

Leveraging Excellence

By Lee T. Todd Jr.



A few years ago, I was engaged in a conversation at a national conference with the president of one of

America's premier research universities and an executive from a Fortune 100 company. The executive remarked that his company did not invest much in university-based research because it was inefficient and lacked accountability.

My presidential colleague spent the next five minutes citing statistics common to higher education, such as retention rates, research expenditures, and faculty citations.

As I watched the interaction, I noticed that, despite having a cordial discussion, they were not communicating effectively. Then it struck me: Higher education does not speak the same language as our stakeholders.

College and university administrators and faculty like to talk about things that are important to our operations but those messages often ring hollow to those outside the higher education world. Business leaders might be interested in six-year graduation rates and student-faculty ratios, but what they really want to know is how they can improve their operational efficiency, increase revenue, identify and recruit qualified workers, and

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continue to compete in an increasingly global marketplace.

At the University of Kentucky (UK), I have placed a premium on reaching out and adding value to organizations—both public and private—that call the Commonwealth of Kentucky home. Kentucky, my native state, has traditionally lured good-paying manufacturing jobs through a combination of cheap land, cheap labor, and tax incentives. But as soon as cheaper land and cheaper labor comes along, many of those companies—from Appalachian call centers to “cut and sew” manufacturing jobs—make the bottom-line economic decision to move out of the state.

I believe universities, particularly research universities, need to partner with regional corporations to provide innovative solutions to business problems. For instance, UK's Painting Technology Consortium is working with Toyota to improve its painting process. The university is also working to make sure industries that are born and bred in Kentucky can stay economically viable in the global economy. Our College of Agriculture launched an equine initiative to ensure that Central Kentucky remains an equine business cluster. The equine initiative helped us create a dialogue with leading members of the horse industry to find out how we could add value to their operations. And those conversations helped us form a new undergraduate major in equine science and management, which involves hands-on education in all aspects of the equine industry. That initiative will help Kentucky remain the “Horse Capital of the World.”

Communicating Our Value

Messages about outreach and partnership hit home with Kentucky's elected officials—a nuance that academia often misses. Legislators often hear about billion-dollar capital campaigns and billion-dollar endowments and scratch their heads as to why public universities keep asking for additional dollars.

I believe it is incumbent on us to show our value. We should no longer bemoan the fact that, as we see it, policy makers “just don't get it.” They get it better than we are willing to admit. They ask only for information on what limited tax and tuition dollars are buying. How we respond says a lot about our commitment to disclosure and our willingness to do what is necessary to provide comfort to those who fund us. We may be perfectly valid in our protestations that accountability is a complicated task when it involves higher education. But we must temper our anxieties with the acknowledgement of our responsibility to make clear how well—or poorly—we are doing the people's business.

In 1997, the Kentucky General Assembly mandated that the University of Kentucky become a top 20 public research university by 2020. One of the challenges we faced from the very beginning was that we were given a destination without a roadmap for getting there. All we had to go on was the statutory language: “a major comprehensive research institution ranked nationally in the top 20 public universities.” It was up to us to fill in the details.

In 2004, we began developing a “Top 20 Business Plan” for

achieving the mandate. Over the course of 18 months, UK engaged in a transparent and specific conversation with the people of Kentucky and their elected leadership about our value to the state we serve. We talked in blunt and honest terms about the benefits of investing in our institution and the resources it will take to achieve our goals.

We also have been willing to attach specific measures of accountability to the resources

we are seeking. First, we have set specific goals for enrollment, degree production, research, and several other measures of our worth that we insist on achieving by 2020. Second, we are talking about the ways in which we make a difference in the lives of people who may never set foot on our campus. When I became UK's president in 2001, I said that if we build a top 20 university but the people of Kentucky do not lead better lives, we will have

failed. We are making a difference and we ought to be able to demonstrate it.

Higher education leaders have a responsibility to talk about what we do and why we do it. And we have an even greater responsibility to the future economic success of our states and our country to make the case for strong universities as the surest pathway to success in a knowledge age. ■

Honoring Collaboration and Innovation

The National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education (NCCI) recently honored the Committee on Institutional Cooperation and the World Universities Network for their innovative projects. NCCI, a widely recognized educational association for professionals leading progressive improvement within their institutions, created this award program to honor institutions and organizations that have created innovative planning and decision-making processes, and have leveraged their best practices in order to help other colleges and universities become more efficient and improve their operational excellence.

Called the Leveraging Excellence Award Program and funded by the Follett Higher Education Group, this program recognizes a new trend in higher education. It acknowledges higher education efforts that resonate with business leaders, legislators, and donors—efforts that can be taken from institutions' campus communities and duplicated elsewhere to help businesses improve their operations.

One of this year's award winners, Brigham Young University (BYU), was selected for its capital needs analysis project, a program that first began at BYU's Provo campus. BYU used the project to consolidate various capital needs functions in an integrated and innovative way. After working out a few of the kinks on the main campus, the project was expanded to include BYU's Hawaii and Idaho campuses. It also expanded into the Latter-day Saints Church Education System and Business

College. Within five years, the capital needs analysis project was adopted by the entire Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where it manages more than 10,000 of the Church's buildings.

"The ability to duplicate institutions' efforts and add value to other organizations—both inside and outside academia—is precisely what the Leveraging Excellence Award is all about," says Lee Todd, president of the University of Kentucky and chair of the award judging panel. "These are the types of innovate approaches to common business problems that will resonate with a variety of organizations. Such relationships play an increasingly significant role in higher education today, as colleges and universities strive to build collaborative partnerships that add value to the various publics that it serves." ■

The 2008 Leveraging Excellence awardees will be speakers at NCCI's annual conference on July 10–12 in Chicago. This year's program recognized six organizations: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation and Brigham Young University both won a Leveraging Excellence Award. Worldwide Universities Network; Five Colleges, Incorporated; the Tennessee Board of Regents; and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis received honorable mentions. For more information on NCCI's Leveraging Excellence Award Program and annual conference, visit www.ncci-cu.org.

The Power of Collaboration

By John D. Wiley



Myth busting is a big and, frankly, enjoyable part of my job. One of the misconceptions people often lay at my

doorstep goes like this: Universities are dusty, tradition-bound institutions resistant to change and slow to innovate.

The evidence is compelling that universities are mastering the change required by the challenges of the 21st century and learning to leverage creative partnerships that improve classroom learning, promote academic collaboration, and stimulate world-class research.

My myth-busting duties are made considerably easier because the University of Wisconsin-Madison is part of a pair of leading strategic alliances—the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) and the World Universities Network (WUN). Both have provided unparalleled efficiencies and have unlocked new academic possibilities for our students and faculty.

These are not empty partnerships. They are lively, creative alliances designed to employ the power of their member institutions to cut costs, deliver classes more effectively, and leverage research through international networks. They provide avenues enabling us to broker broad-based institutional change and adapt to the economic, educational, and political realities we face on a daily basis. They give us the tools to become more effective educators and promote innovation across our campuses by allowing us to share our strengths.

As University of Kentucky President Lee T. Todd Jr. notes in

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his article, we need to nurture these productive partnerships to add value for our stakeholders and demonstrate that we are responsible stewards of our resources. The value that CIC and WUN deliver locally and globally was recognized earlier this year by the National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education (NCCI). (For more information NCCI and its Leveraging Excellence Award Program, see the “Honoring Collaboration and Innovation” sidebar on the previous page.)

CIC, a consortium of Big Ten conference universities and the University of Chicago, has been forging energetic collaborations for 40 years—the fruits of which are evident in the classroom and on the bottom line.

One powerful example is the way CIC institutions have joined forces in language instruction. The typical member institution offers 35 to 60 different languages, and the demand for language instruction often fluctuates depending on world affairs. But it is impractical for institutions to instantly double their staffs or add language programs, at considerable cost, to accommodate these trends. Together, CIC universities provide distance learning in a number of lesser-taught languages, which enables students interested in learning these languages to share in the power of innovation.

The partnership also benefits the ledger. A cooperative purchasing program instituted by the consortium has yielded \$16.9 million in total savings on purchases totaling \$158.6 million—close to a 10 percent savings over what individual universities might have paid.

And UW-Madison has benefited from other partnerships as well. For example, WUN has been a valued

partner in UW-Madison’s effort to accelerate internationalization. The network, an international alliance of leading higher education institutions, encourages academic collaboration and promotes research, outreach, and technology transfer.

The work of WUN has supported more than 70 projects involving more than 3,000 people across four continents. Its work has opened the door for members to secure more than \$40 million in funding. It has also supported more than 600 exchange awards that help support international research that expands research opportunities for graduate students.

It is a network that encourages our students and faculty to think bigger, broader, and more globally. It also helps build stronger research coalitions that yield more important discoveries that enliven all of our local economies.

As an institution, we take pride at UW-Madison in being inventive, resourceful, and farsighted as we adapt to the speed of change in both society and higher education. But we are also proud that we have found avenues to combine our strengths with those of other universities, regionally and globally, to enrich our students, strengthen our faculty, and serve our citizens. When it comes to shattering some of the wrong-headed notions about universities’ hidebound habits, partnerships such as CIC and WUN are indispensable in demonstrating the power of collaboration and the benefits of innovative thinking. ■

CIC (www.cic.net) and WUN (www.wun.ac.uk) will present sessions on this issue at NCCI’s Annual Conference July 10–12 in Chicago. For more information, visit www.ncci-cu.org.