University of Washington
CONVERSATION ABOUT THE FUTURE

Analysis of the College Student Forums
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Overview

The Conversation about the Future on the University of Washington campus was a year-long process of engaging the University community in a broad-based dialogue about the future. The themes from these dialogues will partially guide the direction of the University of Washington. A core aspect of this year's efforts were the College Student Forums, an effort created to bring students into the conversation. These Forums were held in each of the 17 schools and colleges, as well as at UW Tacoma and UW Bothell. The Forums were hosted by President McCormick and Regent Chris Knaus, and attendance ranged from a handful of students to over 70.

This document is an attempt at providing a comprehensive analysis of these Forums. While it will highlight recurrent themes that emerged from these conversations, it will also bring to light several pressing issues that were not frequently identified. The lessons learned flow not only from student comments, but also from the processes through which these forums were organized, and in follow-up conversations with student and staff organizers.

Introduction

The student forums were held in every school and college at the University of Washington (see Appendix A), with the exception of the School of Library and Information Sciences, which will be held in the fall. Forums were held at both the University of Washington Tacoma and Bothell campuses. These forums were almost entirely coordinated by students, whose voluntary efforts helped ensure student participation and created a safe format for conversation. Valuable assistance and guidance was provided by Marilyn Kliman, and several key staff within individual departments and colleges assisted with minor details.

In coordinating these efforts, several key issues came about. Primarily, it became apparent that students rarely come together to talk about issues within their department, much less in a college-wide forum. This lack of communication within and across departments corresponds with the expressed concerns of few interdisciplinary opportunities and the lack of community. In every forum, students expressed how powerful opportunities for conversation can be. Simply having forums where students can come together to process their educational experiences, talk about career opportunities, discuss course content, and delve into intellectual issues can help to create a campus environment that supports and engages students.

Numerous students expressed their desire to have continued conversation within their college, but felt that without central leadership and active pressure, such conversations would not occur. In essence, without President McCormick's support and the Conversation about the Future staff coordinating these forums, students indicated that such opportunities to bring them together would not blossom. The benefits of providing forums for students to come together seem obvious, but without explicit emphasis on creating such forums, they likely will not occur. Currently the burden of organizing such efforts lie squarely on the shoulders of students' voluntary efforts. From the student perspective, that there appear to be few efforts to engage in serious cross-department (within college) conversation, and even fewer resources to be found sends a clear message about valuing interaction. Students stressed the need for better communication among students and administration before addressing specific issues, and this effort should be heavily supported by the administration.

While the Conversation about the Future appears to be over, in at least one college, the conversation is only just beginning. After the Student Forum, students within the College of Education coordinated four college-wide forums, which had students, staff and faculty present. These local forums culminated in a year-end collaborative effort that resulted in the establishment of college-wide committees designed to address the themes that came forth during the initial College Student Forum. It is important to note that this effort was led entirely by students, and while staff have been supportive, without the student energy and volunteer efforts, there would be no continued dialogue around these issues. Students in other colleges have expressed interest in continuing their conversations, but as of yet, nothing significant appears to have surfaced. This reinforces the need to either institutionally support student efforts, or to provide support and guidance for college staff and faculty to create the opportunities for increased sustained dialogue. Students will provide the energy needed for such dialogues to be successful, but must feel institutionally supported throughout the process.

Lessons Learned

The clearest message throughout the process of the Conversation is the value of engaging the campus community in continued meaningful interaction. Students responded positively to engaging in brief, one-hour conversations by raising serious issues and offering profound solutions to many problems. The implications for having students spend a significant amount of time focusing on addressing a specific

issue are grand. Students were able to delve into issues related to their department, their college, the University as a whole, the local community, Washington state, and national and global issues, and offered realistic and easy-to-implement ideas. As it is, if the University of Washington wants to seriously consider the themes that emerged from these forums, active support must accompany and drive efforts working towards them. Student efforts are a valuable aspect of this, but, from the student perspectives raised during these forums, they cannot be the only, or even the main, source of energy working towards change. The President was a clear influence on student involvement, but a similar effect may be possible through college deans, department chairs, and faculty support. Without this sort of support, student efforts will largely fail, and the benefits of communication across departments will not be realized.

Such support can come in a number of ways, and should not be limited to thinking of just students in cross-departmental communication. Faculty, staff, students, and community members all benefit from increased dialogue, and there are several ways of facilitating this. As noted in several of the forums, meeting times during meals are often the most feasible for students and staff. The problem inherent in this is that many of those who would attend choose instead to be with their families and friends for meals. In order to address this, the environment must be more conducive to participation from those with families and significant others. Currently, the campus environment, according to many of the students in these forums, is not inclusive of those with families, and as such, efforts to create dialogue will miss out on a key group of students and staff unless work is done to ensure that children are welcome and included in campus events.

A related issue is the need to recognize that the University's current structures create barriers to students currently working on efforts to engage in cross-departmental conversations. The UW catering is considered unreasonably priced, as are rental fees for many rooms throughout campus. Such barriers must be considered in the process of creating a campus community that engages in dialogue; the University must institutionally support such efforts.

Emergent Themes

<u>Community</u>

While community was mentioned only a few times explicitly, it weaves throughout most of the themes raised in the forums. In fact, many of the themes offer a methodology for working towards achieving a more inclusive, expansive, and enriched campus and surrounding community. The need for belonging to a department and college was expressed in several forums, but the larger notion of being part of an institution that served as a community leader and resource seemed to engage most students. The ways in which the University of Washington can strive to create a campus community are presented throughout the rest of the themes.

Students suggested an ideal way of combining a community focus into academics by creating a program track to focus explicitly on community organizing. This interdisciplinary track would serve to educate students on the history of the local community through community-based educational opportunities. It could provide academic support and experiences that blend history, political science, sociology, law, medicine, geography, art, education, social work, public health, and a number of other disciplines. Such a program would root students in the community and provide student assistance on local grassroots organizing and relevant issues.

Other specific things can be done to help foster a campus community. UW performances could be promoted to spark dialogue around particular issues and could follow annual themes. This could be enhanced by campus-wide book-of-the-month readings. The selected book of the month, which could be

sold at discounted rate throughout the month, would serve as a discussion point throughout campus. This could culminate with several forums for discussion about the book. Different books would be chosen per month based on the larger theme for the year.

Interdisciplinarity and Collaboration

The notion of interdisciplinary work was mentioned thoroughly and almost dreamily by students throughout the University. The very way the University conceives of interdisciplinarity should be expanded to include collaboration with local and state communities as well as other universities. The University of Washington should think about creating opportunities for students to work with community members, faculty from different disciplines, faculty from other colleges and universities, K-12 teachers, practitioners, policy makers, and other concerned and relevant parties. This expanded view would position the University to create and support a multitude of programs and opportunities that provide valuable learning experiences for interested students. Programs and courses in conjunction with other universities should be fostered and faculty could be rewarded for such efforts. Opportunities like the College of Education's course cross listed with the University of British Columbia could be encouraged by offering additional funding or a reward system that acknowledges the extra work involved with coordinating such a program.

An example of the importance of interdisciplinary work can be seen in the health professions. Preparation for future work in the health professions means gaining experience working with people from different disciplines as doctors, pharmacists, dentists, nurses, public health professionals, social workers, and others, all work together to provide health care. In order to prepare students, then, the University must provide opportunities for meaningful interaction. This means working collaboratively on issues related to health care delivery, policy discussions, and hands-on experiences.

Regular college-wide forums. These could focus on a variety of topics, including academic presentations (of resident and visiting faculty, students, and staff), college-wide issues, career preparation, and discussions about relevant social issues. These forums could serve to create community while providing college leadership in areas of concern. These are also excellent opportunities to promote cross-departmental collaboration and to demonstrate connectedness. Extra support should be provided to collaborative forums that span several departments and bring together students from outside the college.

Encourage Course-taking in Different Departments. The University's strength lies in its many strong programs, and this presents opportunities for departmental crossovers. Many students learn to be disciplinarians through watching their department and faculty work solely within their discipline. Faculty who model interdisciplinary work send messages to students that collaboration is effective and essential. Course requirements could be restructured to ensure students take courses and work on projects with students in similar majors. Interdisciplinary programs should serve a more central role in students' academic work.

Collaborative Teaching. Professors should be encouraged to work with faculty from other departments in collaborative teaching ventures. This would benefit teachers who are not as well trained by hooking them up with better teaching faculty and could greatly expand opportunities for mentor teachers. This also means providing a reward system that acknowledges and encourages faculty who focus more explicitly on team-teaching and working to assist other faculty with their own teaching. It also means considering the tenure review process as an interdisciplinary process that includes faculty outside the department and college.

<u>Collaborative Campus-centered Projects.</u> Create collaborative groups (with faculty, staff and students from different departments) to focus on addressing small issues on campus. An example could be the creation of collaborative groups to create art projects on campus that alter the physical face of the University. The University could commission murals, and have graduate students and faculty create teams to coordinate an interdisciplinary effort. The artistic team could come up with a theme or topic based on conversations in the community immediately surrounding the location of the to-be-painted mural. They could then delve into the history of that theme and create the mural based on the outcomes of their learning process. This collaborative project would promote the understanding of artwork and local history while beautifying the campus.

Diversity

Some aspect of diversity was brought up at every student forum. Many of the aspects brought up blend with other themes, but also warrant individual assessment. Overall, students felt that the University could focus more on diversity and begin to provide leadership that encourages all students to think critically about their role in the perpetuation of inequality. Throughout these forums, it became apparent that students do not have adequate opportunities to explore issues such as racism. There exists, then, an opportunity to provide institutional support for engaging in campus-wide discussions related to diversity. The dean of each college could provide a college-wide forum on diversity within their respective college and hold monthly follow-up sessions which delve into specific issues within the college.

<u>Child Care</u>. An ideal way of dealing with childcare would be to create a childcare center on campus that does research into child development and early childhood education. The University could also support college-based child care, where faculty, staff and students come together to create a space for drop-in hours. This would require few University resources, but could provide internships for students.

<u>Outreach</u>. Many students stressed the need for the University to have a continued positive presence in minority communities. This would provide expanded opportunities for students to get into communities and do supportive work. Ideally, students could work in communities for academic credit, and these opportunities would augment their educational experiences by providing increased awareness of issues in minority communities.

<u>Campus Climate</u>. The University could centrally coordinate efforts to promote an inclusive campus climate. The climate would benefit from increased presence of people of color, and from bringing in more culturally relevant and celebrated experiences. Students would like diversity training for faculty, staff and students so that all become more aware of the climate on campus. A cross-disciplinary effort to engage in training, like Professor Nagda's Intergroup Dialogue, could be expanded and implemented University-wide.

<u>Tutoring and Support Services</u>. Students expressed the need to augment the Office of Minority Affairs' tutorial services with more localized departmental efforts. One idea was to have some graduate student Teaching Assistants assigned to tutoring exclusively. Another idea would create a mentoring system that connects first-year students with third-year students. This relationship would last two years. At the end of the two years, the mentee would become a mentor for an incoming first year student and begin their own process of mentoring.

<u>Hiring Diverse Staff and Faculty</u>. Numerous students highlighted the lack of diverse faculty and also noted the corresponding lack of support for the few faculty of color. One of the ways of addressing this was by creating ongoing faculty discussion groups that focus on these sorts of issues, but also includes collaboration on research, outreach into the community, and other pressing needs. Participation in these

discussion groups would assist faculty in gaining support while raising the awareness of other faculty not connected to issues about diversity.

Admissions. While many students challenged the use of standardized tests in admissions procedures, they also wanted to see more conversation about how the admissions process works.

Curriculum. The need for a diversity and ethnic studies requirement was expressed by most students. Some students dug in deeper and suggested that the University require courses that focus explicitly on an aspect of oppression, such as racism or sexism. The curriculum should reflect the student body and the local and state community, and this means ensuring that faculty have the background knowledge and awareness to do such a thing. This could be achieved through more faculty training, but also through the faculty discussion groups.

Need to Serve Local Populations. Students expressed an interest in serving as mentors to K-12 students interested in their field of study. Students could get academic credit for mentoring and a mentoring program could be expanded through the Pipeline project and other programs designed for outreach.

Preparation of Citizens

Students expressed the need to be educated about how to participate in the world once they graduate. This participation varied from being prepared in their professions to thinking critically about their own role as citizens in a democracy. It extended from wanting to learn about how to interact with other people, learning the histories of diverse populations, and understanding the nature of oppression to being prepared to work in their field and future employment. The connection between diversity, interdisciplinary work, and preparation for life as citizens and workers blended in these forums.

Students expressed concern that they did not know enough beyond theory to be of greatest benefit to their eventual clients. Students want to know that what they are studying will matter in their careers, and want to ensure that they can interact and work with all people. Students expressed the desire to learn about social justice so they would be in a place to address social inequality through their careers.

Critical Thinking. Many professional jobs require thinking on your feet, and students wanted greater preparation and practice with basic critical thinking skills. Such opportunities could also be used to increase awareness of alternative perspectives and people from different cultures. One related way of focusing on critical thinking skills appears possible through a well-developed ethnic studies requirement, which centers on teaching students to consider multiple perspectives and also focuses on the critical thinking needed to assess social equality. Students suggested that general education requirements could focus on critical thinking as the core component in preparing them for their majors.

Technology. Students expressed an interest in learning the most advanced technology, but also wanted to ensure that they were not leaving some populations behind or without access. The key here lies in learning how to bridge the digital divide while focusing on new technologies. The K-12 connection would work well here; students could work in community schools teaching K-12 students how to use new technologies, especially in schools with few resources. Another possibility would be to provide student mentoring for incoming students who have had less access to newer technologies.

Experiential Learning and Hands-on Experiences. Students mentioned the importance of connecting with experts in the field and getting practical experiences with some of the work they will be doing in the field. Ideas included connecting students with industrial and field experts who could serve as mentors (especially to minority students to help foster students through the pipeline). In specially designed

programs, the University could also create apprenticeship programs and provide academic credit for experiences and internships in the field. This also works to increase diversity by focusing on training students to interact with diverse clienteles, so that students can provide equitable services to all populations.

Campus Decision-making Processes. Students expressed keen interest in having more involvement with on-campus leadership and decision-making processes. Students serving in decision-making capacities for the University gain valuable experiences by seeing first hand how the University operates. This is key preparation for future faculty, administrators and policy makers. Student participation in decision making processes serves to ensure that students take an active role in the shaping of their education, and students expressed the empowering aspect of being involved. Students mentioned the expansion of the CHID class (Rethinking the University) to focus on one pressing University-wide issue per quarter. This course would ideally have an open enrollment, serving both undergraduate and graduate students. It could serve as a temporary task force on pressing issues, spending a quarter on a select topic, issuing status reports and ultimately, a decision on how the University should decide. The course could have guest speakers from the administration, faculty, students, and community members and could largely be student-run, with the exception of the coordinating faculty. Courses could also focus on social problems that students within the campus raise. For example, a course, or series of courses could be designed around global warming, or around sweatshop issues. These courses would necessarily be interdisciplinary, and could produce a working report, which offers suggestions for UW action.

Study Abroad. Students talked about the need to have experiences working with populations that they will interact with once they graduate. For many students that population is largely located within the state, although for some students this means creating national and international opportunities. Intercampus exchanges could work to expand opportunities within the state, as students could study at other universities with relative ease, and use the local resources that the University of Washington simply cannot provide. The UW could also strengthen community support and presence by creating research communities where there are community centers. Ideally, the University would become more spread throughout the state to ensure that students who wanted a state-wide experience could obtain it.

K-12 Connection. The need to actively work to ensure the K-12 system prepares all students equitably and adequately was expressed by students in almost every forum. Students wanted to participate in programs that place them in local K-12 schools to mentor and foster relationships with students (particularly minority students). While a number of such programs are currently being proposed and in the beginning stages, students expressed the desire to have the process be made as easy as possible. Essentially, students want to know which office to go to in order to be connected with a program that places them in schools. Academic credit and internships could provide support for students serving as mentors or in classroom support roles.

Summary

This document is not intended to be comprehensive of all ideas, strategies, or criticisms brought up during the student forums. For such in-depth analysis, readers should refer to the Conversation website (http://www.washington.edu/change/future/summaries.htm) and look at each school and college's summary notes. Rather, the attempt was to provide an overview and clarification of the major recurrent themes. Specific suggestions that did not appear to relate to the above themes were taken out, but should not be overlooked. Indeed, many of the suggestions are relatively easy to implement and yet could reinforce the focus on community. For example, students mentioned the need for more bike racks, for having students involved with the tenure review process, and for more opportunities for curricular reform. These ideas can all support the endeavor to create a more inclusive community. If such an attempt is to flourish, the ideas within the summary notes should be carefully analyzed.

Where we should go from here

The University should continue to converse about how to create a campus community. The very process of this conversation is an important community-building event. Focusing on answers to how to create a campus community without engaging the community in such a conversation, however, will limit the effectiveness of any proposed actions. The campus must come together in a community-centered way to address how best to foster community.

With that, however, the University should pursue the creation of social-problem and issue based research teams. A number of other methods would help to get at some of the themes raised by the students, but these social-problem-focused groups could comprehensively address most, if not all, of the issues raised. These collaborative teams could address particular social issues and create reports that addressed them. Courses could focus on aspects of these and students could get certificates in these areas of study. Students could also work on senior theses and have graduate student advisors on these projects. This creates numerous undergraduate research opportunities and extends the work currently done sporadically throughout departments.

Within any given social issue, the research teams could serve to research and work extensively on the historical context of the problems and provide subsequent education to the campus and community. Issues could have groups within the teams that focus on the local, national and global levels, while some could focus on how the University of Washington interacts with, contributes to, or addresses the problems. These teams could ultimately prepare reports and working papers to present to local, state, and national policy makers and help ensure that the University of Washington has a presence in public decision-making processes.

Conclusion

The Conversation About the Future was successful in identifying core themes that students feel must be addressed in order to attain their vision of the future. In order to proceed, the University must begin to critically analyze student ideas and move forward with significant student guidance paving the way towards the future.

Appendix A

College Student Forums
Participation Lists

College/School	Date	Number of Participants
College of Architecture and Urban Planning	May 16	20
College of Arts & Sciences, Arts & Humanities	March 3	4
College of Arts & Sciences, Natural Sciences	May 3	6
College of Arts & Sciences, Social Sciences (2 parts)	April 5 & May 4	14
School of Business	May 10	70
School of Dentistry	May 2	7
College of Engineering	March 6	15
College of Education	January 12	56
College of Forestry	March 10	14
College of Library and Information Sciences	Fall 2000	N/A
School of Law	March 27	28
School of Nursing	February 9	19
School of Medicine	May 8	28
College of Ocean & Fishery Science	June 1	22
School of Pharmacy	April 21	19
Evans School of Public Affairs	February 22	12
School of Public Health	April 7	12
School of Social Work	March 1	68
University of Washington Bothell	January 25	21
University of Washington Tacoma	February 1	18
Total		**453**