# THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

# Statewide Strategic Planning Listening Sessions

# *Sheridan, Wyoming*

# Thursday, December 8, 2016

A community member wondered about the Education Initiative. He noted that they had a presentation from the Sheridan County School District that mentioned that having an effective teacher was seven times more powerful of a predictor for student retention. He added that the only thing they had heard was how much money was going to be spent on education, when in reality they really needed more effective teachers and principals. The member asked what the University’s Education Initiative would do to better these programs and how would that produce more effective teachers.

Dean of the College of Ray Reutzel stated that the Trustees Education Initiative was undertaken by the Trustees after hearing from people around the state about ideas that could make the College of Education more effective. He noted that the Initiative was a systematic program of research to look at how programs of educator preparation could be made better. He mentioned that this was not necessarily something that would cost more money but it could help to change some methodology. Dean Reutzel stated that something they had heard a great deal about was not producing special education teachers for the state. He commented that another problem was that many of the school districts in the state had not even seen a University of Wyoming Student Teacher. He noted that the Initiative was going to look at nationally ranked programs to see how they were doing things to see the best practices from around the country to adopt their own programs. Dean Reutzel mentioned that all the programs would eventually review their roles and would adopt their programs so that they could better serve the state. He stated that the whole reason for the Initiative was so that the University could turn out the finest and best educators in the country. He added that this might take a little bit of money to get the research completed, but after the programs got set, it won’t take a lot for them to continue.

Another community member commented about the unique situation with the University and the Community Colleges. He noted that President Nichols had done a great job in trying to strengthen those relationships with continuing efforts that would help provide the students with what they were looking for. He mentioned that there was a local effort at the Community College and if the University could do something similar, it would be a seamless transfer for the students.

One community member commented on recruitment and how it could be a concern with the differential fee proposal that would come before the Trustees. He noted that having a fee as high as $69 per credit hour was quite a burden. He stated that if there was a greater burden on the students, they would end up going to other Universities.

President Nichols stated that she was also committed to keeping college highly assessable for the students. She added that this was a time when the state could not support the university as it had in the past and it was on the University to diversify its revenue stream as well. She noted that one thing that they had been looking at was the tuition and fees. President Nichols mentioned that there had been comparisons done with other Universities in the region and around the country that were similar to University of Wyoming and the University of Wyoming was the most affordable University. She added that the goal was to still keep college as affordable as possible.

A community member commented that he had been doing research and engineering type work for about 20 years. He noted that he had been collaborating with the University and in his experience, the best way to cultivate the talent in the state was to not just graduate them with a degree and send them out into the work place with best hopes. He added that the best way was to work with them while they were upper level students in their bachelor’s degrees or in their master’s programs. The community member stated that he would like to see the University work to better incentivize faculty, staff, and students to work with companies and entities around the state so that it was not something that they did just because they liked it, but so that it would better connect the students with the businesses around the state.

One community member stated that she was concerned about the wage gap in Wyoming. She noted that Wyoming was 49th in the nation for the wage gap. She added that the university classes did not really talk to the students about what they were facing. She noted that she would like to see the University put in courses for all students to take before graduation that would focus on advocating for a fair wage or equal pay for equal work. The community member added that because the state was 49th in the nation, it was likely that the more highly qualified people were going elsewhere to get a larger pay.

Another community member stated that there was discussion about undertaking a Humanities Initiative. She added that in terms of diversity and vibrancy, some of the resources devoted to those programs could be cost effective and beneficial. She asked if there were those types of discussions and she would like to lend her support for more.

President Nichols stated that there was not a Humanities Initiative currently, but there had been talk about it before. She noted that her suggestion was to do the Strategic Planning effort and if there seemed to be the want and need for a Humanities Initiative, to let it come up from the Strategic Plan.

A community member stated that the Haub School’s efforts to establish an undergraduate degree in outdoor recreation was something that would attract a number of kids in the state.

Another community member asked how could citizens of the state keep students that graduated from Wyoming high schools, in Wyoming as opposed to going to other schools?

President Nichols stated that those statistics created a lot of questions. She noted that the university did know the data in terms of the last high school graduating class and also knew what happened next to that. She added that the percentage of students that start higher education at a community college in Wyoming was a high percentage because of the way that higher education was set up in the state. She mentioned that the amount that came directly to the University of Wyoming was about 15% and the amount that left the state to go somewhere else was also about 15%.

One community member stated that something that could be effective in terms of the University of Wyoming was a stronger social work program. He mentioned that there were practicums that were not of the best quality and there was a possibility for some of the undergraduate degrees. He noted that they had tried to get students credit for working in a substance abuse program. The member added that traditionally, there was a group of people that graduate with their MSW and then they left the state. He commented that this program could help in keeping some of the graduates in the state. The member suggested that the University look at the counseling program that happened every 2 years and tried to make it every year because the state needed people connecting with the mental health and substance abuse system in the state was critical.

Another community member stated that even though 91% of high school kids graduated, a large number of them were not prepared when they got to the entry level, community college work. He noted that these students then were put into remedial courses and got behind, leading them to not complete their schooling. He wondered if that was correct and if there was anything that could be done to hold the K-12 schools accountable to make sure that the students were expected to do that work before graduating. The community member stated that the two biggest areas in the remedial education was in math and English. He stated that they were doing good work to get the students pushed through faster so that they could get to the college level courses. He noted that they were at about 30% of students in remedial math.

President Nichols commented that at the University, about 8% of the students need remediation. She added that when that happened, the student would go to LCCC.

Another community member stated that the technical education program was critical for the state for secondary and post-secondary education.

A community member supported what was said about increasing the amount of students attending the University and Community Colleges. She added that there should be more opportunities for internships and working with businesses so that students could see the value in their education, while also becoming more likely to stay in Wyoming. She noted that there were students that had to find their own way to those kinds of opportunities. The community member also commented on the topic of equal pay. She encouraged President Nichols to not accept a pay cut from President McGinity’s pay, as to be a role model for the women in the state on equal pay. The member discussed fees and stated that she thought that the fees seemed to be higher than they should be. She mentioned that she would like to see the fee increase be staged in such a way that the juniors and seniors did not have to pay the additional fee.

Another community member stated that he appreciated what was happening at the University of Wyoming, the cooperation at Sheridan College, and was looking forward to more of the cooperative efforts that benefited the students. He noted that it seemed like the university had become a large bureaucracy, which was tough to deal with. He stated that there were three examples in dealing with the Ag research station alone. The member commented that the University should give the research people a little bit of flexibility. He added that when dealing with agriculture and crops, they did not survive until someone actually came to a decision.

One community member discussed what made Wyoming a vibrant place to live and work. She noted that there was a lot of beauty throughout the state that attracted people from other states to visit and move to Wyoming. She added that another aspect was that art and culture were things that attracted people to Wyoming. The member talked about the various buildings on campus that were great for attracting people which included the museum and other national exhibits.

Another community member mentioned that he was working on getting more kids involved in programming and into that field. He noted that he was a product of Wyoming with his bachelor’s and master’s degrees, but in order to get an advanced degree in the computer field, the University only had one program, which was the computer science program. He stated that the classes he took to receive his degree 20 years ago, should not be the same classes that it took currently because he did not use the types of math that he was taught anymore. The member added that there were students that had to pass a barrier so that they could get their degree and they were unable to, even though they did not really need to pass that barrier to be able to get the jobs that they want. He commented that there was an opportunity for the University to look at advancing the computer science degree program by teaching students how to use the technology. The representative added that they still needed to find someone to do the programming and that was the difficult part. He mentioned that the FBLA program at the high school just removed the computer programming topic because they could not find any judges. He added that there needed to be trained programmers and to be a trained programmer, that person did not need all the math classes that were currently in the curriculum.

Another community member stated that the missing link was the parents. She mentioned that the department of adult education was being unfolded into another discipline. She added that there was a number of parents that were not successful in high school and did not continue their education. The community member noted that the parents that did not go to continue their education had to somehow be reached and talked to about the importance of going to college and getting a degree.

One community member stated that the Higher Learning Commission had changed its accreditation standards when it came to the level of degree that the teachers had at the community colleges. He noted that this would have a big impact on the teaching ranks at the community colleges as a whole. He mentioned that there was an opportunity for the University of Wyoming to offer courses at a distance so that the instructors at community colleges could get their classes completed.

A community member stated that two obstacles that her kids have had in earning their bachelor’s degree were having an instructor that they could not understand and not being able to register for the classes that they needed to graduate.

Another community member stated that her daughter got her bachelor’s degree at Wyoming and could not get into the master’s program. She added that her son went to Central Wyoming College and when he visited the University to go to school there, he felt as if the school could care less if he went there. The community member suggested that the university work on how they made the students that were coming from Wyoming schools feel like they were wanted because if they go elsewhere, they may not come back to the state.

A community member stated that her son was attracted to the University because of the Tier 1 Engineering Initiative. She noted that she hoped that this was still going strong. She added that her son had other opportunities at other Universities, but Wyoming won him and so the family moved to Wyoming. The community member stated that they were concerned for each of their son’s future opportunities and the bridge from getting their bachelors and masters to getting jobs.

Another community member stated that as someone from a company in Wyoming, when they reached out to give internships, they usually had to resend emails because they did not respond or get back in touch with them. He added that there was not a culture of internships and connection.

One community member asked what the University’s role was in promoting entrepreneurship and business leadership across the board for all their students because of the strength of the economy and the fact that the students were the future of state of Wyoming.

One community member commented on the land grant mission of the University and remediation and if someone looked at it in terms of the fact that it took four years to graduate and there were lost classes, it fell back on the students, the parents, and the Hathaway in terms of encouraging students to take college prep math courses. The community member mentioned that the WAMMI program benefited everyone in the state because of the number of physicians that were under a contract to stay in Wyoming. He noted that he hoped that there was some data from the WAMMI program in terms of qualified people coming to the state of Wyoming.

A community member stated that it was difficult to get people at her work to go back to school and complete their degrees or further their learning at Wyoming especially if they came from out of state. She stated that they always tried to put the University first, but it did not always work out that way when it was just as easy to go to online universities like the University of Phoenix where the costs was very similar.

Another community member commented that she wanted to give support for the collaborations in the science and the agriculture departments. She stated a concern about the extension programs, because the university was the only University in the state, which made extension critical. She noted that it was important that the University maintained the extension offices that helped sustain the communities especially as the state was seeking more economic growth.

Another community member commented that it was pretty well accepted that if a student had not taken math for over a year, they would struggle upon arrival at UW. He noted that the students that did not take a math class in their senior year of high school were more likely to need the remedial math courses when they got to college. He suggested that students in high school should be required to take four years of math.

A community member stated that she had been blessed to have three students go through the University of Wyoming. She noted that the programs that worked really well were the ones that had an internship part built into the program. She commented that there were a lot of areas that were being funded by the Wyoming State Government that could have internships. The member suggested that if there was an internship program across the board, it would help to keep the students in Wyoming.

Another community member noted that Laramie was relatively a long drive away, but the people in Sheridan were still part of the university. He commented that people from the University should feel free to stop in and see what was being done in Sheridan.