

University of Wyoming Strategic Scenario Planning (SSP)

The University of Wyoming mission: We honor our heritage as the state's flagship and land-grant university by providing accessible and affordable higher education of the highest quality; rigorous scholarship; the communication and application of knowledge; economic and community development; and responsible stewardship of our cultural, historical and natural resources.

Rationale for Strategic Scenario Planning

The University of Wyoming is our state's lone four-year public doctoral university, and we are at a pivotal moment. The university has been generously supported by the state of Wyoming to an extent unparalleled in the U.S. However, the structure of Wyoming's economy – and the basis of its tax revenues - has shifted significantly. UW must diversify our own revenue base and reduce expenditures in the extremely near term. UW will need to first shrink in response to the reductions in revenue we will receive from the state, and we must make significant changes. State funding has declined an inflation-adjusted 36% in the past 10 years, and 25% in the past 5 years. We cannot do the same thing we've done for years with a quarter less funding.

Simultaneously, we are a research extensive, land grant university committed to offering a quality education to our students from their first year through their doctoral studies. We serve Wyoming communities in a variety of ways, from agricultural extension and experiment stations to fine arts outreach. We must continue to be the engine for Wyoming's economic growth and prosperity, Wyoming's creative economy, and the accelerator and nucleator for building a better Wyoming.

This project is aimed at “seeing around the corner” - pointing UW in the right direction, laying the groundwork for strategic planning around President Seidel's four pillars, and finding ways to leverage existing strengths and emerging areas UW will lead the way on, while preserving the essential core of the institution. Strategic scenario planning is about identification of driving forces and critical uncertainties; thus, our primary charge was to conduct a Strategic Listening Tour; build on and further develop and recommend strategic themes based on President Seidel's Four Pillars (more digital, entrepreneurial, inclusive, and interdisciplinary) and on campus and key stakeholder engagement; and aggregate themes and develop a strategic plan framework for recommendation to President Seidel and the Board of Trustees. The SSP team also used listening sessions to identify plausible scenarios; the charge directed us to focus “upon identifying, prioritizing, building, and strengthening the most important, future-forward assets of the university and ensuring we are attentive to providing an educated workforce to grow and sustain critical professions in the region.”

Driving Forces and Critical Uncertainties

Shifts in operating assumptions have come rapidly in the past year. The pandemic has shifted and accelerated investments in technology, which will impact teaching, research, and flexible work opportunities. The state's budget has significantly shifted to the downside, and though this has been attenuated by the federal government's various relief programs, the university has had to adjust its budget accordingly and we expect we will have to continue to evolve our budget model to rely less on the state's allocations. Investments in student success have been strong and growing for the past half-decade, but they are devolved, and it is not clear that they are well aligned or non-duplicative. Critical uncertainties remain around enrollment trends and whether UW's incoming first-year class will convert at traditional rates from admitted to enrolled this year and in the future; UW's ability to compete in the online marketplace given our late start; our ability to retain outstanding faculty and staff; our ability to convert our strong academic and research core facilities into research output and external funding; and the ability of UW to leverage investments in technology and pedagogical change to serve the state during its economic transition.

Listening session audience summary

The SSP core team conducted a listening tour, comprising over 15 hours of listening sessions. The audiences targeted were:

- UW Alumni Association
- Current UW students
- UW faculty
- UW staff
- Parents of UW students
- UW Foundation Executive Board

Each session was moderated and guided by a common slide deck that posed a series of prompt questions. Not all questions were used in every session; each session had a slightly different focus depending on the audience. In addition to the Strategic Listening Tour, feedback was gathered using a Qualtrics survey based on the same set of prompt questions. Participants in the listening sessions, as well as our campus community, Albany County community, businesses across Wyoming, and legislators, were invited to complete the survey. Prompt/survey questions included:

- What do you treasure most about UW? If you have had some affiliation with UW, what was important about that experience?
 - Students, faculty, staff, alumni – Why did you come to UW?
 - Trustees – why did you decide to serve UW?

- Legislature – How can UW best contribute to the state?
 - Foundation – Why did you decide to give to UW?
- What do you think are the strengths of UW? What is unique about UW? What does UW do well? What is/should be our identity?
- What are the strategic priorities UW should focus on? If we were building it from scratch, what would we focus on? What does this new University look like?
 - What serves as the core of the institution?
 - What absolutely has to stay?
 - What’s missing in our current mission?
 - What are some areas where you think that UW has the capacity to grow?
- What do you think is the future of the economy of the state of Wyoming and how can UW help in moving the state in that direction?
- What do you think are the other future needs of the state and how can UW help pivot in that direction?
- What skills, capabilities, or knowledge do you think UW graduates need to be successful after graduation?
- Businesses, business councils, NGO’s, governmental organizations: What skills, capabilities, or knowledge are you looking for in your employees?
- Faculty, staff: How can we align incentives, structures, processes and recognition/rewards for faculty and staff to encourage and stimulate innovative activity across the institution?
- Faculty, students, legislators, alumni: Excellence in research is critical for UW to contribute to the important challenges we face in the state and nationally, whether in energy, the environment and climate, or cybersecurity. How can we attract, support and retain leading research faculty, and include students in these interdisciplinary research activities?

Listening Session Themes

- UW should position itself as a long-term economic engine and source of innovation.
- UW should lead on the future of work in Wyoming and the region, promoting rural resilience.
- UW should lead and collaborate openly and thoughtfully in aligning higher education priorities for Wyoming.
- UW should focus on programs and people, not on buildings.
- UW should continue to focus on applicability and affordability, recognizing that there is room in our tuition pricing to remain affordable and competitive while increasing rates.
- Re-envision staff classification system to provide more ladders of opportunity/paths to promotion for our staff (within job category).

- Living learning communities and academic affinity groups are important to retention, progress towards graduation, and completion.
- Co-curricular opportunities are key to developing students' leadership and essential skills.
- UW should focus on programs that bring multidimensional benefits including benefits to the state.
- UW should connect natural resource and outdoor assets and opportunities to people – including traditional students, non-credit students, and executive education.
- A key priority is a more robust Investment in mental health and wellness resources for UW community.
- Translational and experiential learning – internships/co-ops, undergraduate research, education abroad and intercultural learning, problem-based learning, and interdisciplinary work on society's grand challenges - are important investments to prepare our students for the future. To increase access to these opportunities, cost mitigation and scholarship funding should be pursued.
- Invest in marketing and recruiting efforts, leveraging international and affinity markets.
- Expand revenues through tuition increases, tuition differentials, entrepreneurial tuition; develop program fees (vis course fees); expansion of online and certificate/continuous learning options (including focus on marketing and enrollment management); invest in research support (proposal development and funding opportunity identification support, post-award support, electronic research administration, IP assistance, contracts, subawards); systematize and grow corporate partnerships.
- Focus on and foster alumni engagement and lifelong/non-episodic learning. Tap opportunities for alumni to both consume and partner in production of micro-credentials, study tours, and skills bootcamps.
- Tackle curricular complexity so that robust program learning outcomes are maintained while reducing unnecessary curricular bloat.
- Next Generation University Studies Program (UW's general education program) should be informed by the emerging economy, emerging fields, civic engagement, and skills that allow students to tackle interdisciplinary challenges.
- Invest in legislative and governmental relations.

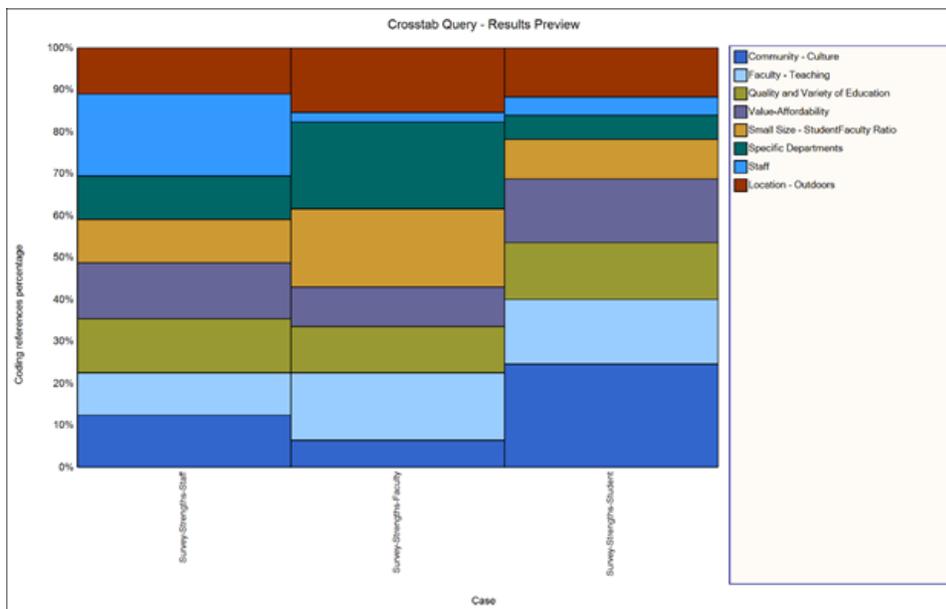
WYSAC Listening Session and Survey Analysis – Discussion

The Wyoming Survey Analysis Center (WYSAC) analyzed both the notes from listening sessions and the survey responses to the same prompt questions from the Qualtrics survey. WYSAC edited open-ended data from listening sessions and the survey for spelling and grammar as necessary for textual analysis. They then conducted a text analysis of responses using specialized software, and prepared reports summarizing the analysis. All told, 129 people responded to the Qualtrics survey, and there were over 300 attendees at our various listening sessions. Following are some of their findings.

To the prompt question “What do you think are the strengths of UW? What is unique about UW? What does UW do well? What is/should be our identity?” WYSAC found eleven primary areas identified by constituents. These include the community and culture of the university and state; the quality of our faculty and of their teaching; quality and loyal staff; the quality and variety of educational opportunities; the value and affordability of UW; the quality of specific departments; the location and outdoor opportunities in Wyoming; the quality of research; and the brand/identity of the university.

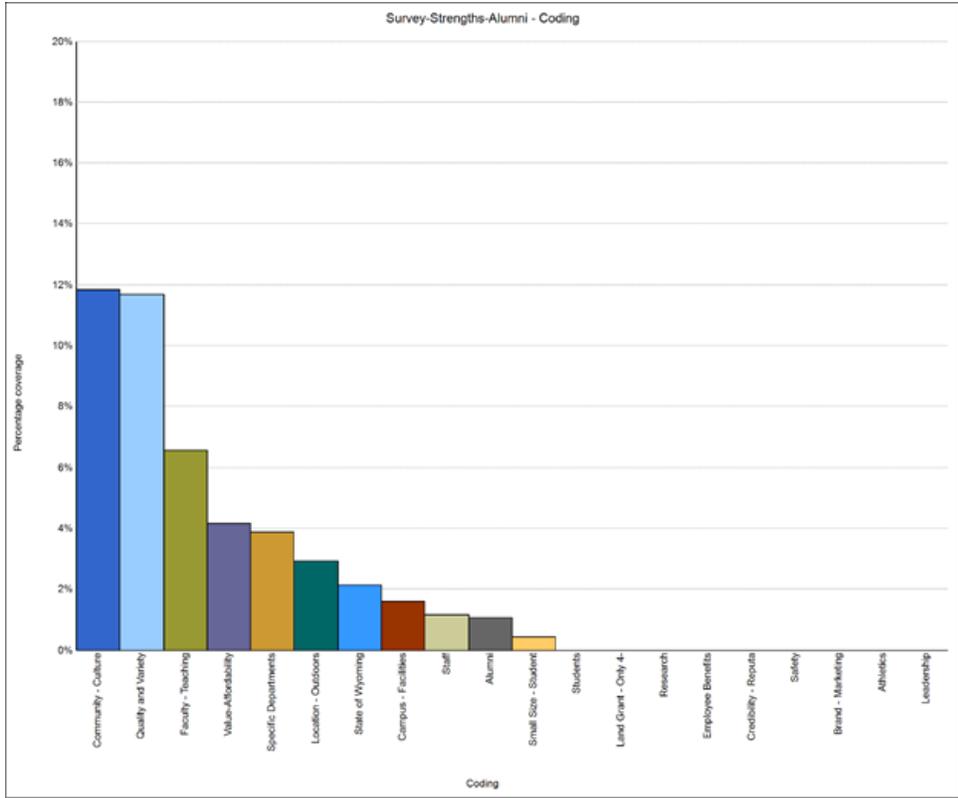
Below is a graphical comparison between Student/Parent, Faculty, and Staff respondents of the top 8 “Strength” categories:

Figure 1: Student/Parent, Faculty, and Staff survey responses: UW’s Strengths



For alumni, the next figure shows their responses as coded into categories similar to above for students, faculty, and staff.

Figure 2: Alumni Survey Responses: UW Strengths



For UW donors and Wyoming community members, strengths are represented below:

Figure 3: Donor Survey Responses – UW Strengths

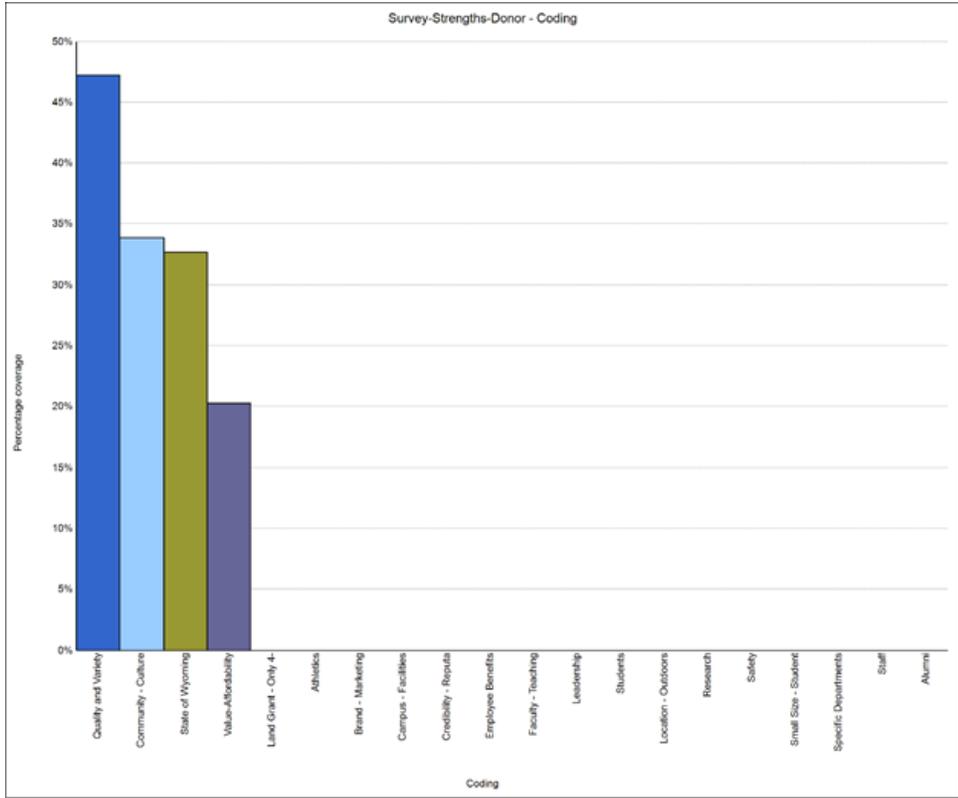
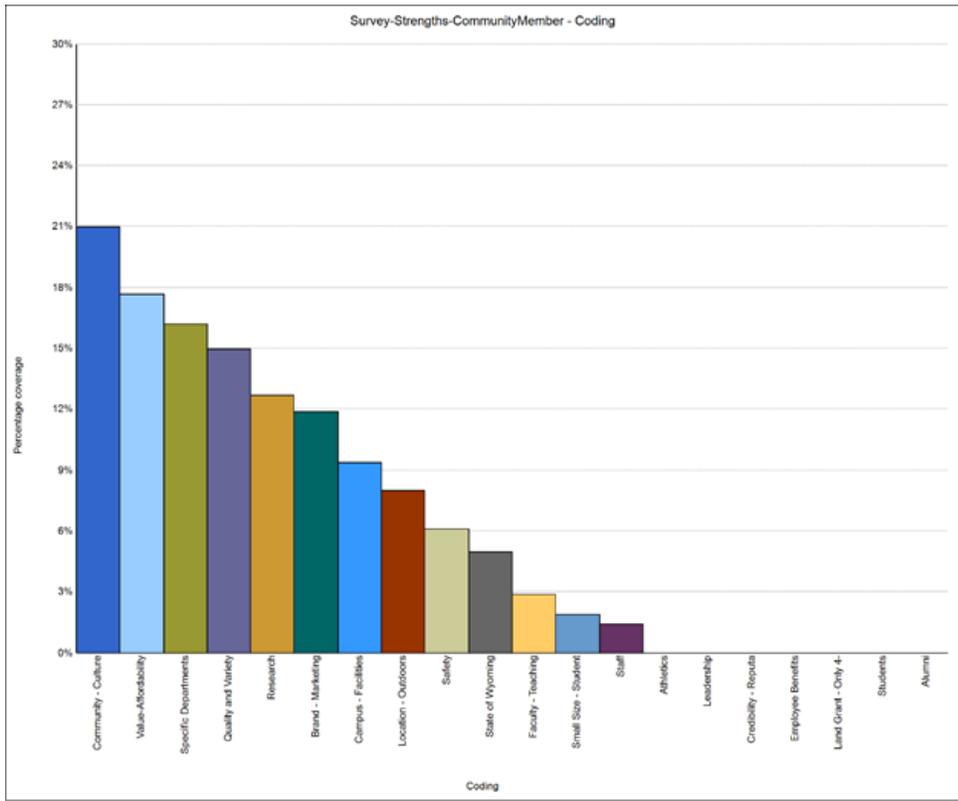
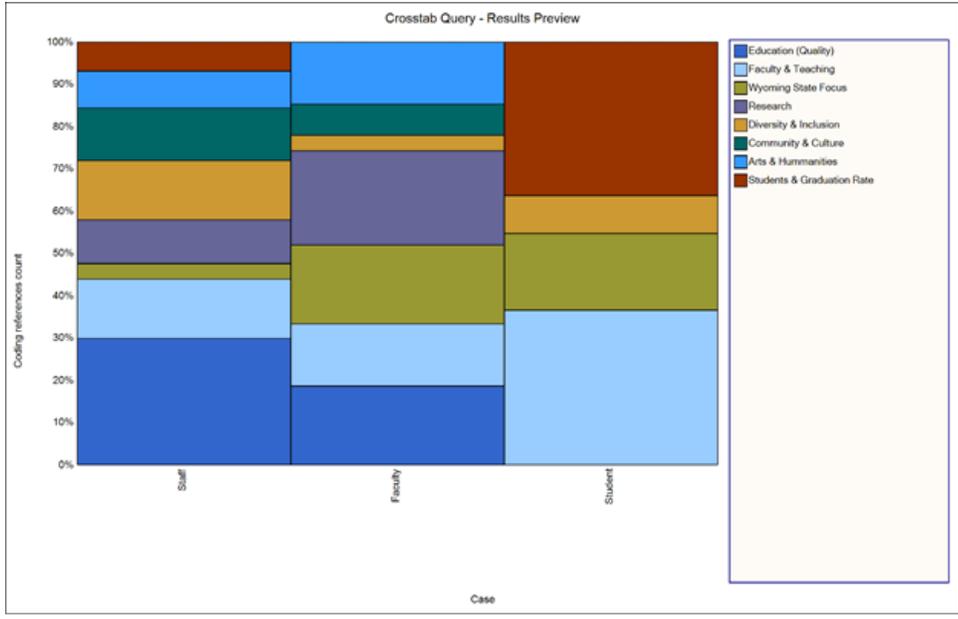


Figure 4: Community Member Responses – UW Strengths



With respect to the question “What are the strategic priorities UW should focus on?” survey respondents who identified as faculty, students/parents, or staff are represented in the next figure.

Figure 5: UW Student/Parent, Faculty, and Staff Responses – UW Strategic Priorities



Alumni, donor, and Wyoming community members' synthesized responses are represented in the next three figures.

Figure 6: UW Alumni – UW Strategic Priorities

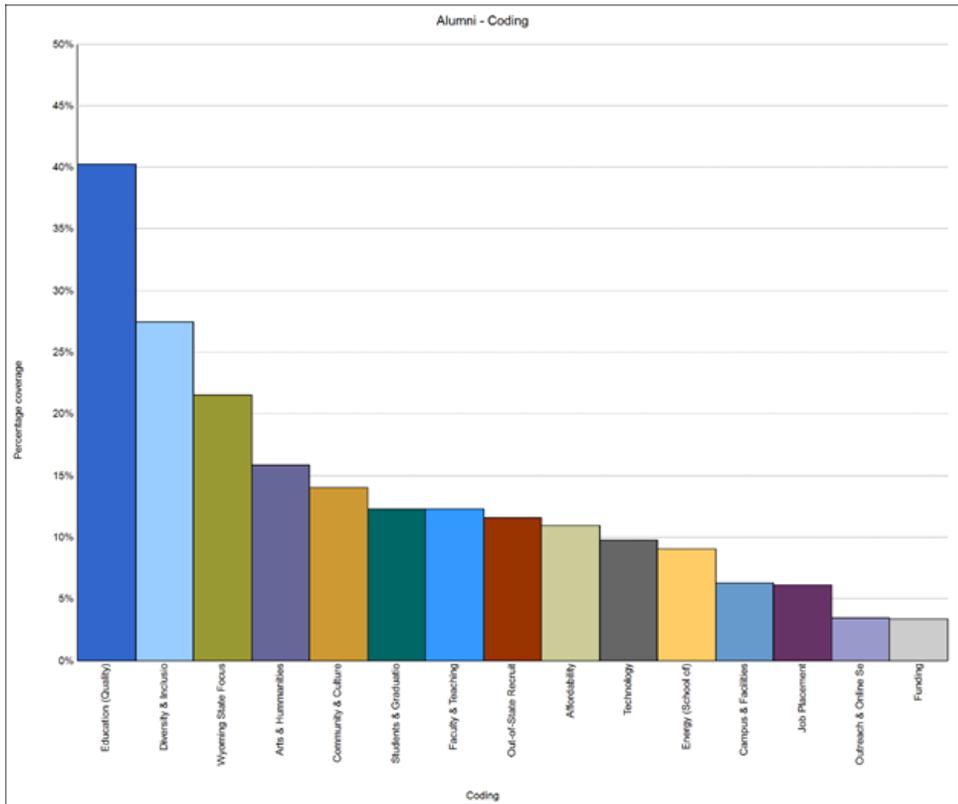


Figure 7: UW Donor Responses – UW Strategic Priorities

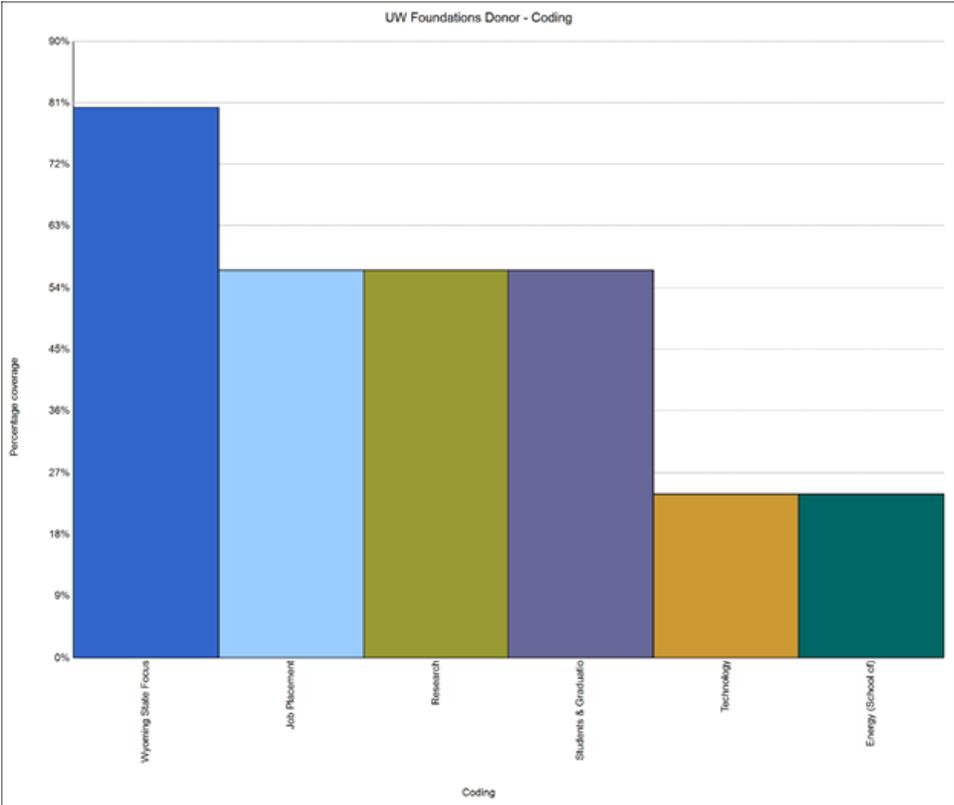
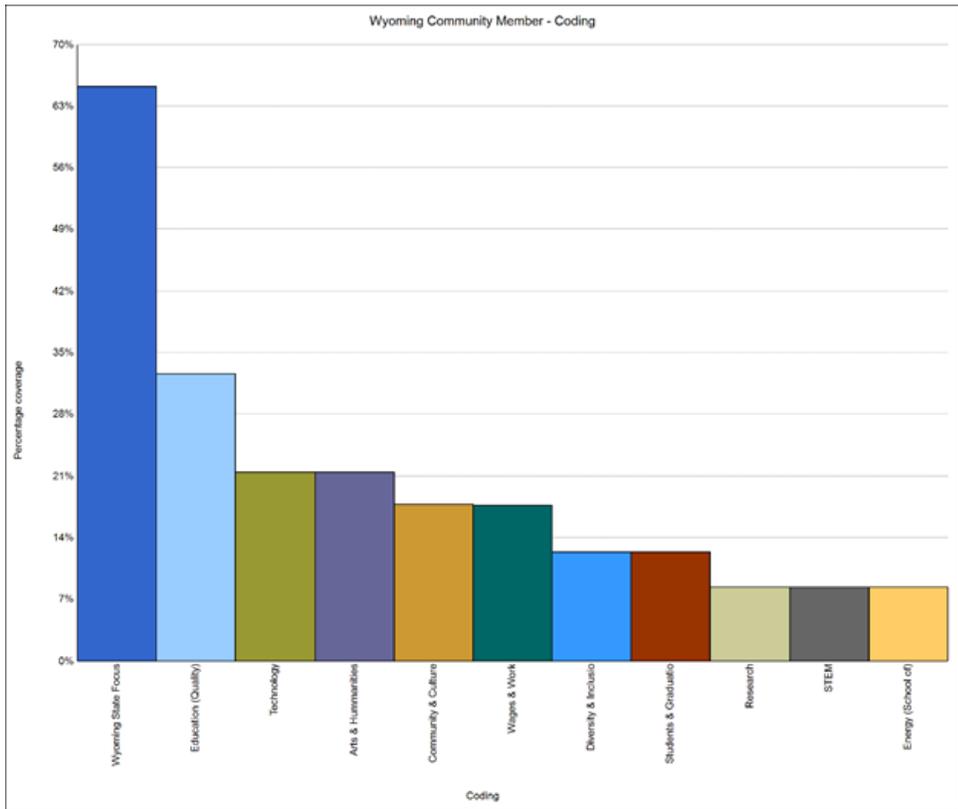


Figure 8: Community Member Responses – UW Strategic Priorities



Pillar Teams work

Simultaneous with the core team’s strategic listening tour, four teams of faculty, students, and staff members from across UW also began exploring how to build out the vision for UW to be a more digital, inclusive, interdisciplinary, and entrepreneurial university, in keeping with the vision of President Seidel. These Pillar Teams were charged with exploring what these themes might look like for Wyoming and provided baseline work that will be shared with the campus to begin to work with in the coming months and next academic year. Further high-level summaries of these reports are presented separately.

Plausible Scenarios, Implications, and Paths - Conclusions and Next Steps

Plausible Scenarios:

UW faces, as does all of higher education, several headwinds. The headwinds in Wyoming are compounded by an institutional budget model that has been based on reliance on strong state investment, but that historical trend has shifted to the realm of uncertainty. Further, UW’s

value proposition must change. In order to thrive in the future, UW must not only diversify its revenue sources, but also invest more heavily in student success, faculty retention, and 21st century foci of excellence. UW must identify efficiencies in resource use and redirect and pivot its investments into areas of education and research that will help drive Wyoming's innovation infrastructure and economic trajectory. The most plausible scenarios for UW range from continuing to take cuts to state aid and responding afterwards in non-strategic ways, as we have done in the past and allowing ourselves to shrink into insignificance; to proactively and intentionally pivoting our focus to diversification of our revenues and educational offerings with clear future value to the state, region, nation and world.

Implications and Paths:

Immediate Actions - Low hanging fruit:

In listening sessions, and in the work of the digital, inclusivity, innovation/entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary pillar groups, several common themes have been identified, including things that are relatively simple or extremely high priority to address. The detailed reports contain more recommendations, but these rose to the top.

- Harness multiple points of existing excellence in conflict and problem resolution to begin exploring Center for Conflict Resolution.
- Harness multiple points of existing excellence in entrepreneurship and innovation spaces to begin exploring cross-disciplinary Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.
- Harness multiple points of existing excellence in digital and computational spaces to begin exploring cross-disciplinary School of Computing and shared data lakes/hubs.
- Invite and incentivize curricular innovation and analytics to give faculty tools and support to innovate their program curricula.
- Invite and incentivize faculty to participate in an audit of bureaucratic processes – including course action requests, etc.
- Continue to build out the Wyoming Innovation Network, both in shared academic programming and innovation support for Wyoming.
- Begin identifying added resources to invest in enrollment management, student success, and government relations.
- UW has room to generate revenue in out-of-state tuition, as well as entrepreneurial and differential tuition rates.
- Re-start Next Generation General Education (University Studies Program) group. Integrated First-Year Seminar courses, Honors colloquium, First-Year Experience, First-Year Writing, and other courses (and programming) across campus. The current Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs) and LLCs should grow in number to accommodate (eventually) all new UW students.

Intermediate steps and Strategic Planning:

We will use this strategic scenario plan, along with Pillar team reports, as a baseline framework for building out a strategic plan with the UW community in the next academic year. This will allow Provost Designate Carman an opportunity to get to know the institution, and our internal and external constituents to dig further into the core team's and pillar teams' work from this semester to help shape UW's future path for the next five years. This will put UW in good stead to quickly adapt to the uncertainties and headwinds we will face in the next five years.

Strategic Scenario Planning Core Team

Co-Chairs: President Ed Seidel, Interim Provost Anne Alexander

Members:

Rudi Michalak (*Chair, Faculty Senate*)

Riley Talamantes (*President, ASUW*)

Courtney Titus (*Vice President, ASUW*)

Chris Stratton (*President, Staff Senate*)

Laura Perez (*Director of Diversity, ASUW*)

Laura Schmid-Pizzato (*UW Trustee*)

Macey Moore (*UW Trustee*)

Kelly Crane (*UW Extension*)

Adrienne Freng (*Faculty Senate Executive Committee*)

Keener Fry (*Executive Director, Alumni Association*)

Gregg Cawley (*School of Politics, Public Affairs, and International Studies*)

Mary Ivanoff (*Chief of Staff, Office of the President*)