



EQUITY & REASONABLE COSTS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

CONVENING SUMMARY

JULY 21 & 22, 2015
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher education financing is receiving historic levels of attention. Parents and students gather around kitchen tables struggling to put together the funds to pay the high price of college. State policymakers debate the value of higher education and appropriate levels of taxpayer investment. The federal government grapples with rising numbers of Pell Grant recipients and an expanding volume of student debt. Many question whether today's system of higher education financing could be more affordable, cost-effective, and efficient.

These critical conversations typically focus on the total amount of funding for higher education rather than how funds are allocated. But colleges and universities serving different populations and abiding by different missions vary in the resources they require to carry out their duties. Similarly, within an institution there is a great deal of heterogeneity across programs and departments when it comes to resource demands. Addressing concerns of affordability, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency will therefore require new and careful attention to not only how much is spent on higher education but also *how funds for higher education are distributed*.

In K-12 education, such considerations often arise in discussions about school finance equity and adequacy. How might these concepts translate to the postsecondary level? How can equity and reasonable costs of educating students at the college level be conceived and measured? How might state and federal policymakers, systems of public higher education, and individual institutions utilize this information to guide decision-making?

These provocative questions were the focus of a two-day workshop convened by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab in July of 2015. Twenty-one national experts from a diverse set of backgrounds and sectors came together to examine the current evidence, debate ideas, and develop strategies for advancing a conversation about this new approach to higher education finance. Some shared their experiences with the institutional and political challenges to pursuing "equity" in funding. Others described current public funding models and research on estimating the true costs of an adequate postsecondary education. Experts from the K-12 sector shared work on historical funding trends and efforts in that field to measure resources and school performance.

Through a wide-ranging and candid discussion, the group coalesced around ideas that will shape the Wisconsin HOPE Lab's research agenda to frame and inform a public discussion that rethinks higher education finance by drawing attention to equity and reasonable costs. The following four key objectives and insights emerged:

1. Those involved in decisions about higher education finance would benefit from a clearer understanding of the costs of adequately funding different student populations. While we know that educating underserved students requires greater resources, we do not know the amount of that differential in higher education. Improved understanding of the true costs of providing

adequate educational experiences—and defining “adequacy” itself—will help better identify inequities and inefficiencies in existing funding structures.

2. Current reports on total state allocations to colleges and universities provide insufficient information with which to assess the distribution of resources to different types of institutions. Appropriations and budget cuts do not affect every college or university in the same way, and better metrics are needed to assess differential inputs and impacts.
3. The mechanisms for remedying funding disparities in higher education are unclear and must be explicated.
4. New research is required to better understand the public returns to investments in postsecondary education. Stated benefits from higher education funding are often vague or value-based, rather than elucidating tangible benefits in areas like public health, civic engagement, and reliance on the social safety net.

PARTICIPANTS

- **Nino Amato**, Chair of the Board, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- **Debbie Cochrane**, Research Director, The Institute for College Access and Success
- **Alicia Dowd**, Associate Professor, University of Southern California
- **Alisa Hicklin Fryar**, Associate Professor, University of Oklahoma
- **Richard George**, CEO, Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation
- **Sara Goldrick-Rab**, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- **Nicholas Hillman**, Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- **Derek Houston**, Doctoral Candidate, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- **Tiffany Jones**, Program Director, Southern Education Foundation
- **Richard Kahlenberg**, Senior Fellow, The Century Foundation
- **Amy Kerwin**, Vice President, Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation
- **Tammy Kolbe**, Assistant Professor, University of Vermont
- **Andrew Nichols**, Director of Higher Education Research & Data Analytics, Education Trust
- **Noel Radomski**, Director, WISCAPE
- **Jed Richardson**, Managing Director, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- **Bob Samuels**, President, University Council-American Federation of Teachers
- **Katherine Sydor**, Senior Policy Advisor, U.S. Department of Education
- **David Tandberg**, Assistant Professor, Florida State University
- **Julie Underwood**, Dean, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education
- **Thomas Weko**, Managing Researcher, American Institutes for Research
- **Kevin Welner**, Professor, University of Colorado; National Education Policy Center

WHAT DO THE TERMS “EQUITY” AND “REASONABLE COSTS” MEAN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

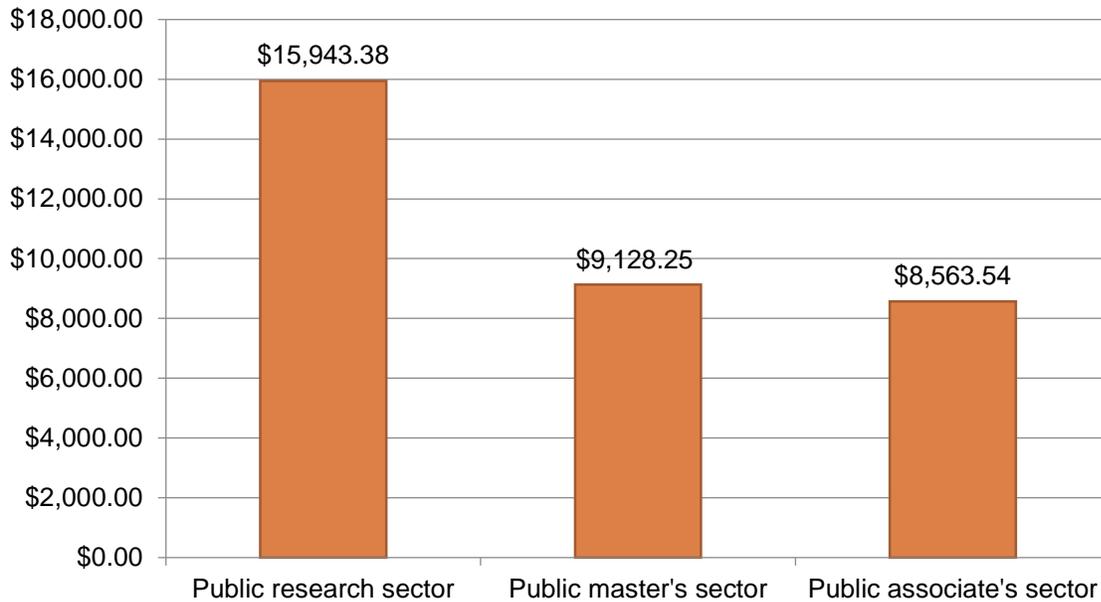
In the opening session of the workshop, University of Wisconsin-Madison professors Sara Goldrick-Rab and Nicholas Hillman set the stage for the discussion. They argued that the public is demonstrating unprecedented concern about college affordability and there are broad questions being raised about access and completion disparities in higher education. State appropriations for public colleges are dwindling, yet many university systems rely on legacy formulas for determining the distributions of these scarce resources. There is little discussion, however, of whether students receive equitable opportunities to learn within publicly funded systems, or whether sufficient resources are allocated to ensure that they receive a quality education and support to complete degrees.

Participants explored possible definitions of equity. The discussion highlighted several disparate views informed by participants’ perspectives on societal inequity and the goals of institutions of higher education. Equity along any dimension is difficult to assess because institutions enroll different populations, have disparate missions, and offer different programs. Tammy Kolbe of the University of Vermont engaged the group with two questions to frame the conversation:

1. What are the critical funding goals and how do current funding systems align with those goals?
2. What do we hope to see distributed more equally? Financial inputs? Educational resources? Opportunities? Outcomes?

Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation described equity by discussing how open and broad-access institutions often receive the least funding per student. He argued that disparate education funding shortchanges community colleges (see Figure 1). Despite accepting students who are less college-ready and have higher barriers to completion, these institutions are expected to make do with less, while research universities enjoy substantially higher subsidies. Debbie Cochrane, of the Institute for College Access and Success, asked: “Why are the most poorly funded schools being asked to perform the most Herculean tasks of the entire higher education community?”

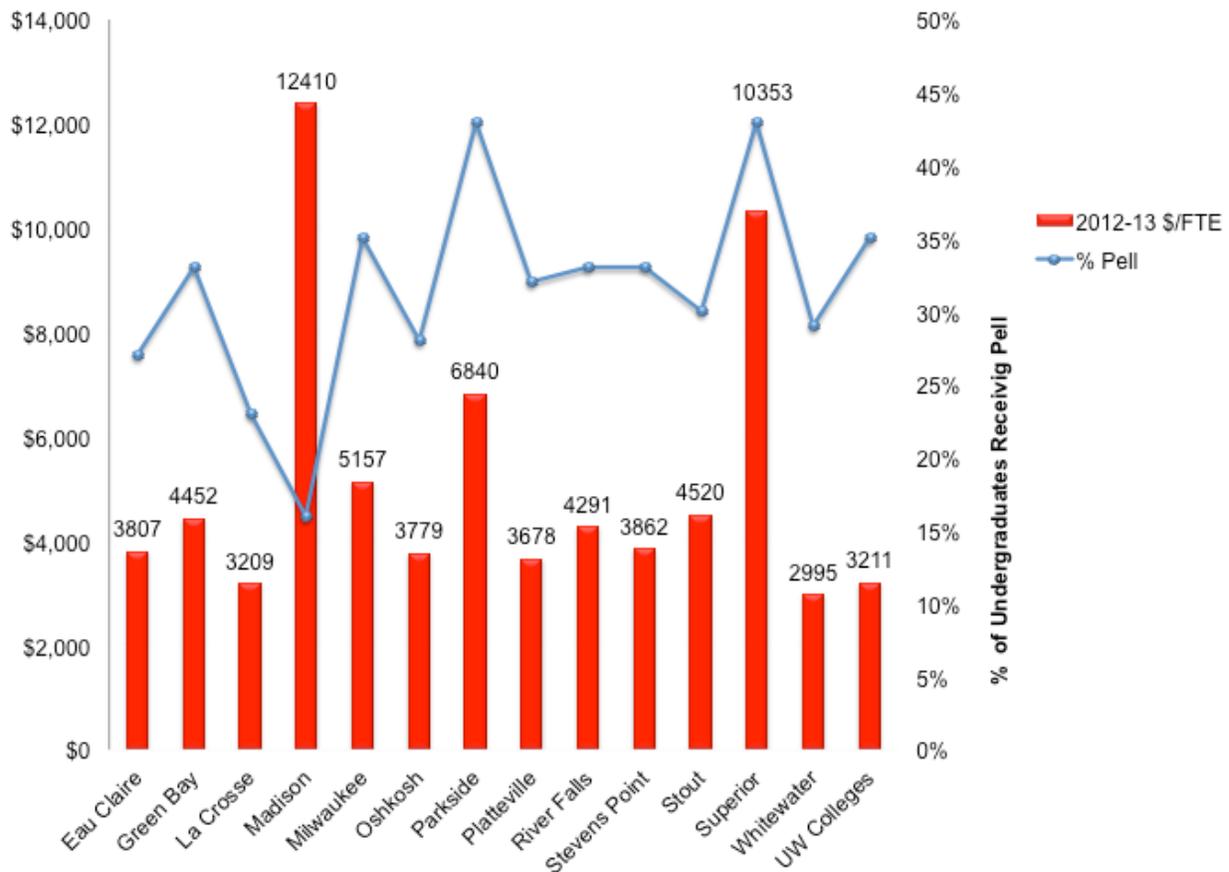
Figure 1. Revenues per Full-Time Equivalent Student (in 2012 dollars)



To further illustrate the point, the group discussed the state funding differences between two institutions in the University of Wisconsin System: UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee. UW-Madison is a selective, research university serving students who are well prepared for college, and it enrolls a relatively small percentage of low-income students and students of color. In contrast, UW-Milwaukee serves a hybrid research-access mission in the urban core of Milwaukee. It is large, like UW-Madison, but its student body is less prepared for college and is markedly more racially and economically diverse. Yet as Figure 2 shows, on a per-student basis, UW-Milwaukee’s state appropriation is less than half that of UW-Madison. Is that inequitable? Does it mean that either school has adequate resources to educate its students?

The group concluded that it is difficult to know, since there is little available information regarding each institution’s actual costs of providing adequate educational experiences to their unique student populations. The state would need this information if it wanted to assess whether the distribution of state appropriations was cost-effective.

Figure 2. State Support per Full-Time Equivalent Student (Undergrad & Grad) and Percent of Undergraduates Receiving Pell Grants, by UW System Institution



Participants also discussed why there is little information regarding the actual costs of educating students in higher education, much less how costs differ according to which students are being educated and where they are taught. Information about higher education finance tends to focus on expenditures, using accounting data, rather than resource costs, i.e. what packages of resources come together to produce outcomes and the costs of those resources. This is not how institutions create accounts of revenues and expenditures, nor is it how IPEDS, the major national data source, collects financial data from these institutions. It is unclear how resource cost data would be collected and what it would cost, nor how it could be integrated into institutional data systems. Due to insufficient accounting regarding the actual costs of educating students, it is hard to judge if states are providing enough money for institutions to create meaningful learning environments and opportunities. Is \$3,000 to \$4,000 of funding per FTE (as in Wisconsin at many institutions) enough? For which students? At what level of undergraduate education? In which programs?

The lack of accessible data on resource costs necessary to provide adequate educational experiences or institution-level state appropriations points to clear next steps. Thomas Weko, of the American Institutes for Research, summarized the research needed on true costs:

What is that learning experience? How does it vary across student populations? At the end of that, you have to be able to roll that up into coefficients that legislatures can use as inputs to a funding model.

In addition, the public must have accessible reports describing institutional funding levels within their systems, how those funding levels have changed over time, and how funding levels will be impacted by proposed changes in state appropriations to higher education.

Even in the absence of this information, some states have explicitly taken steps to address equity in their appropriation formulae, particularly in performance-based funding models. A few of these models attribute higher weights to disadvantaged students but, as Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation noted, the weights are not systematically or empirically derived. Tennessee's performance-based measure, for instance, assigns higher weights to success with disadvantaged populations to its institutions whose mission is to provide access to all students. Participants expressed concern that this system has deepened funding differences between Tennessee's selective and access institutions. Andrew Nichols of the Education Trust explained this result by pointing to the funding disparities that predated Tennessee's performance-based model:

The problem is that many performance-based funding systems are stacked on top of existing funding structures that are inequitable and inadequate.

It can be difficult to usefully compare how states are allocating appropriations across different types of institutions. Reports usually focus on trends over time in state appropriations for higher education, aggregated at the state level across all public institutions. These are useful and help to highlight variation across states. But they do not tell us much about how students or institutions are affected, since they do not reveal how appropriations are distributed. We cannot tell, for example, whether declines in state appropriations in a given state mean that a flagship university's budget or a community college's budget is diminished. In order to better understand how resources matter for outcomes, policymakers and practitioners need more consistently detailed reporting.

In conversation, the group discussed several reasons why states, colleges and universities, and the public may neglect equity concerns. Facing dwindling public subsidies, higher education advocates are preoccupied with protecting and growing the overall level of public funding. Under this scenario, it may be less productive to talk about distributions within states. Alicia Dowd, of the University of Southern California, worried that competition for limited resources will continue to prevent lower-funded institutions from receiving larger shares. In addition, states face competing

pressures, including a desire for “excellence” that may lead to greater investments in flagship universities in order to raise the profile of or justify their entire public higher education system. In this case, the overall funding available for higher education may depend on an inequitable distribution of appropriations that favors the flagship. Moreover, politics plays a key role in ensuring that legacy appropriations formulae remain largely unchanged. Redistribution to a more equitable system would inevitably create both winners and losers, creating politically difficult tensions that are more easily avoided. David Tandberg, Professor at Florida State University, offered that some neglect equity concerns and accept legacy funding inequities because they are reluctant to expose complex cross-subsidies at work in higher education. This is especially true at research universities due to suspicion that the public would be unwilling to pay for research if they knew its true cost and how it is funded. Bob Samuels, of the University Council-AFT, wondered whether equity, particularly of opportunity and outcomes, can be achieved in postsecondary education given current inequalities in income, health care, and other resources.

How far might a state go to achieve equitable outcomes, and to what end? Andrew Nichols of the Education Trust asked the group if they would be comfortable with less state resources going to public flagship universities (perhaps in exchange for more freedom to raise tuition) if it meant more money was allocated to access institutions. While a few members of the group thought that this might be an attractive model, all noted that it might have serious limitations, particularly in that it could create what Nino Amato of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab termed “academic apartheid.”

Richard George of Great Lakes pointed to a shift in perception of who benefits from higher education. In the past, the public perceived college as conferring a public benefit in the form of a more educated, economically viable citizenry. This viewpoint justified large public subsidies for higher education, which helped keep prices lower. Over the past thirty years, however, that perception has shifted. Now, people view college as conferring primarily a private benefit. Since the benefit accrues to individuals, it appears (to some) more appropriate to make individuals primarily responsible for paying the price. Increasing public subsidies in order to lower the price facing individuals will require shifting the public conversation to the public benefits of higher education, especially in terms of health, crime, and an engaged citizenry.

LESSONS FROM K-12: IS “ADEQUACY” ADEQUATE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION?

The workshop’s second session focused on aspects of the K-12 finance experience that might inform thinking in higher education finance. While adequacy and equity have not received much attention on the postsecondary level, they are central to conversations and policy in K-12. One reason for this is that both federal and state policy have enshrined public K-12 education as a right while the traditional view of higher education is that it is a privilege based on merit. In K-12, policy attempts to bind schools with financial support so that external inequities do not impact the system. There is no institutional parallel in higher education funding, although for individual students financial aid provides somewhat more equal opportunities.

Kevin Welner, of the University of Colorado, discussed potential lessons from K-12, especially regarding “adequacy” standards for serving at-risk students. Welner chafes at the use of “adequacy” as a potential standard. He argued that focusing on adequacy, the intent of K-12 accountability systems legislated by No Child Left Behind and postsecondary performance-based funding systems, might lead to lower standards. Moreover, focusing on outcomes has led to issues with gaming the system, including teachers who feel pressured to artificially inflate their students’ standardized test scores. Welner also highlighted the issue of “whack-a-mole inequality,” where fixing one way that advantaged people can exercise that advantage simply results in those people seeking out another approach. K-12 attempts at creating more funding equity, including No Child Left Behind and federal Title I funding for schools with disadvantaged populations, has consistently shown that societal problems have to be addressed outside the school as well as in to be effective, Welner argued. Conversely, Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation contended that focusing on adequacy in K-12 education policy has helped the sector change focus to outcomes instead of equal inputs, which has helped show that disadvantaged students need more resources to succeed.

K-12 research on ability tracking also can be instructive for adequacy-based conversations in higher education. K-12 tracking systems provide different educational experiences within the same school to students of different perceived ability. Proponents argue that tracking allows educators to better match curriculum to students’ skills, which improves outcomes for all students. Opponents worry that tracking widens both educational and societal inequities by providing enhanced opportunities mainly to students from high resource backgrounds. Kevin Welner of the University of Colorado argued that in K-12 and postsecondary, Americans have embraced a utilitarian/vocational frame for education. He highlighted the growing trend in tracking in high school with a renewed emphasis on “high tech highs” and career technical education. This reflects growing pressures in higher education to increase science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. Sara Goldrick-Rab of the University of Wisconsin-Madison pointed out that higher education has a great deal of tracking, but it is across, not within schools. On the postsecondary level tracking is presented as choice, with different student populations being

diverted to different types of institutions. Well-prepared, and often high resource, students are encouraged to attend costly flagship universities and private institutions while less-prepared, often lower-resourced, students are directed toward regional and community colleges. Higher education has “removed the necessity to educate heterogeneous populations together,” she stated. Andrew Nichols of the Education Trust concurred, stating that even if we “took affordability off the table,” equity concerns would persist if people of color and low-income students were diverted to community colleges and regional universities due to admission standards.

Participants discussed how choice and the “meritocracy” of higher education alters outcomes and public perception of the financing system. Kevin Welner of the University of Colorado pointed out that Americans have traditionally believed in equality of opportunity, not equality of outcomes, which implies that outcomes are eventually determined by a meritocracy. Katherine Sydor of the U.S. Department of Education noted that after students leave the K-12 system, there is no longer policy or funding to provide equal opportunity. This seemingly meritocratic system reinforces existing inequities according to David Tandberg. Tammy Kolbe of the University of Vermont wondered if free community college policies, such as those recently passed in Oregon and Tennessee and proposed at the federal level through America’s College Promise, might lead to an expansion to K-14 of current policy to provide adequate public education. Equity and adequacy could come at a price, however. Kevin Welner worried that expanding the current K-12 system into the first two years of college might also constitute a “deal with the devil” if it came with the introduction of accountability policies, which have produced mixed results in K-12.

REVIEW OF CURRENT FRAMEWORKS

The workshop then moved to a discussion of specific funding frameworks currently used in higher education and an assessment of how big picture visions of equity and adequacy are actuated in policy. Three speakers described their experiences and research in California.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Bob Samuels of the University Council-AFT shared his efforts to audit the University of California’s finances and push for greater funding equity across campuses. A state audit revealed that campuses receiving the lowest level of per student funding were also the campuses with the highest number of underrepresented minority students and Pell grant students. Samuels advocated for a revenue sharing bill to shift some funding to lower-funded campuses, but he confessed that ultimately his efforts led to deeper inequities. California’s premier public universities, UC-Berkeley and UCLA, responded to enforced revenue sharing— aimed at improving equity— by increasing enrollment of out-of-state and international students, who pay much higher tuition than in-state students. Due to UC-Berkeley’s and UCLA’s response, which

was unanticipated by those seeking to improve equity with California, opportunities for in-state students were diminished and differences in resources grew.

David Tandberg asked if these inequitable decisions were the result of state governments failing to adequately fund systems, with flagships having more tools at their disposal to garner revenue. Alisa Hicklin Fryar of the University of Oklahoma said that flagships use these cuts as a reason to raise tuition even higher and are, on net, making more money. Tammy Kolbe of the university of Vermont combined these two notions, explaining, “The pie can be both shrinking and divided poorly.” Tiffany Jones, of the Southern Education Foundation, amplified Kolbe’s observation by positing that in some cases inequity is not just the result of more influential colleges within systems taking advantage of their prestige, but can also be the result of system design. In Florida, for example, the performance-based system is designed to have a “bottom three.” In this case, institutions that serve disadvantaged students are intentionally punished for lagging in state metrics.

Looking toward solutions, Katherine Sydor of the U.S. Department of Education remarked that researchers and advocates must continue to communicate to federal higher education officials that states are disinvesting from higher education and that that disinvestment is potentially broadening existing inequities. One obstacle to raising awareness is the lack of existing data regarding institutional equity and adequacy. Sydor asked other participants to describe a potential annual report that could reflect these equity concerns to the public, the media, and policymakers. David Tandberg of Florida State University said that a good start would be institutional- and programmatic-level data rather than the statewide data that is currently available. Thomas Weko of the American Institutes for Research called for adequacy benchmarks that would inform as to whether public systems, institutions, and programs are spending enough to provide the outcomes demanded by performance-based systems.

INTERCULTURAL EFFORT

Alicia Dowd of the University of Southern California presented research on intercultural effort in higher education. She took issue with studies stating that black students had lower preferences for entering higher education using a model of college decision-making that only includes money, time, and effort. Instead, she added “intercultural effort” to underscore the added barriers and discrimination faced by students of color in higher education. An example of the additional intercultural effort required of students of color is that many do not enroll in high-demand STEM classes for fear of being racially stigmatized, despite STEM aspirations being equivalent between students of color and white students. Moreover, students of color are often relegated to less attractive programs within campuses, which further stratifies existing achievement gaps. Developmental education is often assigned to graduate assistants or part-time adjuncts. Institutions with non-selective admission standards often include particular schools or programs with much higher admission requirements that make them inaccessible to disadvantaged students. A failure to address the disparities in these efforts will lead to more inequity.

REAL COSTS

Debbie Cochrane of the Institute for College Access and Success presented on the Real Cost Project, an effort to determine the real cost of providing a community college education in California. The real cost calculated by the project was nearly double actual funding per student in California's community colleges. This raises a question - despite this significant underfunding, how are community colleges accomplishing some of their goals? Real cost calculations can be useful starting points for funding conversations, but how do institutions justify requests for state allocation when they have been moderately successful with far less?

Kevin Welner of the University of Colorado shared that real costs estimates from K-12 are often too shocking to decision makers to be of any use, as they would require significant increases in state revenue & expenditures. Bob Samuels of the University Council-AFT suggested that policy thinkers shouldn't get caught "bargaining against ourselves in austerity thinking," and need to put out a positive vision of what's needed and then find a path to get there. Alicia Dowd of the University of Southern California suggested developing snapshots of quality standards for various types of programs to determine appropriate costs. This could permit scholars and decision-makers to see who on campus is overspending and who actually needs additional revenues to support students.

EQUITY & REASONABLE COSTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

Next, attendees took a close look at one case, the University of Wisconsin System, to examine its internal allocations to its institutions. The University of Wisconsin System includes 26 campuses, including 13 two-year campuses, 11 regional comprehensive universities, and 2 research universities. The System commissioned a report to determine the possibility of changing its long-standing legacy formula for allocating state expenditures.

What was the purpose of the document? Thomas Weko of the American Institutes for Research posited, "This is a conflict avoidance document," and suggested that as many systems do, UW System was attempting to avoid causing further dissension over disproportionate allocations to UW-Madison, the "flagship" institution. Andrew Nichols of the Education Trust was reminded of a similar conversation in Maryland:

We couldn't agree on anything except that no one should get cut...everyone was willing to talk about why it's unfair to their institution, but won't propose how to change the allocations of others.

Political pressures, particularly those within the system itself, are instrumental in preserving current funding structures. Participants noted that the System struggles with change, and there are consequences for efforts to create change. Some campuses receive more funds because of the success of their local legislators, while others fall behind.

Could greater equity be created in UW System, and if so, how? Eliminating differences between the flagship and other system schools could necessitate tradeoffs for System funding overall, and might hamper the research mission of some institutions. While some contend that inclusion in a system constrains advocacy opportunities for individual schools, attachment creates other benefits. Tiffany Jones of the Southern Education Foundation noted that state allocations may not be a big enough pot of money to significantly impact flagship institutions, whereas additional state funds could be “a game changer” for other institutions with lower resources. Should, therefore, the flagship receive fewer funds? One concern is a potential tradeoff between equity and the mission of elite research universities. David Tandberg of Florida State University asked the group: if we were to redistribute funding allocations to be more equitable, could a flagship institution continue to operate in the same way? “We’ve built our elite research universities on the back of an inequitable system,” he said. Debbie Cochrane of the Institute for College Access and Success shared this concern:

Under a system of equitable funding would we render obsolete the mission of elite public research universities? And should we do so?

Kevin Welner of the University of Colorado insisted that public research universities are critically important to maintain for the impacts their research has on their states and the world.

At the same time, flagship institutions also have greater external funding opportunities. Similar to UC-Berkeley and UCLA in the University of California system, UW-Madison has an additional policy lever to pull, in that it can enroll higher levels of out-of-state students and gain additional revenues. This policy lever increases revenue and enables research, but further erodes affordability for Wisconsin students. There is some indication policymakers in Wisconsin have noted this inequity, pointed out Noel Radomski of WISCAPE. In the most recent state budget, the state legislature restored part of a budget cut and required that institutions most impacted by cuts should receive the funds. Yet, UW-Madison received a large portion of the restored funds, despite being far less impacted than other institutions.

How might a state increase equity without sacrificing its elite institutions’ research missions? Sara Goldrick-Rab of the University of Wisconsin-Madison pointed to the 2011 proposal from the UW-Madison Chancellor Biddy Martin to accept a large reduction in state funding in return for governing itself separate from the rest of the UW System. This raises, she noted, an interesting question. In order to increase investments in a place like Milwaukee, could Wisconsin decide to allow an institution like UW-Madison with the capacity to generate more tuition revenue, to gradually turn to private funds and receive less state support, if that money were reallocated to

the needy institution? What would be the consequences? Derek Houston of the University of Illinois noted that reducing access to flagships could harm social mobility for key groups.

Again and again, participants underlined the need for additional research to inform funding decisions with rigorous estimates of true costs of a college education. Currently, there is not enough information to make apples-to-apples comparisons of institutions, both in terms of funding needs and in terms of outcomes produced. Noel Radomski of WISCAPE discussed his initiative to start a “Blue Ribbon Commission” on Wisconsin’s higher education system, to provide a comprehensive look at the state’s colleges, program array, funding, and other factors. Research often has less of an impact on legislation than it does in court cases, said Nicholas Hillman of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Thomas Weko of the American Institutes for Research pointed out that in higher education, unlike K-12, the only history of litigation on resource disparities has arisen from state systems of higher education with *de jure* segregation. Tiffany Jones of the Southern Education Foundation emphasized legal rulings requiring additional funding for institutions have sometimes resulted in inadequate relief. This underscores the need for additional research to prove inequities in the cost versus expenditure per student and to provide better estimates of sufficient funding.

NEXT STEPS

After two days of discussions, attendees developed four suggestions of how researchers and policymakers can enhance consideration of equity and reasonable costs.

1. The field would benefit from a clearer understanding of the costs of adequately funding different student populations. While we know that educating underserved students requires greater resources, we do not know the amount of that differential in higher education. Improved understanding of the true costs of providing adequate educational experiences—and defining “adequacy” itself—will help better identify inequities and inefficiencies in existing funding structures.
2. Current reports on total state allocations to colleges and universities provide insufficient information with which to assess the distribution of resources to different types of institutions. Appropriations and budget cuts do not affect every college or university in the same way, and better metrics are needed to assess differential inputs and impacts.
3. The mechanisms for remedying funding disparities in higher education are unclear and must be explicated.
4. Research is needed to better understand the public returns to investments in postsecondary education. Stated benefits from higher education funding are often vague or value-based, rather than elucidating tangible benefits in areas like public health, civic engagement, and reliance on the social safety net.



THE WISCONSIN HOPE LAB

Participation in Wisconsin postsecondary education is growing but students from low-income households, students of color, and students who are the first in their families to attend college are still being left behind. Ensuring that these students fulfill their potential requires finding new and effective ways to level the playing field, minimizing barriers to college completion by identifying replicable and sustainable interventions.

The Wisconsin HOPE Lab is the nation's first laboratory for translational research aimed at improving equitable outcomes in postsecondary education. The Lab will help to make findings from basic science useful for practical applications that enhance college attainment and human well-being throughout the state, and in turn, the nation.

Our goal is to help policymakers and practitioners (a) accurately state the costs of attending college, (b) ensure that families and students understand these costs, and (c) find effective ways to cover these costs that enhance degree completion rates as well as the personal and societal benefits of postsecondary education.

Core funding for the Wisconsin HOPE Lab is provided by the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation.

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