



18 May 2020

To: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System
Ray Cross, President

From: University Committee, University of Wisconsin-Madison
(Terry Warfield, chair; Paul Campagnola, Erica Halverson, Eric Sandgren, Steve Ventura, Kirsten Wolf)

Re: Proposed Recommendations for System Restructuring in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

The University Committee of UW-Madison is the elected executive committee of our Faculty Senate and the Board of Directors of PROFS, the voluntary non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of the faculty. We write today on behalf of the faculty of UW-Madison to express concern about the [*Blueprint for the University of Wisconsin System Beyond COVID-19*](#) presented by UW System President Ray Cross to the UW System Board of Regents on May 7, 2020. While much of the plan has appropriate recommendations for response to the pandemic and re-opening of campuses, we are troubled that it was developed without adequate shared governance consultation. Indeed, the initial draft includes recommendations for UW System restructuring in the guise of pandemic response that go far beyond what should be done in haste to respond to the current crisis. Furthermore, development and implementation of Blueprint recommendations would seem to require participation of the new UW System President.

To be specific, the *Blueprint* includes recommendations about instructional design and delivery that are clearly in the domain of faculty, provosts, and chancellors of each campus of the system. Without careful study and consultative process, this is an abrogation of clearly spelled out responsibilities in state statutes and UW System rules. As noted in Wisconsin State Statute 36.09(3)(a), chancellors, in consultation with their faculties, are responsible for designing curricula and determining the primary divisions of the academic calendar (UW System Administrative Policy 165, Part 1). Moreover, faculty have “the primary responsibility for advising the chancellor regarding academic and educational activities” (State Statute 36.09(4)).

The last time a major re-organization of higher education in Wisconsin occurred was in the late 1960s. The abstract of *A Forward Look. Final Report of the Governor's Commission on Education* (later known as the *Kellett Report*) begins, "This report is the result of a 2-year study of Wisconsin's education system in which over 600 men and women and 3000 students participated. Volunteer citizen task forces, which provided data and recommendations for the Commission's consideration, addressed themselves to 4 major issues: organization of the educational system for effective statewide planning; development of a financial policy that would provide equality of opportunity and equity in cost sharing; formulation of procedures to increase resources allocated to education; identification of desirable relationships between state government and educational institutions."

All of these issues still resonate as we consider recovery from the pandemic. We call for a similar type of in-depth study involving students, staff, faculty, administrators and the people of the state. The handful of scheduled listening sessions with regents cannot replace a robust consultative process at each campus. Such a study need not take two years, but it is clearly warranted to come up with appropriate and enduring solutions to the fiscal and operational deficiencies of the System that have come into stark relief due to the crisis.

We strongly urge you to take all steps necessary "to protect the lives, health and safety of persons on property under [your] jurisdiction," as specified in Wisconsin State Statute 36.11(1)(a). However, we also request that you respect our shared governance processes as well as the autonomy and judgement of the leaders and faculty of individual campuses in decisions about instructional design and delivery modes. We also strongly encourage you to develop a process for evaluation and recommendations about UW System restructuring that is broadly inclusive, based on the best principles of shared governance and based on clear and compelling evidence. We do not wish to live through a repeat of the unfortunate consequences of the aborted attempt at creating a public authority, tenure provisions change process, nor the System restructuring in fall 2018 that is widely perceived as a top-down mandate without necessary deliberation and with many unintended consequences.