

UW-W Faculty Resolution for a Blue-Ribbon Commission to Study the Proposed UW-System Restructuring

Whereas the American tradition of higher education, which made the United States' university system the envy of the world, was built on the principle that university governance requires the joint effort of the governance groups to make sound decisions;

Whereas the faculty by legal statute, history, custom and tradition has exercised primary responsibility over academic, educational, and faculty personnel matters in order to ensure the high quality of education;

Whereas the current proposal for restructuring the University of Wisconsin System by merging the UW-Extension and UW-Colleges into selected four-year institutions is one of the most massive restructurings proposed since the creation of the UW System (1971 instantiated in law, 1974 completed);

Whereas the proposal was initiated from a top-down approach with virtually no input from the governance groups, including the faculty governance groups of the UW Colleges or the UW comprehensive institutions, including UW-Whitewater;

Whereas the decision to merge the two university systems in 1971 was preceded by more than two decades of discussion, including legislative studies, campus and system study committees, and a blue ribbon higher education commissionⁱ;

Whereas the merger, even once initiated, was undertaken carefully through a Merger Implementation Study Committee, given six years to gather information, study issues related to the merger, and offer its recommendation through open meetings and other forums. The Merger Implementation Study Committee was charged to consider thirteen areas seen as necessary to implement the merger, including faculty tenure and retirement, uniform compensation requirements, complete review of savings and/or efficiencies effected by or contemplated by the merger, and even the "practicability, feasibility and wisdom of the merger" (s. 26 of chapter 100, 1971);

Whereas the three primary reasons given for the necessity of the merger and its hasty implementation – demographic changes, budgetary constraints, and declining enrollments at the UW Colleges – are in need of careful examination;

Whereas, for example, the assertion that "demographic change" will result in reduced traditional student enrollments has not been proven to be historically accurate in the past because the percentage of students attending college has increased even as the

demographics of the younger population has decreased (resulting in, for example, the 1990 cohort having more students enrolled in college than their much larger 1950 counterpart);

Whereas enrollment numbers are not simply about admission numbers, but also about student retention and persistence. Nationwide, approximately 40% of freshmen do not graduate from a four-year college within six years, and an even larger portion of freshmen in two year colleges fail to graduate. While we need to investigate specific reasons for non-graduation/drop-outs within the UW-System, especially for the UW Colleges, studies (in the US as a whole) indicate that one of the major reasons is due to lack of financial support by the state. The most logical way to raise college retention is perhaps then not to merge the UW-Colleges and UW Extension with selected comprehensives but to increase investment in higher education and K-12 education.

Be it therefore resolved that the Faculty Senate of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater call for the Board of Regents to assemble a Citizens' Blue Ribbon Commission to study the rationale for the proposed merger, including the budgetary constraints, the demographic changes, and the lower enrollment numbers. Furthermore, we ask that the Blue Ribbon Commission work in cooperation with the governance groups so as to draw from its cumulative wisdom and consult with experts that can help inform and frame the discussion. Finally, the UW-W Faculty Senate asks that the Blue Ribbon Commission use its authority to promote the broadest discussion of the purpose of higher education as essential to the future of the citizens of the state.

Be it further resolved that if a merger is decided on as the best course of action, the merger will be implemented with the care that the people of Wisconsin deserve. Thus, we should establish a committee that studies the problems that might emerge from a merger and offers recommendations on changes that need to be put in place in advance of any merger.

ⁱ Edmund David Cronon and John Jenkins, *The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1946-*, volume 4, University of Wisconsin Press, 1999, 521-96. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/UW.UWHist19451971v4>