

Summary of Major Themes from the Forum “What Would Public Authority¹ Mean for the Wisconsin Idea²?”

March 30, 2011
22 Ingraham Hall
UW-Madison Campus

On March 30, 2011, a public forum was held to discuss the question of what Public Authority status might mean for the Wisconsin Idea. The forum was sponsored by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and held on the UW-Madison campus. What follows is an introduction to the forum, a summary of the major themes presented by panelists, and key questions and responses from the audience and panel members.

Introductory Comments

As everyone knows, Chancellor Martin has been steadily advancing the cause of increased flexibility for UW-Madison over the past year, branding her working model as the “New Badger Partnership.” One aspect of the New Badger Partnership’s approach to flexibility is a split from UW-System constituting the university as a public authority.

As a former research administrator and a current faculty member, I long for the day when flexibilities in purchasing, personnel, and other state-governed systems can be streamlined, and I enthusiastically support the Chancellor’s efforts to obtain such flexibilities for our campus. These will undoubtedly make my ability to do my research and teaching more efficient. However, as a member of the CALS faculty, I also recognize that a UW-Madison administratively separated from the UW System and our partners across the state such as stakeholders, counties, and UW Extension, may have certain consequences for us and our work that affect our partnerships.

Chancellor Martin has recently posted memos between UW-Madison and other UW System schools reaffirming some of those partnerships under a Public Authority model, but it is also fair to say that there is discussion inside and outside of the university community as to if and how those partnerships might be impacted.

One of the central reasons for the discussion today is to reflect on how a public authority model might impact the Wisconsin Idea, a tradition first articulated by UW President Charles Van Hise in 1904. Van Hise famously said that he would “never be content until the beneficent influence of the university reaches every family in the state.” And of course, today that belief reinforces much of our work here on campus,

¹ See <http://budget.wisc.edu/> for more information on Public Authority

² See <http://www.wisconsinidea.wisc.edu/> for more information on the Wisconsin Idea

fostering close working relationships within the state, throughout the country and around the world.

To me, some of the important questions that I hope we will discuss today are what we value, and who we want to be as a university. I have long felt that our close partnerships with stakeholders, citizens, businesses, organizations, campuses, and government is a source of tremendous strength and focus for our campus, and I will freely admit that I have come to cherish the value that the Wisconsin Idea represents. While most land grant universities embody some of these values, Wisconsin takes it to another level with its service-oriented mission and dedication to improving the state and its people. I believe that Edison's quote about the way the value of an idea lies in the using of it is actually practiced here on our campus, and it is a tradition about which we are justifiably proud.

It is certainly possible that a public authority model will not interfere with these relationships, or that it could serve to add additional impetus to foster new relationships. It is also possible that a public authority model could impact our relationships in unintended ways. Today, we welcome the chance to hear from five panelists with diverse views on the subject of how Public Authority might affect the Wisconsin Idea, and then welcome the chance to engage in dialogue with you, the audience, on this very important topic.

-Irwin Goldman

Comments of Panelist Dennis Dresang, Professor Emeritus, La Follette Institute, UW-Madison:

- Chapter 36 of Wisconsin State Statutes have been used to draft a new Chapter 37 which will constitute the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a public authority.
- The mission and many of the current traditions, such as tenure, shared governance, academic freedom, and the public nature of the institution, would remain.
- Most of the current UW System Board of Regents members serve 7 year terms and all are appointed by the Governor. Under a public authority model, the Governor would appoint 11 out of 21 members, but most would serve 3 years terms. Various categories must be appointed, such as a member representing agricultural interests, members from WAA, WARF, and UW Foundation, and a member of the UW System Board of Regents.
- A new personnel system would need to be developed by July 1, 2012, under which there would be no classified staff appointments.
- The funding for this model would come from a block grant from the state, tuition, and gifts / grants. The UW-Madison would not need to provide funding to DOA and could retain interest on its own funds.

- With respect to the Wisconsin Idea, several key issues apply. These are: (1) authorization; (2) capacity; and (3) will. With respect to authorization, there are no specific obstacles to participating in partnerships with other UW system schools. With respect to capacity, the UW would be in a stronger position because the faculty would be in a better position under public authority. With respect to will, this is up to individuals, just as it is now.

Comments of Panelist Jim Munsch, farmer and food systems consultant from Coon Valley, Wisconsin:

- Strongly dependent on the science at UW-Madison to run his cattle and consulting businesses in agriculture.
- Strongly reliant on UW Extension for their expertise in agricultural science, but also aware of the fact that he and his business also help Extension personnel learn about real-world problems and issues.
- Feels that someone is “shaking his canoe” with discussions about a public authority split from the UW System, partly because this raises the significant question of whether UW Extension will be able to remain as viable and important as it is now.
- The area of Western Wisconsin where he lives is impoverished compared to counties in the east. The UW-Madison is perceived as a place where it is difficult to obtain financial aid, whereas his local UW System school (UW LaCrosse) is viewed oppositely.
- From a macroeconomic point of view, the move toward public authority appears suspect because tuition may eventually soar, making it unaffordable to lower income people in the state.

Comments of Panelist Kathy Cramer Walsh, Professor, Department of Political Science, UW-Madison.

- There is a great deal of pride about UW-Madison around the state of Wisconsin, but a lot of skepticism too.
- The institution is viewed as rather elite, expensive, and a difficult place in which to gain admission. People who work at UW-Madison are viewed as out of touch, lazy, liberal, and elite.
- The quality of the education offered at UW-Madison is a critical factor that people around the state care about.
- How people view public authority depends on where they stand. If they are alumni, they may see public authority as our one great hope. But for those not inclined to support UW, they may see this as an elitist approach that is out of touch with the people of the state.
- People around Wisconsin love our sports teams, marching band, UW Extension personnel, the UW Hospital, and other marquee programs. These form a cumulatively positive impression of the UW-Madison. However, their negative impressions are often people-specific because of incidents involving people they know and a negative experience with UW-Madison.

- Public authority may initially be viewed negatively by people around the state, but it could ultimately be very positive if some of the positive aspects of the university are maintained and magnified.

Comments of Panelist Richard Klemme, Dean, Cooperative Extension, UW Extension:

- UW Extension is a separate campus that tries to build the kind of partnerships people need. The citizens of Wisconsin are all viewed as potential students in UW Extension.
- The UW Extension model is county-based, and there are some 275 tenured faculty out in the state that are co-funded by state, federal, and county tax levy dollars.
- UW Extension highly values what they have in the UW-Madison campus and the UW-Madison campus benefits from this too.
- Extension in counties around the state provide feedback loops for science-based professionals to know what is happening and to be able to provide service. Faculty and Academic Staff learn from practitioners and vice versa.
- UW Extension has a lot of questions about the public authority model. In the past, there has been great cooperation with UW-Madison to sort out problems. The two campuses are intertwined, interdependent, and mutually beneficial to each other.
- Ultimately, UW Extension is challenged by the public authority model and sees the questions of authorization, capacity, and will as very important for the future.

Comments of Panelist Michael Bell, Professor, Department of Community and Environmental Sociology, UW-Madison:

- The Wisconsin Idea is perfectly compatible with a world-class university.
- While the principles of public authority are admirable, there doesn't appear to be any explicit commitment to the Wisconsin Idea in the principles as outlined by the Chancellor.
- We have a great tradition of doing public education very well, but when the pie gets smaller, the knives get longer.
- Tuition does not appear to be a magical solution to our budget woes. Without a statewide coalition about the pie, it is possible that with incoming tuition rising, state funding may be reduced.
- We should give serious consideration to the Wisconsin Idea Partnership, which may provide flexibility while keeping the UW System together.
- One hybrid model to consider would be appointing 5 UW System regents on the Board of Trustees instead of just one regent.

Comments, Questions, and Discussion. Please note that the answers provided below are responses from panelists and may represent the combined answer of more than one panelist.

Q: Have other schools made this move nationally and what can we learn from them?

A: Yes, several other models exist, including Michigan, Virginia, and Oregon.

Q: How might the fact that other UW-System Chancellors oppose the Public Authority model affect our relationships?

A: It is possible that competition could occur among various UW entities as their boards compete for resources. UW-Milwaukee is also examining public authority, and were it to also obtain this status, there would be boards from that institution, UW-Madison, and the UW System that would all be competing for state resources.

Q: Would our status as a Land Grant Institution change?

A: It doesn't appear that there would be any changes to our status, though it is possible that certain federal dollars that flow to UW-Madison by virtue of its land grant status may follow different paths under this new model.

Q: What are the barriers to creating a public authority for the whole UW System?

A: No specific answer could be provided to this question.

Q: Public authority status has been brewing for some time, but why does the Governor want this so much now? Another version of this question is that there is a hunger for more facts and a pervasive lack of trust in the state right now. People are therefore asking, what is the motive for this change, and why now?

A: Governor Walker has a history of trying to privatize public entities such as the Milwaukee airport and parks. He is also pursuing privatization of the state's power plants. Thus, privatization is one of his desires and the public authority model may be as close as he can get to privatization.

Q: What is the current percentage of UW-Madison's budget paid for by the state?

A: The general figure provided of approximately 18.7% covers all undergraduate education at UW-Madison. While this figure has declined significantly over the past several decades, it can be misleading when presented out of context because it is a percentage of our total funding. Total funding to UW-Madison has gone up substantially because of rapidly increasing gift and grant support, thus also reducing the state's contribution to our total budget.

For example, over the last 10 academic years, the proportion of the UW-Madison budget supported by state taxes has changed from to 26.4% in 2000-2001 to 18.4% in 2009-2010 despite the fact that state tax dollars to the UW have increased from \$399,300,000 to \$457,000,000 in that same period. Part of the reason for this decline in the percentage of the total budget supported by state taxes is that federal programs and gifts, grants, and segregated funds have grown from \$638,200,000 in 2000-2001 to \$1,174,200,000 in 2009-2010. This large increase in federal programs

and grants / gifts results in a reduced percentage of state tax dollars as a share of the total UW-Madison budget.

Q: The title of this forum is about how public authority might impact the Wisconsin Idea. Might this new model negatively affect the ownership people may feel for the institution?

A: Public Authority does have the potential to change the perception of ownership of the UW-Madison from the people of the state to a much smaller group of stakeholders. There is a potentially hard-wired political issue regarding the possibility that a legislator no longer may see his or her relationship with the UW System schools, but with the UW System school in his / her district only. In addition, there is a potential perceptual issue about how individual citizens might view their sense of ownership of the institution under a public authority model.