

Rep. Shankland: Letter to UW System President Cross

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UW System President Ray Cross
1720 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Dr.
Madison, WI 53706

Dear President Cross:

I am writing you today in response to your surprise proposal to dramatically alter the UW System. I recognize the difficulties and severe financial shortfalls the UW System is facing, which is why yesterday I circulated a bipartisan legislative sign-on letter to our Congressional delegation urging them to push for additional federal funds to support our higher education institutions during this challenging time.

As a legislator who attended dozens of meetings and participated in hundreds of conversations about program array and distinctiveness and the policy's relationship to layoffs, I have many insights into why this policy is misguided. We have learned years of valuable lessons at UW-Stevens Point, and I would welcome a conversation with you about the impacts of your proposal. In the meantime, I have the following questions:

1) Why wasn't shared governance invoked prior to this media announcement? If the stakeholders most needed to successfully reduce budget shortfalls weren't consulted first, how can you count on their trust throughout this process? How will you work with shared governance stakeholders moving forward?

2) Given the higher education relief funds provided in the CARES Act and the concerted effort across states to request further funding, did you ask our

Congressional delegation for funds beyond the CARES Act?

- 3) Rather than announcing painful layoffs to the press instead of those who are likely to be laid off, did you consider alternative strategies, including invoking shared governance to explore alternate budget scenarios, including more furloughs? How many financial scenarios did you create prior to announcing mass layoffs to the media?
- 4) Did you have conversations with state lawmakers regarding the UW System's budget request for the 2021-23 budget and the potential use of budget stabilization funds in the next budget?
- 5) Cutting programs means cutting access and limiting equity to students who live in the region of that campus, especially in rural areas. Have you considered how changing academic programs at each university based on enrollment can adversely affect enrollment, recruitment, and retention, leading to lower tuition revenue?
- 6) In your Blueprint for the UW System beyond COVID-19, you cite demographic projections and workforce as two of the four challenges. Have you updated demographic projections and workforce numbers based on the unemployment rate and the projected unemployment rate for the fall 2020 semester and beyond? How will potentially changing demographics tied to the unemployment rate alter your forecast?
- 7) By whose estimation will campuses be "stronger, not weaker" by "focusing its resources on distinctive programs"? Did you conduct a survey of students and potential students regarding offering them fewer choices, and did you consider their tuition dollars as a primary revenue source?
- 8) How will your program distinctiveness initiative affect the local students, faculty, staff, alumni, local economy, and local employers? What say will they have if UW System is the "director and manager" rather than the "convener/collaborator/coordinator" in driving these decisions, rather than the campus area community that has the greatest interest in this? Have you noticed how starkly antithetical this is from successful higher education models, including the technical college system?
- 9) For what reason are you targeting the 11 comprehensive universities, while excluding UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee? Does your identifying these two

campuses as R1 universities inherently imply that research universities should be protected from the program cuts that you are proposing for the 11 institutions that predominantly serve first-generation, rural, returning, and nontraditional students? What trust does this inspire in this process, and how does this serve campus unity and collaboration?

10) Access and equity to higher education is crucial for economic mobility and access to opportunity. How does your proposal support access and equity to higher education, especially for the most vulnerable students?

11) How will your proposal impact the Wisconsin Idea? Will every family of the state have equal access to “the beneficent influence of the University” if you dramatically reduce access to the programs and people who are the very soul of the Wisconsin Idea?

I watched the Board of Regents meeting today with great interest and remain concerned about the path you are taking. I look forward to hearing from you about how you will address these pressing issues. Thank you for your attention to my request.