



**WICHITA STATE
UNIVERSITY**

**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
AND RESEARCH**

*Office of the Provost
and Vice President*

MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty and Staff

FROM: Gary L. Miller 

DATE: September 23, 2010

SUBJECT: Reshaping 2.0

I hope the new semester is starting well for you.

We are in the process of scheduling town hall meetings in each of the colleges and other units for this fall. The president will attend if his schedule permits. During those, we will bring you up to date on the political climate in Kansas and provide some thoughts on the road ahead. I will also describe our Reshaping activities for this year. I want to provide some thoughts in advance of those meetings.

Reshaping in Review

The academic year 2009-2010 was remarkable. Facing a chaotic environment of current year budget reductions and a future of economic uncertainty, we plowed ahead with the *Reduce-Reshape-Rebuild* initiative on multiple levels. Reshaping efforts emerged in nearly all of the colleges. In an extraordinary act of university service, the Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Committee educated themselves about the complexities of university resource dynamics and offered extremely important input into a number of division-wide initiatives. New leadership in the Division of Campus Life provided exciting new opportunities for partnerships with that group. Many other initiatives moved forward even in a time of budget uncertainty. And, the commitment of the faculty allowed us to accommodate increased enrollments without sacrificing quality.

A shape for the future is emerging. Building on the strong foundation of our efforts thus far we will continue with our Reshaping initiative. Let me turn to our plans for this year.

An Adaptive Challenge

We find ourselves in the midst of what I have learned leadership scholars call an adaptive challenge.¹ Such a challenge is one that is significant and not well defined and for which there are no obvious solutions. Adaptive challenges arise in complex situations and cannot be resolved through technical applications or off the shelf approaches. Rather, they require new ways of learning and of coping with the uncertainty and fear of change. They require an adaptation of some kind.

¹ See, for example, R. Heifetz. 1998. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. R. Kegan and L. L. Lahey. 2009. *Immunity to Change*. Harvard Business Press, Boston, MA.

What makes this particular challenge so complicated – what makes it an adaptive challenge – is the unusual interaction of proximate economic pressures with changing attitudes and expectations of higher education? Our challenge is not just to reduce the budget to meet new and much lower funding levels. We are also being required to address and finally resolve public concerns about low graduation rates, student preparation for 21st century work and the outcomes of learning. People want real change in higher education even as they reduce their support for it.

It is this interaction that I have depicted as the bottleneck through which the Reshaping initiative is designed to guide us (Figure 1).

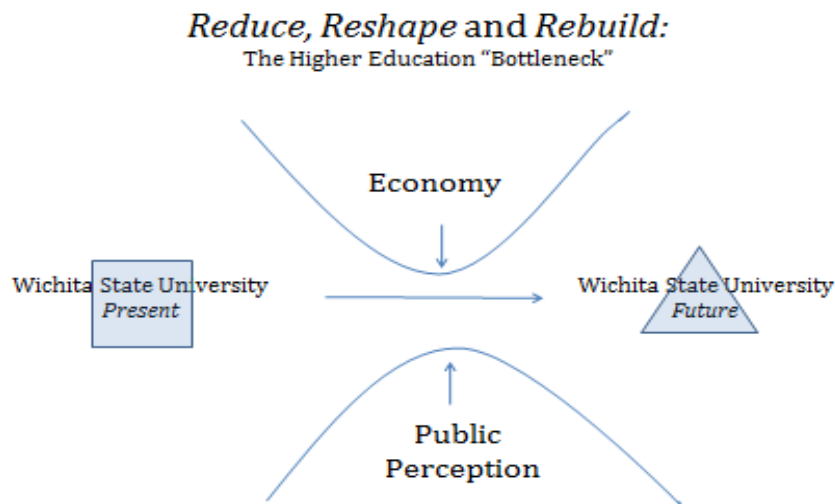


Figure 1. The higher education bottleneck created by increasing negative public perceptions, increased expectations and extraordinary economic conditions.

We anticipate that the economic conditions for higher education will not improve in the coming years. It is anticipated that FY12 may be a particularly difficult year because the state will have exhausted stimulus funds now being used for significant entitlement obligations and, because of the end of the stimulus program, there will be no incentive to hold higher education funding above the 2006 level, where we now stand. There are also elements of the Kansas economy, aviation in particular, that are expected to lag behind the general recovery.

Despite this, there is plenty of evidence that expectations of higher education continue to rise in Kansas even as the public continues to be highly skeptical about the ultimate value of a college degree.

There is no clearer demonstration of this than the Kansas Board of Regents *Foresight 2020* strategic initiative which I attach here. The plan reflects the perfect storm of rising public frustration with higher education, declining state support and the expectation of greater access to a college degree. Ambitious new goals are set to increase the participation of adults in higher education, improve persistence and completion rates, ensure student learning of fundamental skills and align higher education with the state economy, all worthy. The plan does not assume a significant increase in funding from the current 2006 level.

A summary of the six major goals of the plan is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Major goals of the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) strategic plan.

KBOR <i>Foresight 2020</i>	
Goal # 1	Align higher education with P – 12
Goal # 2	Achieve higher participation rate
Goal # 3	Measurably improve persistence and completion rates
Goal # 4	Ensure foundational skills for work and life
Goal # 5	Better align higher education with Kansas economy
Goal # 6	Enhance national reputation of Kansas universities

One of the goals (# 6) calls for increasing the national rankings of Kansas public universities. Perhaps this goal, more than any other part of the document, is the best window to America's frustration with education. Knowing that popular university ranking schemes reflect primarily admissions requirements and endowment size and not educational quality, we nevertheless forage for higher ranks because they taste so seductively like the enduring success we crave.

It would be easy for us to declare the new KBOR strategic plan impossible to accomplish and move forward with a series of marginal improvements aimed at giving Rome what Rome requires while counting on delay from the conquered lands to slowly alter Rome's expectations. Something like this was even suggested at a recent meeting I attended.

I will continue to advocate strongly for a different approach, one that directly addresses the adaptive challenge of reshaping this university for the 21st century. To do otherwise would be, in my view, antithetical to our commitment to accountability. The question is, of course, how do we build on our Reshaping effort to engage the ambitious goals of the KBOR *Foresight 2020*?

It is important to appreciate that by design KBOR plan is not intended to give much aid to the adaptive challenge. The goals are essentially mandates for improvement that simply give voice to concerns and aspirations. But, if we understand the swirling forces of ambivalence and frustration and genuine concern for students that gives rise to documents like this, a number of the real dimensions of the adaptive challenge – elephants in the room if you will – are revealed. To expose and tackle these dimensions is what befits the Wichita State University commitment to accountability to our students, to the community and to ourselves. If we are to truly reshape ourselves for the 21st century, on the way to meeting the KBOR goals we will have to confront and conquer this herd of elephants.

I have written about many of the most important national higher education challenges in previous memos to the faculty and faculty leadership groups. To summarize, the goals of the KBOR *Foresight 2020* address symptoms of extraordinary challenges among which are: (1) a higher education business model that is no longer sustainable, (2) a global e-learning environment whereby any university can offer any course virtually anywhere and anytime, a fact that changes the entire landscape of competition and collaboration in higher education, (3) a traditional learning model that appears not to easily or effectively articulate with contemporary, technology-mediated living, and (4) a research environment of increasingly diminished public funding and rising expectations of research as a tool of economic development.

These “elephants” and others not listed stir up more than a little anxiety in me. To say, as I am saying here, that we must not only *recognize* these but also *address* them is also to say that we anticipate change or, at the very least, are open to talking about change. Elephants are very large

animals and, so, it is reasonable to think of change associated with them to be spelled with a capital “C”. How will we proceed?

Reshaping 2.0

I originally conceptualized the *Reduce, Reshape, Rebuild* initiative as a reaction to imminent threats of state budget reductions – which were realized – while simultaneously preparing for the future. It was clear that the size of reductions and the need to reduce immediately would prevent any strategic response to the crisis thereby creating a situation where the university was nearly overnight “reshaped” serendipitously. The goal of reshaping was to consider how we could reallocate resources in such a way as to mitigate (to the extent possible) the damage inflicted by our need to take large reductions in a very short span of time (within an 18 month period) while at the same time to plan for how we would arrange ourselves to allow us to rebuild as conditions improved.

In my memo to the Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Committee of February 27, 2009, I argued that the reshaping-rebuilding part of the initiative was essential “...*in order to avoid damaging the fabric of the university by memorializing deep cuts that will [and, as we know now, did] occur by chance in certain units in FY10 owing to large numbers of unfilled faculty and staff lines.*”

What I hope I have made clear above is that we are not now dealing with just a dramatic budget reduction problem. We are trying to find our way – our future “shape” – within an environment of dramatic change. Thus, we cannot simply reshape. We must *be about* reshaping. We cannot simply expose the elephants, we must train them. The ultimate shape of the Wichita State University of the future is what we have to figure out.

From the beginning, I emphasized that reshaping would focus on moving us toward the Wichita State University of the future and not on restoring the Wichita State University of the past (prior to the cuts). Some of my reflections on this are included in two memos to the Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Committee (February 27, 2009 and April 2, 2009) that attempted to contextualize our local problem in the broader transition in American higher education.

In the first of these, I talked about our obligation to pay attention to dramatic shifts in public perception of higher education, the imperatives of the new global information economy and its relationship to student access to and use of technology and the intersection between traditional values of liberal learning and changing demands on higher education.

I expanded on this last theme in the April 2 memo by arguing that the history of Wichita State University is a history of urban education based fundamentally in the liberal arts and sciences and, because of this, our consideration of the modern context and relevance of liberal studies, especially as manifested in the general education program, is well within the legacy and obligation of the university. In each of my public presentations about the reshaping initiative I emphasized that we should be about making models of how public urban research universities thrive in this great time of transition in American higher education.

We will continue to plan within a set of guiding principles and assumptions. These are:

- The strength of the university resides in the innovative power and personal energy of its personnel. This human capital must be preserved and supported to the extent possible.
- The urban serving mission of the university is the foundation for success. Reshaping will support and enhance the mission.
- An important outcome of reshaping is the continued strengthening of shared governance.
- Access, diversity, tolerance and respect are inviolate principles of Wichita State University.

Last year, we initiated a mechanism for faculty and administration to share information and begin the process of working through the difficult challenges we face. The Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Committee (FSPB) served as the principal vehicle for this collaboration. We will continue with this important group this year. In addition, I will engage the deans in a more vigorous process of reshaping that will focus on our cost structure and organization. Both the FSPB and the Deans will spend the fall semester studying the KBOR *Foresight 2020* in terms of our mission and environment (both local and enterprise-wide).

An ad hoc committee including faculty and administrators has begun a study of the General Education Program. Separate reviews of the KBOR program review process and their new distance education policy will be undertaken by the FSPB. And, of course, working with the deans, we will ask the college faculties to closely examine *Foresight 2020* in the context of their college curricula. This planning space is shown in Figure 2.

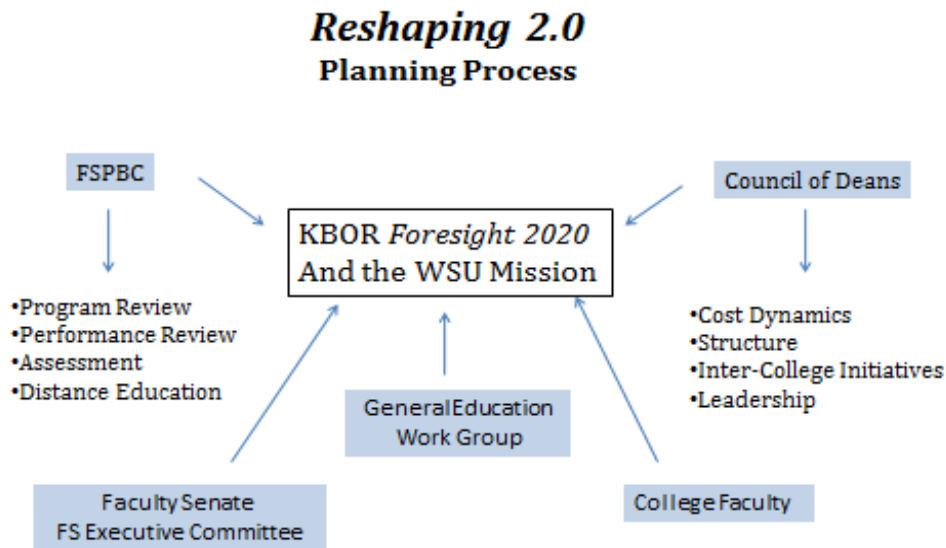


Figure 2. Planning space for Reshaping 2.0

Appeal for Engagement

In the end, the emerging shape of Wichita State University will depend on our response not only to the proximate goals of *Foresight 2020* but to the underlying challenges represented in that document. The work of the committees and groups depicted in Figure 2 is a formal approach to this work. What we will also need is the energy of your collective thinking.

Thus, I am appealing to each of you to find a way to get involved in the process of Reshaping. There are many ways in which you may do this. Here are a few that come to my mind:

- Become involved in College reshaping initiatives.
- Explore ways in which your courses and your departmental curricula address the challenges of *Foresight 2020*.

- Become involved in the general education discussion.
- Advance innovations for learning.
- Become familiar with the national narrative about higher education.

Each of you brings a special innovative power to this great challenge. I look forward to another great year.

GLM:lcm
Attachment

C: Don Beggs