Washington's Now and Future Premier Comprehensive University: Thoughts for a Discussion

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Introduction

"Transformation" is a grossly over-used and probably clichéd word. Yet, I can find no more appropriate term in the context of thinking about the future of Western Washington University. Ours is the premier public comprehensive university in the Pacific Northwest. Our aspirations are to be the best university of our type in the nation. That cannot happen simply by doing more of what, to this point, has proven to be successful. We will need to leave known and familiar territory to relentlessly seek the front of the pack. To experiment, to create, to innovate, to occasionally fail. To transform.

Now, imagine that becoming "best of class" continues to be our aspiration during a period in which, overnight, state support dropped from 60% to 43% of the operating budget. There is transformational pressure even if we did not have the additional aspirations.

How are we to respond to the rapidly diminishing support for public higher education? We at Western. We all as citizens of Washington.

Meaningful answers to questions like that must come from us all, not from any single individual. Or, just from the university. So, I have written what follows – for campus but also for all friends of Western – to stimulate your best thinking, hoping you will help us find meaningful answers.

And, not to whine or complain. But, as will be the theme throughout, to approach such transforming forces not as victim but, rather, aspiring to be masters of what we are to become.

Transformation

I begin by recognizing that our institutions of higher education are imbedded in a society that is rapidly changing. The major transforming societal forces are well known, and here are a few:

- Certainly, the globe is shrinking and flattening, just one consequence of plummeting information and communication costs.

- The diversity of cultures, races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations has always been there. Today, though, we understand that such diversity constitutes important building blocks essential to constructing shared and ever-brighter futures.
- Climate change and sustainability increasingly define our options and guide our choices.
- Pressures for the public sector to be ever more efficient and accountable only grow.
- We strive to ever more emphasize an entrepreneurial culture.
- Even as competition abounds, we seek success through strategic partnerships and collaborations.
- The dizzying pace of technological advancement creates opportunities earlier generations could not even dream of. And, challenges – ethical, organizational, social – that our inherited culture and norms are struggling to keep abreast of.

A first principle is that those experiencing transformations, rather than being in the lead, are too often pushed along. Think the health care industry, think print journalism, think the automotive industry.

Think American higher education. Consider the two previous periods of major transformation in American higher education: those following passage of the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 and the opening up of public higher education when the GI Bill was passed following the Second World War.

Today, we in higher education look back on these transforming events with self-congratulatory pride. We forget that the higher education establishments of the time felt threatened by these pieces of legislation and opposed both. The higher education power structures of the times found change threatening and reacted accordingly.

I, and perhaps you, are now part of today's educational power structure. How do we lead transformations instead of being propelled along by them? We have to take ourselves outside our zones of comfort -- before we are pushed outside the zone.

The best way to do so is to continually ask questions that make us uncomfortable. That is part of my role as a university president. That is part of your role. In what follows, my focus is upon a question that, I suspect, will take us all outside our comfort zone: What is to become of the public's universities as the public becomes ever more a minority stakeholder in their operation?

Western Washington University

Where is Western when it comes to the transformations under way?

Over several decades, Western has evolved from being a respectable regional university to being a destination university, the Pacific Northwest's premier public comprehensive university, with nearly 10,000 admissions applicants competing for 2,700 openings.

In our research and our curricula, Western of today is at the forefront of those transforming societal forces I mentioned earlier, providing ample opportunities for over 14,000 students to learn in close collaboration with "Big U" caliber faculty.

But how does Western move from best in the Northwest to best in the nation? One part of the puzzle is obvious to everybody on our campus. In a rapidly changing world, we will not get there by simply continuing what, to this point, has proven to be a winning game. We must transform.

Consider one example: Western's Huxley College of the Environment – at 40 years - is one of the oldest environmental colleges in the nation. Forty years ago, meaningfully marrying environmental policy and environmental science was revolutionary. Those were two distinct and mutually distrusting cultures.

Today, other universities are now routinely going about it. At Western, do we simply pat ourselves on the back for having been there 40 years earlier and then continue business as usual? No, Huxley is asking itself how it must fundamentally change, what it needs to be doing today that, 40 years from now, other universities will want to adopt.

Those are the kinds of questions we are asking at Western *and I could have selected many other examples*. We have some answers I am very excited about. But, in this context, the point to be illustrated is simply: to reach the next level, we must change what, to this point, has worked so well. My reading of history suggests that this is a challenge that very few organizations can surmount. After 90 listening sessions last fall involving 2,200 colleagues, I am confident Western can.

Today's Transformed Higher Education

I began by noting the societal forces by which we will either transform or be transformed. It is not always easy to see the transformations already well advanced when in the midst of change, so let me first catalogue the several significant ways in which the universities of today are not the university that I, and perhaps you, once knew.

Teaching to Learning

One of the most profound transformations already well advanced in higher education is, perhaps, also one of the most simple. Universities are not about teaching, they are about learning. In the course of my career, I have witnessed the subtle change in vocabulary that masks a dramatic shift in purpose as faculty discuss curricula in department meetings, as faculty senates discuss criteria for promotion, tenure, and merit, and as we decide how best to measure our performance so that we may continually improve it. Decades ago, we talked teaching; today, we habitually focus upon learning.

Learning is Created, Not Transmitted

Our very understanding of how people learn has undergone a revolution. Learning is not about transmitting; it is about constructing. Faculty do not fill empty vessels with their imparted wisdom. Rather, through our teaching we create the needs, the pressures, the experiences, the

provocations, the models, the information for students to construct meanings within their own contexts.

And, supporting this extraordinary shift, we also realize that students differ remarkably in the approaches that, for them each individually, effect genuine understandings. These are the widely differing "learning styles" so clear, today, to any modern and thinking professor. Together, these combine to form yet another shift: students become further enabled to and responsible for their education in what we call "student mastery learning." The role of the student in the education process has changed from passive recipient to engaged collaborator.

Delivery Technologies

As to the new technologies, they do allow us to reach audiences traditionally not well served by higher education, reaching people where they are in their lives, in their careers, in the state, around the world.

For decades, most often heard by me in legislative hearings, the idea has persisted that these new technologies can significantly lower costs of higher education. Remember when, with the advent of television, there were seers predicting that teachers would soon become obsolete? Such cost saving is a Chimera too often chased and never caught.

The basic fact is that we do not teach history or biology or philosophy, we teach people. *Higher* education is not a mechanical transfer of information; it is a fire inspirationally ignited through human interaction. People teach people. *Even over the Internet.* As far as I can glimpse into the future, technologies will greatly extend the effectiveness by which mentors and learners work together, but the basic dependence on highly talented faculty will remain. And, hence, our basic cost structure persists.

Accountability, Assessment, and Transparency

Today, there is a well-established spirit of accountability and transparency on university campuses across the country. These changes now have firm, decades-long roots although not everybody has caught on. I smiled when, on television this spring, one of our elected representatives chose to complain about the lack of transparency at the four-year institutions in Washington; I smiled, knowing that people around the state reported relying on Western's web site to find out what was really happening with the higher education budget down in Olympia.

At Western, our budget process was entirely open, well documented in detail on the web. Relying upon all sorts of means for bottom-up involvement, criteria were publicly posted, all proposals for reductions publicly posted on the web, and budget presentations from each budget unit were podcast in real time and available thereafter from the web. All with forums attached for open discussion and debate. Every penny we have to budget was available for all to see. In part because of this transparency, folks at Western never felt in the dark about the budget, or budget cuts, and were real participants as Western was forced to make very difficult budget choices.

We have the usual student course reaction surveys – every class, every term – and routine alumni surveys. We supplement these with nationally normed surveys of student engagement, campus climate, and student experiences with all parts of the university. We use "360 reviews" of

administrators (president also) including surveys on performance. We systematically measure the effectiveness of our general education program and all other major components of the curriculum. And, all these we integrate into processes for continual improvement.

I could go on. But, what I have listed is now standard across the country. When I first started as an assistant professor, none were.

These are all developments we welcome: public higher education is an important trust and those directly responsible need to be held accountable; measures of outcomes allow us to do an ever better job of what is as much a calling as it is a job; and Western, we are certain, will shine in open, rigorous, and credible measures of performance.

The Student Body

Just as our country is changing, demographically, so too are the students on our campuses. At Western, the ethnic and racial composition of the student body closely match that of the state. And, as with the state, we are becoming increasingly diverse. To use the most recent data, that for spring quarter, 2009, over 18% of our students identified themselves as African American, Hispanic Latino, Asian, or Native American. Last year, it was 16.8%, a significant one-year jump with increases in all four categories.

A diverse faculty and staff are one important means of assuring a diverse student body and, here, there is also progress to report. The numbers of faculty members of color has gone from 61 to 74 in four years – an increase of about 16%. The number of professional staff of color at Western has increased by a third in the last few years.

By the way, there is another demographic change evident on our campuses: significant for higher education and, I believe, a change that portends major and continuing societal transformation. This is the success of women in higher education. At Western, our student body is 54.5 percent female. As truly transformative legislation like Title IX slightly cracked the door open, women have exploded into the halls of higher education, including law schools, medical schools, MBA programs, and the like. It is an important success story, one built on generations of struggle and with chapters remaining to be completed in areas like engineering, mathematics, and certain sciences.

Student Centeredness

I do not know of any university today that does not refer to itself as being student centered. Certainly, at Western, our special approach to what we call engaged excellence builds upon student-faculty engagement in meaningful and, often, one-on-one learning opportunities. While I suspect that, even today, the extent to which particular universities live up to the now shared value of being student centered varies considerably, we have come a long ways. When I left graduate school to interview for jobs, we were sometimes told (I remember one conversation too graphic to repeat here) that so long as we published, our teaching and our treatment of students simply did not matter. Today, no university would say such.

Partnerships and Seamlessness

In terms of partnerships, the stereotyped notion of a transfer student as starting at a community college and then, two years later, transferring to a four-year fits only a fraction of actual students. Transfer students present multiple transcripts from diverse institutions; students jump between 4-year and 2-year institutions in both directions, sometimes enrolling in multiple institutions simultaneously. Real progress has been made in erasing the boundaries that separate sectors and impede such patterns.

Today, colleges and universities are frequently on each other's campuses. Western has nine baccalaureate and masters programs on the campuses of four other institutions. In this web of inter-institutional relationships, we realize we must pool resources to achieve our mission. Our role for some programs is to aggregate and broker local demand, finding an external supplier to meet the demand rather than doing so ourselves. And, one result being increasingly recognized: across the various higher education (and K-12) sectors, we all have a serious stake in the success of each other.

Entrepreneurial

Throughout American higher education, those comfortable campuses where we define what it is we will do when we want to do it are long gone. There are still those who think we can control and divide up the turf; sometimes they hold public office. But, even in states with strong, single system approaches to higher education, access to higher education is being provided through a highly competitive marketplace.

There is nothing wrong with this, so long as we make sure that our competitive instincts remain focused by a critical consideration: making the most effective use possible of the resources the public and, increasingly, our students provide. Certainly, we value the forces of the marketplace in other spheres as a reasonable way to match efficient allocation of scarce resources with consumers who have the fiscal means to effect their demands. And, entrepreneurship is nothing new to university campuses. Our faculty have long competed intensely for, and been rewarded for, obtaining extra-mural support for research and scholarship, for establishing partnerships with other institutions, public and private, for doing scholarly work worthy of publication in journals with 10% acceptance rates, and for drawing to them exceptional students who then excel.

On our campuses, we now know that real business plans have two components. We have always been good at thinking through great good things to do and then defining what it will take to do them, sending plans for the requisite support down to Olympia. A complete plan on any campus today also includes a "where *I* will get the resources" component, all the more important as we understand Olympia is unlikely to be the place to find further support.

Efficiency

Universities have become more and more efficient. How can that be when you see tuition rising? We must not confuse "price" and "cost." Tuition is the price people have been paying. Why has tuition been rising even as costs have remained steady? It is because states have been steadily reducing the share of the costs that they would cover.

Over the last 15 years, instructional costs at Western have risen an average of 1% annually above the CPI (Consumer Price Index). We are a talent-based enterprise; the costs of talent always rise faster than do the prices of goods, and so this alignment with the CPI is really remarkable.

Costs have been kept largely flat even as, over the same period, much more has been provided: in the technology and equipment students find in classrooms, science labs, graphic arts studios, and computer labs; in the wireless high tech environment in which they learn; and in the expanding academic and student support services now available and so important to the retention and academic success of changing student bodies.

By the way, there are downsides to this increased efficiency and cost control. One I will mention. At Western, as is the case around the country, one way costs have been kept in check is by having more and more classes taught by part-time and non-tenure track faculty. These are good teachers but they are required to teach heavier loads precisely because they do not have responsibilities to do the research and scholarship that keep tenure-track faculty (and the state they serve) at the cutting edge, research that, at Western, often also involves undergraduates in what is a shared faculty/student learning adventure.

What about the "Public" in Public Universities?

Background

I have saved, for last, what is becoming the greatest transformational force in public higher education. In state after state, taxpayer support for the costs of instruction has dropped below 50%. This is a trend begun decades before as state support for higher education around the country slowly eroded from historic commitments to cover most (typically 2/3rd's or more) of the cost of educating students.

In Washington and at Western, support declined over the decades from above 70% of the cost of instruction to, for the fiscal year just concluded, exactly 60%. Next year, what had been 60% becomes 43%. Overnight, we, the taxpayers, have become minority stakeholders in supporting the costs of educating those at Western. Instead, students and their families are making up the declining state funding through higher tuition and fees. Fortunately these tuition increases have been fully offset for many students by increases in state and federal financial aid.

Frankly, I was blind-sided by the hits targeting higher education during the last legislative session. Washington's support for higher education is becoming more typical of what is found in some other states. So, why the surprise? Because Washington has aggressively sought not to be like those other states in their slide toward mediocrity. We have seen ourselves as not merely among but, rather, a leader among the global challenge states. We are now heading toward residence in the neighborhoods of less ambitious states.

The consequences are very serious: for what Washington's universities are now able to provide and for what our students and their families have to pay. But, I am more interested in trying to understand what this transformation in ownership portends. For Western. For Western's service to Washington.

The Political Context

For 30 years from my vantage point in Oregon and, the last seven years in Wisconsin, I have watched Washington with admiration. Here is a state that got it: investing in higher education provided brighter futures – economic, social, cultural. And, provided the fiscal capacity to afford admirable commitments to social justice. Sure, higher ed got cut in tough times. But, in better times, the state stretched to reinvest. In Oregon? Funding just kept ratcheting down.

I attributed much of this to the vision of the private sector leaders in Washington. Boeing and, later, Microsoft certainly, but they are just two among many, many enterprises that got the connection between investing in the development of talent and the well-being of us all, their firms included. College graduates are the backbone of an increasingly sophisticated work force. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate in May was 9.4%. For people with at least a bachelor's degree, the unemployment rate was 4.8 percent, significantly better that the 10 percent unemployment rate for people with only a high school diploma and 7.7% percent rate for those with some college, including associate degrees.

Over the long term, Washington flourished. Oregon waned. And, arriving in Washington last summer, I spent time listening across the state. I heard what I expected, particularly from the private sector: repeatedly, I heard, "we fought for strong universities and now we must fight to keep *our* investment."

Then the Legislature convened and, in the halls of our Capitol, I frequently heard something else. There are many who do get the link between investing in higher education and brighter futures. They would say, "Yes, I know that those advocates making the arguments in the private sector are right." They would add, though, "You have to understand that those who elect me do not see the connection."

There are many friends of higher education. There were also a few who saw us as arrogant and elitist, particularly in comparison to the much more favorably seen community and technical colleges. Sometimes, the pent up frustration if not vindictiveness found expression in phrases like "the universities have to bleed."

Bleed we did. But, that is not the story I am here to tell. What are our strategies going ahead? I will explore three paths. I believe Western should aggressively pursue each.

Better Making the Case

We must continue to make the case for higher education. And, it is a powerful case. But, we must also understand our critics and where they are coming from if we are to make the case as effectively as possible.

Elitist? What does that mean? Some assert arrogance and high-handedness in the approach taken by universities. I have not seen such but perception is reality, and we must go to even further lengths to avoid such impressions.

Others trot out the tired and mythical clichés of faculty earning six figures and, if they work at all, teach only one class. I heard precisely such from one elected official. Here, I think we must be

direct, characterizing such arguments as what they are: at best, miss-informed; more likely, efforts to deal with serious policy matters at the level of the sound-bite and cliché; and, we would sincerely hope, not actual demagoguery.

Still others assert that we serve only the families of the better off. This is a most damaging argument, were it true and given our state's strong populist bent. The data are clear. But, let me speak from personal experience. My family roots are in agriculture. I don't mean owning a farm. I mean working in the fields for someone else. My dad was the first in our family to go to college. He was moving irrigation water from one furrow to the other in a field in the Central Valley of California when, at the age of 20, it occurred to him that he would be doing such for the rest of his life. He went down to Berkeley, pumped gas to pay the tuition, and ended with a PhD. Now, both his sons have PhD's and have been successful.

Higher education transforms not individuals, but families. And, states. My dad is now passed. But, I wear his hood, now a garment showing its 54 years, as I hand out 3,000 diplomas each year, a large percentage of which go to those from families where parents have not graduated from college.

A nation's wealth is rooted, most fundamentally, in the *fully developed* talents of its people. We have to continue to make that argument.

We also need to learn from others who, judging from my conversations, have more effectively made the case: the community colleges and technical colleges. Washington is fortunate to have strong community colleges, technical colleges, and universities with distinct and complementary missions. All are important components of Washington's answers to critical needs. But, just how elitist is it to say those from the growing populations where parents have not gone to college really are best suited to the opportunities provided by community and technical colleges?

The next time you are in a gathering of those in leadership positions asserting that two-year education is most relevant to the state's needs, first remember the employment statistics I earlier cited. Then, you might, politely, inquire about where those speaking did their post-secondary work. Four-year degrees, a surprising number from prestigious public and private schools, hang on the office walls of our Capitol buildings.

Making the Case Better

We cannot stop there, though. We have been trying to make the case for decades. We also need to think about how to make the case itself better, stronger. We do have to ask if our critics might not have a point.

The really disturbing issue is this: as legislators reported and as surveys confirm, the broad public does see us, generally, with warm, fuzzy positives. But, they do not see how what we do affects their lives. Compare a cut to higher education with a cut to a public assistance program or to K-12. There were plenty of each of these this biennium. Private sector leaders I regularly talk with do understand that higher education investments are the only way the state, longer term, will be able to have the tax revenues necessary to support its admirable commitments to social justice and K-12 education.

Average voters see the effects of cuts to K-12 or to public assistance programs in their homes and neighborhoods every day. They see no hurt to them, though, if higher education, particularly 4-year higher education, is cut. We know quality diminishes; we know tuition goes up; we know, when forced to shrink, fewer students are able to attend; we know that, when the only programs we can add or expand are those that recover costs in the marketplace, then the pressing and particular needs of those without higher incomes do not register on our necessarily and increasingly entrepreneurial radar screens. So what? They see no consequences for their jobs, the vitality of their communities, and, most disturbingly, the futures of their children.

There is so much we are already doing to directly affect the lives of Washingtonians – all Washingtonians. We must do an ever better job of explaining these. But, we will also look for ways to do more. Some important steps are underway:

- It is the community and technical colleges that are seen by the broader public as more relevant to their lives. We will be formalizing and strengthening our partnerships with two-year colleges. I expect that our current will be expanded by orders of magnitude in the years immediately ahead.
- We do so much to strengthen our community culturally and socially as well as economically. I could name 25 such projects (perhaps 50 if I stretched) we have underway. I do name them at those service club speeches I regularly make. But, we should look to ways to do more. That is one reason why our commitments at the Waterfront must continue to visibly and meaningfully advance. Still, like most other universities, our efforts to be "stewards of place" have been somewhat peripheral, have been more a serendipitous result of our core commitments to learning, scholarship, and engaged excellence. Our contributions to community and economic development will be moving, organizationally and culturally from the peripheral to an integral and higher-level part of how we will strive to be more relevant and more visibly relevant to brighter futures for all who are Washington.
- Also very visibly, we will deliver on our designation by the state as the pilot program for a new approach to building the pipeline to under-served populations. Truth is, the students this state desperately needs in order to expand baccalaureate education are simply not out there in the numbers required with requisite preparation and motivation. The populations that are growing come from families where parents are unlikely to have gone to college. Our Compass 2 Campus program has already attracted the direct involvement of many community members, over 100 faculty and staff, 450 Western students, and 10 school districts. This is one of those fortuitous coincidences where the right thing to do also happens to be, when it comes to making the case stronger, also the institutionally self-interested thing to do. I can think of no initiative more likely to make the case for our direct relevance to those families who, today, just don't see a connection between our continuing strength and their futures.

Just a taste of the ways to use actions, *not just arguments*, in response to the challenge of being the broader public's university. With broad help and guidance, we intend to significantly grow that list in the years ahead.

The Publicly Purposed University

Can we turn around the political situation? We will all work relentlessly to do so. We owe it to the state we exist to serve to make the effort, to have Washington once again make the sustained public investments necessary for brighter futures.

This I am more certain of: the state's fiscal situation is not going to turn around any time soon. Even if the economy picks up as the more optimistic prognosticators are now tentatively saying, our state fiscal picture remains bleak for the next biennium. Perhaps beyond. The one-time federal stimulus dollars that bought the impacts down from disaster to dire will all be gone; expectations are that Constitutionally protected formulaic expenditure requirements will dramatically grow; law suits loom with billions of dollars of recurring budgetary impacts; and educational reform legislation passed last session carries a future price tag in the multi-billions range. Higher education is a part of that roughly 50% of the budget not Constitutionally protected so the revenue shortfalls that result from all these factors are doubled and must be allocated among many critical and important state needs.

As public support has dropped below 50%, around the country, university presidents are fond of pointing out that their institutions have shifted from being "public" to being "publicly-assisted."

That phrase "publicly assisted" has long made me uneasy. We are defined not by where the money comes from but by where we put our efforts: our mission. We are a proudly public institution because of values we hold and a mission to which we are dedicated. And, I don't think that changes with shifts in where the dollars come from.

Drawing from an excellent study of higher education financing done by Lyall and Sell, we are transforming, like it or not, to become not "publicly assisted," but, rather, "publicly purposed."[1]

It is the purposes we pursue that define us as public.

What does it mean to become a "publicly purposed" university? The answer is unclear. But, the very ambiguity is, itself, an advantage. We have the opportunity to define it for ourselves. Or, as is now beginning, have it increasingly defined for us.

My crystal ball is as cloudy as is everybody else's. But, as I look ahead, I glimpse some features, opportunities, and challenges for the publicly purposed university. These I will quickly present and at a high level of abstraction. Where I leave the clouds to seek the concrete, it is only to stimulate your rich thinking about what else we might or should pursue. Whatever we are to become, it is your vision and your doing that will take us there.

Transformations Continue

First, as I developed earlier and as few outside academia recognize, higher education is already amidst major, sometimes decades-long transformations. They involve revolutions in theories of

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[1] Katharine C. Lyall and Kathleen R. Sell. *The True Genius of America at Risk: Are We Losing our Public Universities to de Facto Privatization?* Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Publishing Group, Ace/Praeger Series on Higher Education, 2005.

learning, in the applications of technology, in increased efficiency and effectiveness, in accountability and assessment, in students served, in being student centered, in partnerships, and in outreach. The publicly purposed university must do a much better job of making citizens, legislators, and others fully aware that today's universities are very different from those they remember. Is remains our responsibility to assure that those transformations now under way reach fruition.

Marketing and Branding

In the competitive world of today and, certainly, tomorrow, we must clearly communicate who we are and what we offer. This requires first that *we* understand and agree upon who we are and where we intend to go. Only then we can hope to more effectively communicate Western's distinctiveness. Here, I am talking marketing and branding. Those important efforts are already aggressively under way on our campus and involve faculty, staff, students, alumni, community members, elected officials, and trustees. The results will, if done well, inform *our* decisions about just what kind of "publicly purposed" university we would chose to be.

Excellence

One brand component currently distinguishes us and, certainly, will continue to be a central component of Western's brand. We call it engaged excellence, the special approach to educating students that establishes us a premier institution. Such commitment to top quality will continue to be central. Here, over the year ahead, as we look to opportunities in graduate education, international education, extended education and to fill holes in our curricula in certain areas important to a publicly purposed university, we must adhere to demonstrable excellence as a distinguishing criterion.

Demonstrable Results

And, that word "demonstrable" is key. As we compete for support – from the state, from students and their families, from foundations and donors – assertions of academic rigor and relevance, alone, no longer suffice. Excellence has many dimensions; we must be clear about those that are a priority for us. And, we must document accomplishments on the dimensions we select as most important to our concept of Western as a leading and publicly purposed university. Over the year ahead, there are any number of opportunities to advance these efforts: in designing and implementing the Voluntary System of Accountability, in refining and utilizing the decision-making ("dashboard") indicators, and in taking externally imposed requirements for institutional accreditation, for performance indicators, and for the Washington State Quality Initiative and using the efforts for our own purposes, to better pursue the mission of a publicly purposed university.

Entrepreneurial

The publicly purposed university must be ever more entrepreneurial. Universities are, already, well advanced along this path. Such efforts, though, are no longer side shows or ways to partially mitigate the consequences of shrinking budgets. Universities are rich sources of great ideas to meet important needs. Being entrepreneurial means going beyond having answers and figuring costs to also figuring out where the dollars are to come from. And, as risks are involved, we must begin with exits in mind, something higher education has not always been good at.

Almost by definition, entrepreneurial initiatives cannot be pursued top down. In lean budget times, we have budgeted for an innovation fund for the second year of the biennium to support bottom up ideas. Other opportunities immediately come to mind. The Waterfront project is the quintessential example and opportunity: to create, build, and serve knowing that we will not weaken existing programs to make it happen and expecting scant immediate state fiscal support.

Deregulation

We need regulatory relief from the state. Top-down, centrally directed control fails in a dynamic and competitive world. Just think former Soviet Union. Modern management teaches setting clear goals, providing an environment and resources for success, and then holding accountable. Those states that get this will be the places where universities are able to devote their full and best efforts to being publicly purposed national leaders. Washington needs to be there. It has some ways to go. We, undoubtedly, have progress to make on our campus. We have asked the campus to let us know what policies, procedures, and habits are getting in their way.

Innovation

I believe that a culture of relentless questioning and innovation will distinguish those publicly purposed universities that emerge as national leaders. Yes, in our classrooms, labs, and studios, we encourage our students to innovate and to take risks. Our faculty do the same in their scholarship and creative commitments. But, as with any large and complex organization, the status quo can impose blinders, limiting our field of vision. Where colleagues do come up with innovative and creative ideas, organizational arterial scleroses can block their diffusion. Such dynamics would prove deadly for an organization seeking to be a leading publicly purposed university in a fundamentally changed fiscal environment.

Publicly Engaged

It may not seem necessary to point out that the publicly purposed university must be publicly engaged. But, think about this question: "How are these public purposes to be chosen?" I think the simplest answer is also the best: By the public. And, for many of us in higher education, that insight may be most transforming. And, perhaps, most alarming.

Yes, we have always been accountable to the public's elected representatives, although, as funding diminishes, so too may the rationale for as strong a connection. Be that as it may, we have been always been allowed considerable autonomy in defining our missions and the means by which we pursue them. But, as a publicly purposed university, it becomes all the more important for us to understand the publics and *their purposes for us*, unmediated by elections and legislative sessions. How far are we prepared to go down that road?

Window on the Future

In being publicly purposed it is important that we not abdicate our roles as forward-looking institutions. Success as a university worthy of the name means knowing what will be needed by those it is our mission to serve – students, the private and public sectors, posterity – *before those we exist to serve may fully realize their needs*. That is an insight well-known to any successful, private-sector entrepreneurial enterprise. That leadership responsibility remains an essential component for the publicly purposed university providing truly higher education that serves students and the state over the longer run.

Conclusion

There are many more aspects of the coming publicly purposed university. Some good; certainly some not so good. Please understand, though, that I am not advocating what should happen. I am describing what is happening.

Happening, yes. And we have the responsibility to drive the changes in positive directions. Remember the history of American higher education I cited earlier, though: the Morrill Land-Grant Act and the GI Bill. We must exercise our leadership responsibility for it would be pointless to try only to maintain the status quo.

I will conclude making this point: it is the interdependence of the three questions I posed about better making the case, making the case itself even better, and if not public, then what are we? By thoughtfully evolving – by becoming a national leader as a publicly purposed university – we do work towards our stated vision of being the best public comprehensive in the nation. But, we also make the case clearer and stronger for further state investment.

While not in our immediate future, in the long run we – more importantly, Washington – could have it both ways: even more publicly purposed and, thereby, once again appropriately publicly funded. This is the outcome we should work for and which I believe the citizens of Washington and the leaders they elect must appreciate and embrace.