Unpacking the Wisconsin Idea in an Era of Public Engagement

David J. Weerts
Associate Professor and Co-Director
Jandris Center for Innovative Higher Education
University of Minnesota
Topics for this Session

• Pressures on today’s land-grant, flagship universities. Can institutions serve public AND prestige agendas?
• Countervailing forces: the national movement toward public engagement in higher education. Understanding the difference between outreach and engagement.
• Back to the future? The WI Idea in the context of public engagement: discussion and dialogue
• Reexamining values and practices in an era of public engagement: new questions, redefined relationships with the public and key stakeholders
• Public engagement and the next generation of the WI Idea: dialogue and discussion
Pressures on today’s land-grant, flagship university

• Balancing prestige ambitions and commitments to states in an era of declining public resources: Can we serve two masters?
  – Prestige imperative: Ranking systems reward reputation/selectivity. Feeds cycle of revenue generation necessary for survival (grants, gifts, tuition).
  – Fight or flight? Incentives to be autonomous and “leave the fleet.”

• No good deed goes unpunished?
  – Disincentives to serve state/community needs: “Syracuse slide”
Countervailing forces... the national movement toward public engagement in higher education

Definition of Community Engagement from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2006)

Community engagement is the “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the **mutually beneficial** exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of **partnership and reciprocity.**”

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
"What’s the difference between outreach and engagement?"
A conceptual model of knowledge flow (Weerts, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of higher education institution and community partners</th>
<th>Expert model: outreach (one-way approach)</th>
<th>Engagement model (two-way approach)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University produces knowledge through traditional research methodology. Roles/functions of labor, evaluation, dissemination separated from researcher and community.</td>
<td>Learning takes place within context in which knowledge is applied (community). Knowledge process is local, complex, and dynamic. Knowledge is embedded in a group of learners (community and institution).</td>
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<td>Boundary spanning roles</td>
<td>Agents deliver and interpret knowledge to be used by community members.</td>
<td>Agents interact with community partners at all stages: design, analysis, implementation</td>
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| Dissemination philosophy and strategies | **Expert model: outreach**  
(one-way approach) | **Engagement model**  
(two-way approach) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **Dissemination paradigm**  
Spread: One-way broadcast of new knowledge from university to community  
Choice: University produces alternatives for users to choose | **Systemic change paradigm**  
Exchange: Institutions and community partners exchange perspectives, materials, resources  
Implementation: Interactive process of institutionalizing ideas | |
| Metaphors | Community partners as “empty vessel” to be filled. Knowledge as commodity. | Community and university equal partners in a “community of learners.” Universities become a learning organization. |
| Challenges and concerns | Little attention to users, does not take into account motivations of intended recipients. Innovation less likely to be adopted. | Power struggles between community and institution—consensus through negotiation and strife. Requires significant culture change. |
The Engaged Campus

Source: Andy Furco, Associate Vice President for Public Engagement, University of Minnesota
"Back to the Future? The Wisconsin Idea and contemporary framings of public engagement

“The Wisconsin Idea was built on the notion that broad and deep social connections make a democracy stronger”

“The Wisconsin Idea” expressed not our mission, but our vision. It describes not what we do, but WHY and in WHAT MANNER.

“This vision—of using knowledge and education to create a balance that would keep our citizens at the heart of their own governance and of their own economy—was like nothing that had been seen before. “

“Wisconsin Idea: exemplifies values of truth, self-governance, egalitarianism, integrity, and interpersonal connectedness”

“The 21st century... will require new kinds of emergent, self-organizing social behavior, like interdisciplinary collaboration. To be most effective, people will need to know how to earn and build trust with new cohorts of people on an ongoing basis.”

Unpacking the Wisconsin Idea in the current context
Where do we stand today?

Questions to address at your table:

How might the one-way (outreach) and two-way (engagement) models of knowledge flow shape your understandings about how the WI Idea is “carried out” today?

Reflect on current practices at UW-Madison. To what extent is the Wisconsin Idea a “public service function” vs. a transformative practice guiding teaching, research, and service across the university? Evidence? (Consider roles of faculty, academic staff, students, administrators, involvement of community).

What challenges and opportunities exist for anchoring the Wisconsin Idea as a transformative philosophy and practice?
Challenges of adopting a culture of engagement within land-grant, flagship universities

- Land-grant/flagships historically entrenched in one-way expert model rhetoric and practices (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008)

“Land-grant universities...major transmitters of knowledge to American farmers, consumers, workers, and industry.” -Ronald Ehrenberg, Cornell University Economist

- At land-grant/flagships, engagement occurs in pockets of the institution (enclaves), but not an institutionalized practice (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008).
The Wisconsin Idea in rhetoric and practice?

“The Wisconsin Idea motivates faculty and staff... to carry the benefits of their teaching, learning and research to serve their state...” (UW-Madison website)

“Wisconsin Idea... offering advice about public policy, providing information to the citizens in the forms of doing research directed at solving problems that are important to the state...” (Wisconsin Blue Book)

“The Wisconsin Idea is represented by a broad spectrum of public and private partnerships making the university's resources and expertise available to address issues ranging from... (UW website)

“If anything, we are more committed than ever to the Wisconsin Idea, to using our international stature and quality to serve citizens at the local level.” (UW website)
The Wisconsin Idea in an Era of Public Engagement

Can we disrupt old mental models and (re)create a transformative vision for the future?

- **Single-loop learning** (adaptive): Learning from mistakes. Repeated attempt at addressing a problem, without ever questioning the method or goal.
  - Thermostat: cybernetic system
  - Riding a bike: get back on after a fall.

- **Double-loop learning** (generative): Asking new questions, challenges underlying assumptions about how we view the problem and solve them.
  - Beyond the thermostat: Is there a better way to heat the house?
  - Henry Ford: Designing a new mode of transportation vs. “creating faster horses.”
  - Hardware store manager: “Customers don’t want drills, they want holes.”
Land-grant/flagships trapped in single loop narratives...

- “We need more innovative outreach and engagement projects to share our expertise with the community/state/nation.”
- “We need to tell our story better about our contributions to the state. This will help us gain traction with the legislature/public for funding.”
- Single-loop attributes: Adaptive—addressing a problem without ever questioning the method or goal (“more of/do something better.”)
- **Where has higher education gotten with a single-loop orientation?** (Public view: higher education out-of-touch, not organized to serve society, declining public confidence, funding, etc.)
Moving toward “double loop” perspectives...

“I have a growing conviction that what is needed for higher education is not just more programs [single loop], but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation’s life [double loop].”

--Ernest Boyer, Former President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
The Wisconsin Idea as a touchstone to inspire double loop learning...

Single loop perspectives (public service orientation)

• How do we amplify the Wisconsin Idea (framed as service to the state/nation/world) to better serve Wisconsin residents and beyond?

• Institution as salient feature: How the campus/academic disciplines can better serve public needs.

Double loop perspectives (transformative practice)

• What is a preferred future for the State of Wisconsin, our nation, global communities where we have a presence?

• What is the role of a world class university--with an international scope in mission--in creating this preferred future?

• How do we collaborate with our stakeholders in carrying out this collective vision?

• Public as salient feature: “Society has problems, universities have disciplines.”
Engaging stakeholders in double loop dialogues

Campus leaders and academic staff

Single loop questions

• How do we improve rewards, structures, partnerships, etc. to “do the Wisconsin Idea better?” (More/better public service, outreach and engagement).
• How do we improve our storytelling about the work that we do?

Double loop questions

• How do we design a system/institution that moves Wisconsin, the nation, global communities toward a preferred future?
• How do we engage key stakeholders in this process? (internal and external)
Engaging stakeholders in double loop dialogues

**Faculty**

**Single loop questions**

- How much/what kind of service do I need to do to get tenure?
- What “counts” as scholarship in the promotion and tenure process?
- How do I package my publically centered work to be valued under the current system?

**Double loop questions**

- What is the role of a 21\textsuperscript{st} Century scholar at a world class, land-grant university?
- What role might scholars play—individually and collectively—in creating a preferred future for WI, the nation, the world?
- How do we think about our disciplines, institutions within this context?
Engaging stakeholders in double loop dialogues

**Students**

**Single loop questions**

- How do we produce well qualified students to contribute to Wisconsin’s economic and social well being? (human capital)
- How can we improve degree production in fields critical to the state’s economy?

**Double loop questions**

- What role might students play—individually and collectively—in creating a preferred future for WI, the nation, the world? (students as change agents)
- How do we think about teaching, learning, and scholarship within this context?
Engaging stakeholders in double loop dialogues
Institutional advancement (philanthropy/alumni relations)

Single loop questions
- What can donors, alumni, and friends do to better support our campus?
- Institution as salient organization to support: public will benefit as a result of investment.

Double loop questions
- What role might alumni and philanthropist play—time, talents, and treasure—in helping UW address the most important issues facing WI, the nation, the world?
- Society as salient feature: focuses on mutual benefit (campus and society)
- How might we design development and alumni relations within this context?
Double loop perspectives uncover opportunities to engage diverse stakeholders in more productive ways

• WI Idea in the future... “To be most effective, people will need to know how to earn and build trust with new cohorts of people on an ongoing basis.” (Drury, 2011)

• Working with diverse worldviews and ideologies: Villains vs. Superheroes? (Boyte, 1995)

• Unrepresented voices (race, ethnicity, social class, ideology): Communities to “fix” or “oppose” vs. partners in creating a preferred future? (reciprocity and mutual benefit)

A nagging question: Can we reconcile competing cultures of prestige and engagement?

• Moving from a narrative of “scarcity” to “abundance” (Boyte, 2011).

• Abundance view: UW will not continue to thrive as a world class institution despite its commitment to the Wisconsin Idea, but because of it!

• Evidence?
  – When carried out properly, engagement can improve the quality of teaching, learning, and scholarship
  – Engagement has the ability to leverage private/public support for higher education

• What does it take? Leadership, Courage, Imagination!
Public engagement and the next generation of the WI Idea: Discussion and dialogue

• What are examples of single loop thinking that inhibit creative thinking about UW’s role in the state and society?
• What double loop questions might move you/your department/college/the university toward new “innovations” within the WI Idea?
• What partners might you engage in new and creative ways in the future?
• What barriers and opportunities exist when thinking differently about this work?
You are Invited…

Please join us!

Jandris Center for Innovative Higher Education
University of Minnesota
Thank you and ON WISCONSIN!