

Concerns raised over Cross' proposal to reshape UW System

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Some members of the UW System's shared governance communities throughout the state expressed concern over President Ray Cross' blueprint to specialize campuses and consolidate certain administrative functions.

In a series of virtual campus listening sessions last week, Cross and regents met with student, faculty and staff representatives for all four-year campuses to answer questions on the post-COVID-19 proposal.

One section of the blueprint suggests the UW System now needs to transition from a "convener/collaborator/coordinator" with campuses to a "director and manager" in order to make the necessary financial changes in time.

"In effect, this listening session has the purpose of receiving shared governance feedback on the proposal to ignore shared governance feedback," said Eric Sandgren, associate professor of experimental pathology at UW-Madison. "It's obvious the real agenda is to bypass shared governance."

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Cross responded by saying his plan was only a concept and would "obviously need to be fleshed out" with help from system participants all across the state.

He added he felt his original timeline of having universities reevaluate their mission statements by January 2021, was "just too aggressive."

Other participants in the discussion acknowledged the challenging financial situation the coronavirus created, with some calling on regents to implement a task force composed of shared governance representatives to develop an attack plan.

UWS previously revealed it's facing a system-wide \$100 million budget shortfall through the summer months, even after receiving federal aid and furloughing thousands of employees.

Cross revealed his plan to regents during a May 7 emergency board meeting, where he suggested the pandemic exacerbated problems the system was already facing, and that the timeline for such changes would need to be accelerated in order to prevent any campus closures.

He divided the blueprint into three parts:

- *Removing duplicate university programs in regions of the state and specializing campuses based on college strengths.
- *Consolidating certain campus operational functions like human resources and IT under the UW Shared Services program.
- *Unifying, expanding and aggressively marketing UW online education programs.

Regent Robert Atwell during a listening session said he encouraged Cross to deliver his thoughts on the system's future and commended him for "being willing to speak clearly" on the upcoming challenges.

"Yes, we're listening; yes, we know we have a task ahead of us; yes, it can't be done without robust campus-level support and understanding," he said.

Atwell added he felt regents' first goal should be to "bring clarity" on the blueprint and help Wisconsinites understand the gravity of the financial situation and the "tremendously difficult decision-making process."

See Cross' plan:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/200507BLUEPRINT.pdf>

See video of the meetings at the WisPolitics.com YouTube page:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0FO8o8WdB99-9uZXQWqP6w/videos>