

## Leveraging a Modest Tuition Increase to Enhance the Undergraduate Experience

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### Introduction

The Madison Initiative for Undergraduates (MIU) may serve as a model for others seeking to leverage a modest tuition increase into university-wide enhancements in the undergraduate experience while still preserving affordability and access through an increase in financial aid. The lessons of MIU may be of special interest to institutions that have a culture of strong participatory governance by faculty, staff, and students, along with public audiences and a governing board that are reluctant to support tuition increases. Half of the funds were allocated directly to financial aid to help preserve affordability. The remainder was distributed in a competition that was open to all faculty and staff for projects to improve the undergraduate experience.

Key features of the MIU plan: The goals of MIU are to preserve the quality of the UW-Madison undergraduate experience by: 1) Preserving affordability of a UW-Madison education, primarily through expansion of need-based financial aid; 2) Adding faculty and instructional support to offer the courses, majors, and experiences that students need; 3) Expanding best practices and innovation in teaching and learning, curricular design, and student services to enhance student outcomes.

MIU is funded through a tuition surcharge for UW-Madison's 30,000 undergraduates, which will generate approximately \$40 million annually. Tuition has been increased by \$250 per year for resident undergraduates and \$750 per year for non-resident undergraduates over a four year period (Fall 2009 through Fall 2012). Half of the funds are returned to students as need-based financial aid in an effort to keep tuition affordable for students with financial need. .

### **Lessons from the approval stage**

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), any initiative that includes a tuition increase and is focused on the undergraduate experience will draw widespread attention from an array of stakeholder groups. UW-Madison faculty, staff, and students have a proud tradition of governance in partnership with administration. The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents (the Board) holds decision-making authority for tuition setting. UW System Administration and the leaders of other UW System institutions also have a role in the decision process. The Wisconsin legislature and governor exercise their influence through budget authority. Given UW-Madison's long history of being a low tuition/low institutional aid university, proposals for tuition increases have been generally considered with reluctance. The case for MIU honored that reluctance by putting need-based financial aid at the center of the proposal and by focusing on the goal of the initiative to enhance the quality of the undergraduate experience and protect the value of a UW-Madison degree.

The chancellor and university leadership embarked on a vigorous campaign to engage the full range of governance- and thought-leaders in a discussion of the value of MIU. The chancellor met with campus and external groups in dozens of meetings and venues to present the proposal. The provost, the deans and other campus leaders also carried the message. The campaign honored the partnership role that UW-Madison's governance groups have with administration, including the executive committees of the faculty and academic staff (University Committee and Academic Staff Executive Committee), the Faculty Senate and Academic Staff Assembly, and the Associated Students of Madison. The alumni, through the Wisconsin Alumni Association, became invaluable allies in making the case for increasing tuition with the specific purpose of preserving and enhancing the value of a UW-Madison degree. The UW Foundation launched the "Great People" campaign, their first major campaign directed to fund-raising for scholarships and financial aid. This widespread advocacy was effective and the Board approved the proposed tuition increase in March 2009.

### **Lessons from the primary implementation phase**

Primary implementation of MIU comprised two main efforts. One effort was planning for distribution of \$5M of new financial aid starting with the Fall 2009 semester, with a ramp up to \$20M by Fall 2012. In addition, the Office of Student Financial Aid implemented a "hold-harmless" provision of the MIU tuition surcharge for students with a family income of less than \$80,000, in keeping with a promise made during the MIU campaign. The Office of Student Financial Aid began "re-packaging" financial aid offers immediately after approval. In a related effort, the

UW Foundation continued to expand the “Great People” campaign to raise additional funds for financial aid. MIU and “Great People” together have substantially increased centrally allocated institutional aid from approximately \$6M in 2008-09 to nearly \$40M in 2011-12. Both efforts together were essential for on-going support for MIU. The second implementation element was deciding how to spend the other half of the funds on academic and student support initiatives that would enhance the undergraduate educational experience. In keeping with the patterns already set in the approval stage, the administration established a decision-making process that integrated faculty, staff and students. All faculty and staff were invited to submit proposals to a competitive grants process. Proposals were submitted via deans to the Office of the Provost and then the MIU Oversight Committee. The MIU Oversight Committee was convened as the body that reviewed the proposals and made recommendations to the provost and chancellor; membership included faculty, staff, students, and administrators. An independent Student Oversight Board for the MIU also reviewed all proposals and submitted its ratings for consideration by the MIU Oversight Committee. In three rounds of competition, 54 projects were funded out of a total of nearly 200 proposals. The first set of proposals was considered in a short time frame: the call was issued in August, with a due date in October, and decisions were made by November 2009. The two subsequent rounds, with deadlines in November 2009 and November 2010, were more deliberative processes with decisions announced the following April. To oversee day-to-day implementation of MIU, the provost appointed an MIU Core Team that was tasked with the implementation of the grant process, day-to-day oversight for the project, and accountability for MIU success.

Role of the MIU Core Team: The MIU Core Team was established by the provost immediately after approval of MIU. The charge included providing progress reports to the provost and chancellor and consulting with them on major decisions; working with governance committees to identify members for the MIU Oversight Committee and to keep them apprised of the progress of MIU; designing and implementing the process for the call and review of proposals; conducting the proposal review with the MIU Oversight Committee; consulting with and assisting MIU project leaders to assure success, including delivering informational workshops; requesting and compiling annual reports from MIU project leaders; convening regular meetings of the MIU Oversight Committee; working with University Communications to keep the University community informed about the progress of MIU.

Three elements of the competitive grant process contributed to its success. First, the MIU Oversight Committee membership was inclusive: members included faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The value of the prominent role played by students has become increasingly evident over the life of MIU. Secondly, the review process was based loosely on the NSF review process. That design gave the process credibility and made it familiar to many MIU-Oversight Committee participants and to faculty and staff who submitted proposals. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the competitive grant process drew on a wealth of readily apparent and latent ideas that the faculty and staff had to improve the undergraduate experience.

The proposal call process provided a mechanism to articulate and reinforce campus goals and values that will shape UW-Madison's future. The call for proposals contained clearly articulated criteria based on a vision for an educational experience that was intentionally comprehensive (i.e., in- and out-of-class) and collaborative, and that increased access and success for all students as befitting our public university mission. The accountability requirements demanded project goals that focused on student learning and improved educational experiences and required projects to demonstrate their contributions to the University's future. Because there were only three rounds of competition, there was a sense of urgency for faculty and staff to get their best ideas in the grant process; there was no waiting for next time. The ideas presented in the proposals were truly transformative and MIU provided the funds to make the best ideas reality.

### **Lessons from project implementation over the first three years**

After the funding decisions were made, funds were transferred to project leaders who were instructed to proceed with their projects. Some delays in implementation were inevitable, especially for projects that required new faculty hires, but the goal was to make the impact of MIU visible to undergraduates as rapidly as possible. After only a few years, the positive impact is evident in the student experience. In the first two years, \$15 million dollars in MIU-funded financial aid was distributed to thousands of UW-Madison students. MIU funded 76 faculty lines across 20 departments that serve large numbers of undergraduates, so UW-Madison has been hiring faculty at a time when many universities have slowed hiring. Three dozen positions were added to expand student services and funding was provided for another 24 new academic advisor positions. Approximately 120 50% teaching assistantships for graduate students were funded, which added capacity for approximately 10,000 student course enrollments in TA-taught sections. There has been a substantial expansion in high-impact practices, including expansions in curricular

and residential learning communities, internships, and capstone experiences. These early successes have been essential to point to as value provided by MIU.

A feature of MIU is a commitment to attentive stewardship of these tuition-based funds. As part of this commitment, reporting and accountability for the impact of MIU is integrated into each of the competitively funded projects. MIU projects provide annual reports on their impact on the student experience. One requirement for each curriculum-based project is to demonstrate that the project faculty are actively engaged in assessment of student learning. Thus, MIU has been a vehicle to deepen the discussion about assessment of student learning with faculty. Another requirement is to demonstrate active attention to achieving equity in achievement for underrepresented groups of students. Consequently, MIU has provided a vehicle to update faculty and staff across campus about current diversity efforts and issues. Annual reports from all 54 MIU projects are the basis for an annual MIU report which is made available to all stakeholder groups. Reports are available to the public through the University Communications website ([www.madisoninitiative.wisc.edu](http://www.madisoninitiative.wisc.edu)) and through a page that provides reports on each project ([www.apa.wisc.edu/MIU](http://www.apa.wisc.edu/MIU)). Accountability and reporting on impact is so important that the first MIU allocation funded a staff line to support reporting and accountability.

MIU is being successful as a driver of institutional change. Dozens of new courses are in place or being developed in a range of traditional disciplines and interdisciplinary studies such as History, Psychology, Digital Studies, and Global Health. MIU has funded an expansion of high-impact practices such as curricular learning communities (first-year interest groups), residential learning communities, internships, and capstone experiences. The Wisconsin Collaboratory for Enhanced Learning (WiscCEL), based on the “math emporium” model, is transforming the delivery of pre-Calculus math courses. A new MIU-funded campus-wide advising unit was created, which includes a new Director of Undergraduate Advising position, dozens of new advisor positions, and expanded support technology for advising that is improving information flow to students.

### **The unexpected lesson: readiness for the future**

In summer 2011, former chancellor David Ward was appointed to a two-year term as interim chancellor. He identified that a top priority for his tenure would be to address the funding gap between the quality of educational experience we aspire to deliver and what we can deliver at diminishing levels of state funding. The new initiative, Educational Innovations, calls on faculty and staff across campus to re-think the educational experience at all levels and to ask how can we maintain quality with available resources and how can we generate new resources. Unlike

MIU, Educational Innovations doesn't provide the project funding—projects have to generate or free up the resources needed to move in new directions. But Educational Innovations is, in many ways a logical daughter of MIU, because it draws on the mindset and a readiness among all stakeholders that has been cultivated by MIU to embrace a new vision for excellence based on a comprehensive view of students' educational experience and on integrated accountability.

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