

## DRAFT

### **2Y2D ENGAGEMENT Discussion: Summary & Preliminary Recommendations 3/10/10, Connie Kravas, Vice President for University Advancement**

**The Process:** Four faculty focus groups that included 20 faculty from a variety of disciplines across campus; one focus group of 2y2d team leaders; and 11 one-on-one interviews (either in-person or over the phone) with chancellors, deans, vice provosts and faculty senate representatives. The focus groups were one hour in duration to accommodate group dynamics while the interviews were no longer than 30 minutes. Each group and/or individual was asked the same set of questions.

#### **Defining ENGAGEMENT:**

1. The most basic and organic definition is one of building relationships. From that build openness, transparency, trust and respect.
2. Variously described as ownership, outreach, total buy-in, becoming part of the culture, affinity, collaboration, partnerships or circularity, most participants could agree that they would know it and feel it when it occurred in the optimum state.
3. Generally, engagement is seen as a certain “connectivity” between all audiences, external and internal. It can never be only one way.
4. It is more than just communication and even more than just marketing. Just because we are marketing (both internally and externally) doesn't mean we are engaging people. Engagement is something more than that.
5. It is understood that engagement is holistic but cannot be assumed to occur.
6. Most would agree that while the engagement between internal stakeholders (not to be mistaken for morale) is better at the UW than most places, there is still a disconnect between administration and faculty (though that is perceived as quite ordinary).
7. The Mark Emmert administration is generally given credit for engagement being better now than in the past.

#### **External ENGAGEMENT (donors, alumni, parents of current and prospective students, state residents/taxpayers and the legislative community):**

1. There prevails a general feeling that the University enjoys more gravitas and good will in the area than other institutions of its size and nature enjoy, but it still feels like there is more negativity than there should be. The resources, mission, activities, etc. are not totally understood in the community and the negative sounding stories in the press fill the empty space in the public perception.
2. Most agree that things are turning around slowly but surely, or at least they were until the most recent budget issues. Still, the message needs to be managed much more, and mapped to the variety of divergent audiences. The UW should tell the same story to everyone in different ways.

Current efforts are “spotty” and not consistent. There is an ebb and flow depending on where or when the message is delivered and who delivers it.

3. One audience consistently underengaged is parents of existing students. There is not a program for them and no real way to keep them engaged throughout the process of educating their children.
4. With regard to donors and alumni, there is a perception that those whose lives have been touched the most (grateful patients, scholarship recipients, first in the family to get a college education, etc.) are the ones that need to be identified and cultivated the most. Those individuals feel a need to give back to the University because of what it gave them. Their individual stories need to be told. Students and those who benefit the most can tell the story better than anyone else.
5. A strong umbrella brand, participants said almost universally, consistently applied and deeply imbedded into all communications, would be very effective in shaping public perception. There is a feeling, evidenced by the success of the recent Husky Promise messaging, that a student/faculty-told story would resonate more effectively with external audiences than one told by the administration.
6. Even though the UW seems to be having difficulty being heard in the legislature, most participants feel the effort should continue at its current level or even be expanded.
7. Getting more people onto the campuses is seen as an important tool to lowering the walls even more to the community. But, eliminating artificial campus boundaries by telling a “wherever you are in Washington, we’re in your neighborhood” story would help more people understand the role and the presence of the University.
8. The University is not arrogant or elitist, most participants agree, it just seems that way because the UW story has not been told in an effective way that resonates with multiple audiences. Past messaging almost seems apologetic, in the Northwest cultural way. There is nothing wrong with being aggressive, competitive and confident.

**Internal ENGAGEMENT (faculty, staff, students, etc.):**

1. The UW, especially within the current environment, is missing a kind of nimbleness — there is a sense that there is too much reaction to and not enough management of potentially damaging situations.
2. It is felt that there was more faculty connection to the University during the recent campaign when there was a clearly stated mission. A “mission-driven” message is missing now — there is no clear direction or no “rallying cry” to get behind.
3. Most agree the culture of engagement is being suggested from the top (more so than at any other time), but now it is up to the individual units to make it two way. There is still a feeling of “controlled skepticism” about what happens next and whether or not there is some kind of hidden message from administration. Now, most say they have settled into a bunker mentality, waiting for the next shoe to drop (a reference to budget cuts and layoffs). More consistent communication and more transparency are needed.

4. Many participants agree that a more seamless path between faculty, students, staff and administration is necessary in today's academic environment, but no one could suggest what that might look like.
5. Universal training for those in leadership roles should, in the opinion of many, be mandatory — highlighting the importance of leadership in the engagement process. The good news is that it was felt that leadership skills are learnable. There is a difference between leadership and management. The former should be incentivized even more than the latter. Administration, faculty, staff and students need to work together to anticipate the educational expectations for future generations of students and begin right now revamping the process of teaching. If this isn't done effectively and soon, it is possible the UW could become irrelevant.

### **Future Vision for ENGAGEMENT**

With an almost unparalleled unanimity, participants in these discussions grew energized and animated when thinking about the expected outcomes from a totally engaged environment at the UW. There were numerous visions for this optimal state, but most agreed what many of the benefits would be:

- Maximized creativity, intellectualism and collaboration at all levels and in all units.
- The UW positioned as the unquestioned institution of choice for both faculty and students.
- The UW would be a universally-recognized fundamental part of the economic structure of the Northwest — as much an integral part of the culture as salmon, sustainability, and the Space Needle.
- A more free-wheeling entity, ready to go when opportunity knocks. Strategic principles, not just a strategic plan, would guide and direct. The institution could be more opportunistic and would take more chances.
- Faculty, staff and students would be the best ambassadors.
- The whole thing would be a financially sustainable model.

While most agreed the above euphoric state may never be fully achieved, and probably shouldn't be without continually asking "what are we doing here?" several suggestions for navigating to that point were delivered and discussed:

1. Begin a rigorous process right now deciding what the UW is at its very core, what it needs to be in the future to be relevant and vital, and develop a transparent, clearly articulated path through the gap. Everyone has a stake, role and responsibility regarding engagement — we all are responsible for not just any one group or person.
2. Look at where resource investments are being made. If necessary, create a new model that puts financial resources where the biggest return (monetary and non-monetary) can be expected. For instance: a) invest significantly more heavily in the branding efforts; b) re-allocate Advancement resources in ways that will leverage what was learned in the last campaign (i.e., small donations from many donors); and c) build an inter-campus technology infrastructure that will facilitate more engagement from geographically dispersed populations (video-conferencing, etc.).
3. Consider bringing back an enhanced Faculty Fellows program. Cross disciplinary mixing creates an environment where faculty can not only build and nurture professional relationships but

personal friendships as well, leveraging the “3 degrees of separation” concept for their work. The idea that engineers are building machines and equipment for medical research is an example used by participants.

4. Study the “University of the Next Century” model from Arizona State University as a way to transition effectively from a research university tone to one that also publicly values the undergraduate experience.
5. Personalize the UW and quit messaging in “institutional language.” Either get the president out in the community more or put other faces (students, faculty and/or staff) to it. Humanize what is done here. Show how it has and will impact the community on a personal level.
6. If one route to financial sustainability is to accept more students, build the infrastructure, the framework, the platform for all of that **before** growing the institution. Otherwise, the University will be forever reacting and not managing its future.

Finally, one all-encompassing theme was evident throughout the discussions — do something. Even though participants considered this process of listening a very positive step, they were clearly frustrated by past initiatives and projects that started with passion and purpose then seemed to wither on the vine before any real change occurred.