

**Date:** May 13, 2010  
**Subject:** APLU Western Regional Conference at the UW: Public Higher Education and the Need for Change

### Background

In April 2010, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) convened five regional meetings to discuss key concerns about the future of public research universities in the United States<sup>1</sup>. The University of Washington (UW) hosted one of these meetings in Seattle on April 26, 2010, featuring special remarks from UW President Mark Emmert and APLU President Peter McPherson, as well as a welcome address from King County Executive Dow Constantine and a keynote address from UW Regent Bill Gates, Sr. Participants included 67 Presidents, Chancellors, Provosts and Research VPs representing over 20 institutions of higher education in the states of Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Nevada, and Hawaii, as well as representatives from the American Council on Education, the Council on Government Relations, the Gates Foundation, the Association of American Universities, and Seattle area start-up companies EnerG2 and MicroGREEN.

Through three sessions—*The Federal-State Research Partnership*, *The State-Public University Partnership*, and *A New Federal Role in Public Higher Education*—panelists and attendees addressed potential solutions to some of the problems facing public higher education, from suggestions for incremental changes in the existing negotiation process that determines indirect cost reimbursement rates for research, to bold new proposals such as direct federal operating support for institutions. APLU will use these discussions to inform both a national report that might help set national lobbying goals, and a National Academies panel charged by Congress to make recommendations for strengthening America’s research institutions.

Key questions addressed at the UW regional meeting included:

- ❖ What is the nature of the social contract between government entities and public universities?
- ❖ What current and future role will industry play in the full spectrum of the innovation process?
- ❖ How can we partner with the federal government to use research dollars more efficiently through reduced regulation, renegotiation of indirect cost reimbursement, and multi-institutional research partnerships?
- ❖ How can we tell the story of public universities and the story of research in a compelling and tangible way?
- ❖ Are there new ways to partner with the federal government to preserve and maintain our public research institutions and mission?

Video highlights, filmed by UWTV, can be viewed online at the following location: [www.uwtv.org](http://www.uwtv.org). In addition, some highlights from each session are outlined below.

### Opening Remarks

Public higher education is a critical national asset. Yet, as Mark Emmert pointed out in his opening remarks, financial support for this enterprise depends upon fifty independent state legislatures making decisions outside of the national context. The current economic crisis has hastened longtime trends that are seriously threatening to erode the quality of

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<sup>1</sup> For background materials and locations of the other meetings, see APLU site: [www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1512](http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1512)

our public institutions. King County Executive, Dow Constantine, welcomed meeting participants and emphasized the importance of public investment in higher education, even in difficult times, because it is the bridge from where we are now to continued prosperity in the future.

#### Session 1: The Federal-State Research Partnership

This session addressed how institutions can partner with the federal government to use federal research money more efficiently, and to advocate more effectively for full reimbursement of indirect costs. This issue is important to institutional budgets as well as research productivity. But, as Bob Birgeneau, Chancellor at University of California (UC) Berkeley, pointed out, the federal government's underfunding of the research enterprise is especially important because it has caused many institutions to redirect resources from elsewhere, including instruction, to plug the gaps.

Mary Lidstrom, UW Vice Provost for Research, discussed the importance of streamlining federal regulations, and increasing efficiencies, including providing better administrative support for faculty members who are now spending over 40 percent of their time on administrative tasks related to their grants instead of focusing fully on their research. Paul Ramsey, Dean of the UW School of Medicine, discussed the many successful UW inter-state and inter-institutional partnerships and discussed the efficiencies that result from this approach, facilitated by technological advances that allow researchers to collaborate across long distances. Matt O'Donnell, UW Dean of Engineering, and two Seattle area entrepreneurs focused on university partnerships with industry and the efficiencies that can occur along the research and development spectrum as new knowledge is translated into real world solutions.

#### Session 2: The State-Public University Partnership

This session explored the erosion of state support over time and how public research institutions might better address the needs and concerns of the states. Randy Hodgins, UW Vice President of External Affairs, and Steve Juarez, UC Associate Vice President of State Governmental Relations, discussed how research institutions might better align with and address the needs of the states. Also discussed were the need to find more compelling ways to express the value of instruction and research in every realm of life, and the need to continually demonstrate to elected representatives how state investment in higher education pays off in the near and long term by educating the future workforce, as well as by creating not only new knowledge but also new companies and cures of tomorrow.

Michael Young, President of the University of Utah, implored institutions to represent carefully the delicate balance they strike every day between the teaching, research and public service missions, and to not promote one at the expense of the other.

#### Keynote Address

Allan Golston, President of US Programs for the Gates Foundation, began the keynote session by emphasizing the important role of research institutions in effecting change in the world through the discovery and dissemination of evidence, which provides an argument for intervention as well as a pathway for improvement.

Bill Gates, Sr., eloquently underscored the value and importance of public research institutions and explained that institutions are not always their own best advocates and must better mobilize their alumni base as well as community

supporters and business leaders to help make their work more relevant to the interests and needs of policymakers and other stakeholders.

### Session 3: A New Federal Role in Public Higher Education

In the third session, UC Berkeley Chancellor Bob Birgeneau asserted that as institutions react to the disappearance of state funding they have moved toward privatization in some ways, which is a disservice to the country and jeopardizes the diversity of students being educated via the public mission. He posited that hybrid federal-state institutions could be the future, with significant federal contributions (research and operating support) coming to institutions alongside requirements for a certain level of continued state support.

Dr. Birgeneau and UC Berkeley Vice Chancellor Frank Yeary outlined several new ideas for increased federal support for public research institutions, including an endowment matching program similar to existing efforts in Canada, direct federal support of endowed professorships, or an injection of direct federal operating support for a geographically representative group of top tier research institutions. Ultimately, Birgeneau emphasized that we must pursue not only changes at the margin, but advocate for a new, large-scale, national reinvestment along the lines of the Morrill Act or the GI Bill. What is at stake is too important, says Birgeneau: “Our students look like real Americans. We are the conduit in real American society – we are the realization of the American dream.” There was a sense of urgency and a plea to act aggressively and move forward with new, and big, ideas.

### Closing Session

During the closing session, Peter McPherson, president of the APLU, summarized the key issues discussed during the day and sought consensus around a list of potential action items moving forward. Ultimately, the conversation revealed the need for much further discussion on the questions of pursuing incremental change versus pursuing structural change. Various proposals need to be further distilled and readdressed not only by institutional leadership, but also by faculty and other important stakeholders who could prove impassable barriers to implementing change. Generally, participants agreed on the following goals:

- ❖ Achieve greater research efficiencies (ways to do more with the same or less).
- ❖ Streamline federal regulations around research grants.
- ❖ Reduce the research-related administrative burden for principal investigators.
- ❖ Advocate for indirect cost reimbursement rates that fully cover the costs of research.
- ❖ Find new ways to facilitate commercialization of new knowledge.
- ❖ Develop new ways to partner with the federal government to preserve quality of instruction and research at public institutions, including potential new funding models.