make even in these times of budgetary challenge. Part of it has to do with supply and demand. As I understood those principles from my freshman econ course and as I see universities around the country competing for a too small pool of faculty and staff of color, we are going to have to continue even more to pay a premium for faculty and staff of color. That is understood by deans and vice presidents and department chairs and it will stretch budgets even more.

I also think we should formulate a faculty/staff diversity initiative. There are many models out there for us to borrow from and any such initiative for Western would benefit from thorough consideration by governance and other bodies. This is not the place to go into details but recognize that it must affect both recruitment and retention, providing one-time sources of funding for a variety of steps.

We have certain diversity funds already in budgets. I intend, in the bleak budget ahead, to propose initially modest but additional funding for a faculty/staff diversity initiative. In our open and transparent processes, it may not survive. But, in so doing, it is an expression of the importance we, as a university, must attach to this effort, critical to preparing the future Western Washington University.

The State of Washington, in its education master plan, intends to increase the number of baccalaureate graduates. The sad truth is that the students prepared to succeed in universities are just not out there in the numbers the state expects. And needs. As high school graduation numbers have leveled off, it is the populations of color that are growing. There lies Washington's opportunity. And, Western Washington University's opportunity. And, when the state cannot immediately expand capacity, it makes sense to focus on a currently too narrow pipeline.

We do much in this area now. There is a need, first, to assure our efforts are aligned with potential synergies already realized. Then, there is an opportunity to do more. This is another opportunity for us. And, it is picking up steam: there is a bill being considered in Olympia that would make Western the state's pilot for such efforts. We will not use additional state dollars here. The commitment is to privately raise necessary funds and this is the sort of activity that foundations do find appealing. Further, the pipeline challenge is a priority for the Obama White House and federal support is expected to be in the offing.

Sustainability

I clearly heard that our commitment to sustainability is strong and, most certainly, will be one of the cornerstones of our strategy to become the best. This is nothing new for us. However, looking across the country today, I would be hard pressed to name a university that did not assert a commitment similar to ours. Our history, our established strengths, and the values that infuse our campus do give us a significant leg up. Our challenge will be to approach the subject genuinely and innovatively, with ideas others will come to us to copy.

How do we find those ideas? The sustainability group, organized bottom-up as all such effective groups must, will be central to that effort. And, it is the sort of thinking and strategizing that we must now be doing so that, as the economy turns around, we know what it is we most need to do and do first.

I want to use the topic of sustainability to comment on another dramatic lesson I learned throughout the listening sessions. We are a campus of caring, committed colleagues actively engaged in the challenges of our wider world. Remember those tidbits I asked people to share? So often, they involved some personal commitment: serving at a Hospice facility, volunteering in a clinic, adopting two children from Africa, ...

This pervades our faculty, our staff, and most certainly our students. And, I also saw it to an unusual degree in my listening sessions with members of the Bellingham community. If you have spent much of your life here, it may require a newcomer like me to point out how extraordinary this is. I don't know quite where to go here, but I raise it because you just may. It does seem to be a key advantage to build upon as we decide what, for our purposes, constitutes the best university of our type.

Waterfront

I had many questions about where we are on the Waterfront. I first explained that we are currently juggling two roles. One is to facilitate our community and its able leaders as they come together to lead a development that future generations can look on with pride.

The other, of course, involves our own interest in a presence on the Waterfront. Here I offered several thoughts, developed by listening to you. First, I heard that our planning seemed to follow from the need to expand baccalaureate capacity and also heard from you that enrollment projections for the programs that would locate on the Waterfront were not realistic.

I understand the need to emphasize growth: that's what the state pays for. But, I got to thinking. Perhaps we have the cart before the horse. First, we should ask, what is it we could uniquely do at the Waterfront alone and that would contribute to our basic vision: premier university in the nation through engaged excellence? Answer that question first and enrollment implications may or may not follow.

It is another important question, precisely the kind we can and must address as we work through the current budget situation and prepare for better times.

I also heard of very genuine and real concerns. One, that we continue to ask the responsible entities to fully address seismic standards. We will. And, that we not dilute support for current programs by shifting resources toward a development on the Waterfront. We won't.

In several listening sessions, colleagues reported concerns about having academic programs located in two different sites. Travel between the two sites was one concern. Another concern addressed the potential to further isolate students who need broader exposure to the diverse academic programs that enrich our campus. To these and related concerns, my reaction is probably predictable given my emphasis on taking risks and innovating. Perhaps these are show stoppers but it is also possible that there are solutions we, as creative people, can come up with once we more specifically understand what we want to do on the Waterfront.

I also heard excitement about being on the Waterfront. The most common denominator was to have a better and more effective location to interface with the community – be it in educational outreach, partnerships with other entities including NOAA, research and other activities in support of economic development, and supporting the needs of the community in the critical area of the fine and performing arts. Basically, getting off our hill and being even more effectively stewards of place.

Again, even though we are entering a budgetary hiatus, this is an area where we can further plan and develop the strategies we will need to have in place for the future. And, we must also continue to make progress on the project. We are. Engaging our students in the process, we are moving forward with a character study to more precisely conceptualize how, physically, our presence on the Waterfront should look and feel. Here we use funds specifically appropriated for such purposes during the last legislative session. Groups on campus are continuing to refine plans for our presence there. We will also be seeking legislative help in land acquisition. This will not displace the current capital project priorities but there is some reason to be optimistic simply because the infusion of Economic Stimulus dollars does expand funding available for one-time expenditures.

Advancement

These are difficult times for raising money. Even the funds we have previously raised are, to use the phrase common to the trade, “under water.” Endowments are not producing the revenues

that, historically, we have come to count upon. For example, we support about \$900,000 of scholarships through income on our endowments. We are projecting that will drop to \$150,000 this year.

Nevertheless, this is precisely the time for us to plan a major capital campaign, and I have asked for that planning to begin under Vice President Bower's leadership. We need to be prepared to go forward in 12 to 18 months – it will take that long to plan. If the economy is sufficiently improved to allow us to proceed, then we will. If not, we will adjust. But, we must be prepared.

That may well involve you, too, as we do need to do a lot of work internally to understand our needs and opportunities, realizing that a capital campaign only adds “margins of excellence” and does nothing for filling holes. I trust you also see the critical connection to other tasks I have mentioned: defining what class it is that we intend to be the best in and marketing, to mention just two.

Academic Quality

I began with what I thought was the most important and pressing need for us to stay effectively engaged in preparing bright futures. I will end with the subject that must drive all the above considerations.

Attention to academic quality is key to our future, certainly. It must also determine the difficult budgetary decisions we will all soon be engaged in. And, we must consider difficult choices. For example, when I present the budget situation to our Trustees this afternoon, one of the considerations I will put on the table is the possibility that, to protect quality, we may have to go through a period of being a smaller university, downsizing over the next several years. There would be serious consequences for us. And for the state we exist to serve.

I trust we won't have to go there. But, why even consider such a disagreeable course? Our edge is the quality of our academic programs. We must never lose sight of that driving force. I saw its origins in the faculty, staff, and students with whom I was able to meet. I saw recognition of its value in the many groups outside the university that I met with around our state.

Conclusion

I have laid out fifteen major initiatives we could be pursuing today. Indeed, I have said we should be pursuing them if we are serious about being best. And, these are just a distillation of the many ideas you shared with me. The list could be longer. Indeed, I invite you to make it longer. As these remarks go up on the web today, there will be a community forum for you to add to the list.

What about priorities? While not requiring new dollars, these each require time and talent. And, we are each thinly stretched. Yes, we each, individually, need to set priorities. But, together as a university, do we need to do so in pursuing further consideration of these fifteen items?

Maybe, maybe not. One of the useful features of the subjects I have raised is that they do not each require the attention of us all. We are 2,200 strong. I saw that collective strength face-to-

face through the listening sessions. What a reservoir of talent. And, at this stage, that is what it is about: applying our best ideas to challenging questions.

Pick just one of the many areas where we need to engage our own excellence in order to prepare for tomorrow, become its champion, force me, force our university, force yourself to find the strategies we need to have in place to move Western to become the best in the country.

I tell myself that the period ahead will test my abilities as a leader like they have never before been tested. Everyone in this room is also a leader. And, you will find your leadership tested as never before. I now know you and so know you are up to the test. Through your leadership – and most assuredly *not* through mine alone – Western will be made stronger.

What really, is going to get us to the vision? Western will be the best if we are each the best – in our commitment to the vision, in our belief in our own excellence, in our willingness to innovate and experiment. And, most importantly, in our commitments to each other.

Thank you for listening. And, let me know what you think: email, online forums, further opportunities to meet, to talk, to listen.