

A Closer Look At UW-Madison's Campus-Wide Diversity Initiatives

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May 5, 2021

Introduction

As espoused within the “Wisconsin Idea,” the University of Wisconsin-Madison is an institution that prides itself upon liberalism and service. This foundational tenet can be found on the homepage of the university’s website: “The Wisconsin Idea is our pledge to the state, the nation, and the world that our endeavors will benefit all citizens.”¹ Embedded within this institutional promise is the more general principle “that education should influence people’s lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom.”² In order to have the outreach efforts of the university truly benefit all citizens, it needs to adequately embody the diversity that exists within Wisconsin, the nation, and the world. If true diversity is not incorporated within the university at all levels, and minorities and the marginalized are not given due representation, then the “Wisconsin Idea” can be viewed as rather colonial. Unfortunately, UW-Madison recently ranked second to last among major public research institutions in minorities as a percentage of undergraduates, and only about 1/5th of faculty identify with minority groups.³ Even beyond alarming statistics, it is abundantly clear to members of the campus community that UW-Madison is overwhelmingly white.

Before examining how UW-Madison has dealt with their diversity issues, one must question what diversity even means. That is a difficult question to explore; everybody has their own conception of diversity, therefore it would not be rash to say that there is no clear-cut definition of what diversity is and what it embodies. However, these individual conceptions come together to outline the many human differences that exist within the world. While many

¹ University of Wisconsin-Madison, accessed April 10, 2021, <http://www.wisc.edu>.

² “The Wisconsin Idea,” *The University of Wisconsin*, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.wisc.edu/wisconsin-idea/>.

³ “Diversity Update 2020,” *University of Wisconsin Madison Office of the Provost: Academic Planning and Institutional Research*, October 2020, <https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Diversity-Forum-2020-APIR-Diversity-Update.pdf>.

people limit their definition of diversity to racial and ethnic representation, a more holistic definition of diversity takes into account the many other human differences that exist within society, from gender and sexual orientation, to physical ability, political opinions, and socioeconomic status. But, for the sake of this history, diversity's definition will be limited to matters of race and ethnicity.

Regardless of how diversity is defined, it is vitally important for any space. The world is a diverse place, and institutions, higher education institutions especially, should reflect the diversity of the world. More importantly, a truly diverse environment warrants the inclusion and acceptance of minorities and the marginalized; these are the people that have the most to gain from diversity, for they gain the representation they are entitled to and have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Therefore, the evaluation of UW-Madison's diversity efforts provides important insights into how minorities and the marginalized are treated on campus.

Since the late 1980s, UW-Madison has implemented multiple campus-wide diversity initiatives. While the university regularly provides diversity and campus climate updates,⁴ the institution has endeavored to address its long term diversity goals through decade spanning frameworks. UW-Madison has implemented three such plans: The Madison Plan (1988-1998), Plan 2008 (1998-2008), and Affecting R.E.E.L Change for Diversity & Inclusion (2015-Present). With these initiatives, UW-Madison has sought to address the diversity related issues that have plagued the university for many decades.

In taking a broad look at the relationships these initiatives have had with minority and marginalized communities, it could hardly be said that they are collaborative and harmonious. While the university has certainly made an effort to incorporate the voices and viewpoints of

⁴ "Diversity Reports," *University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Diversity, Equity, & Educational Achievement*, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://diversity.wisc.edu/reports/reports/>.

these communities, the diversity initiatives have been met with criticism among groups across campus. The origins, development, and implementation of these plans have been characterized by conflict, and the specific measures undertaken by the various plans have been viewed quite differently by different people. As diversity is such a complex subject, the overall story of UW's diversity initiatives is complex as well.

The Madison Plan

The Madison Plan, UW-Madison's first official diversity initiative, was published by the Office of the Chancellor on February 9, 1988. But the origins of the Madison Plan can be traced to the year prior, specifically to a document known as the Holley Report. This report, which is officially known as the Final Report of the Steering Committee on Minority Affairs, was published in November 1987, and it provided the foundation for the Madison Plan as well as other diversity efforts in the years to come. The Steering Committee on Minority Affairs was created by the university administration in response to a slew of racist incidents on campus, most notably an island themed party hosted by the Phi Gamma Delta (FIJI) fraternity. At this May 1987 event, partygoers dressed in blackface were greeted by a racist caricature of a "native" black man, complete with exaggerated lips and a bone through his nose.⁵ The event sparked heated protests, particularly on the part of UW's Black Student Union, and it was their pressure that prompted the university to create a steering committee on race related issues. This committee, which was composed of students, faculty, staff and administrators, would go on to

⁵ Allison Geyer, "Speech Wars: Can First Amendment Defenders and Social Justice Activists Find Common Ground on Campus?" Isthmus, March 23, 2017, <https://isthmus.com/news/cover-story/can-first-amendment-defenders-and-social-justice-activists-find-common-ground-on-campus/>.

publish the Holley Report, named after committee chairperson Charles Holley. Holley was an undergraduate and co-president of the Black Student Union, and he would go on to graduate from the UW Law School. It is important to note that although Holley was the committee's titular head, some felt that Holley was not the driving force of the committee, but rather an acceptable compromise between the more radical members of the Black Student Union and the administration.⁶

Before giving recommendations on how to solve racial issues on campus, the Holley Report recognizes UW-Madison's shortcomings in "promoting a truly multi-cultural community of learning."⁷ These shortcomings are manifested "in the low percentages of people of color among faculty, staff and students, despite decades of remedial effort; in the low retention rates of minority group students and faculty; and in the content of the UW-Madison curriculum."⁸ The report then goes on to list nine key recommendations that would help foster a truly pluralistic multicultural community. These recommendations include the appointment of a Vice Chancellor of Minority Affairs and Affirmative Action, taking action to ameliorate problems regarding the recruitment and retention of minority students, and having the Chancellor establish goals to recruit, hire, and retain minority faculty members.⁹ Additionally, the report calls for the establishment of an investigatory body to address the concerns of minority non-instructional staff, the establishment of a multicultural center, the mandating of a six credit ethnic studies requirement, and the initiation of an orientation program to increase the comfort of students of color and combat racism.¹⁰ Finally, the report urges the university to reach out to the minority

⁶ Craig Werner, interview by Robert Lange, August 5, 2009, third interview session. OH #1041, University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Program.

⁷ "The Holley Report," *UW-Madison Steering Committee on Minority Affairs*, November 1987, https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Holley-Report-or-Steering-Committee-on-Minority-Affairs-1987_Final-Report.pdf, 1.

⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 3-4.

community in Madison.¹¹ All of these recommendations are important to keep in mind, because many of them are implemented, revisited, or revised throughout the university's subsequent history of diversity planning.

The Madison Plan emerged from the Holley Report due to the efforts of UW-Madison Chancellor Donna Shalala, who took office in January of 1988. Shalala, who was the second woman to lead a major research university and the first woman to head a Big Ten university, was immediately tasked with responding to the Holley Report upon assuming her position. She saw the racial issues on campus as not particular to Wisconsin, but a national issue that manifested throughout higher education.¹² Nevertheless, she regarded these issues as something she unexpectedly inherited, for she felt that they distracted her from her main endeavors as Chancellor.¹³ As for her reaction to the Holley Report, she was extremely critical; she believed that the Steering Committee on Minority Affairs was taken over by its student members, who in turn took a separatist approach in their evaluations and recommendations.¹⁴ Not only did Shalala find this approach unacceptable, but she also found the Holley Report to be not comprehensive enough to change the behavior of the institution.¹⁵ As such, she took matters into her own hands and conducted a series of consultations with students, faculty, staff and community members, and from these consultations she created the Madison Plan. Given that Shalala came into office in January of 1988 and the Madison Plan was published February ninth, it is worth noting that these consultations must have been conducted quite quickly.

The Madison Plan begins by recognizing the gravity of the diversity situation at UW-Madison. It notes how two keys to the university's success, its accessibility and its

¹¹ Ibid, 4.

¹² Oral History Interview with Donna Shalala. Interviewed by Laura Smail, 1988. OH #0357, UW-Madison Oral History Program, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/66138>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

educational excellence, are in jeopardy, as “UW-Madison remains out of reach to the high school students with the fewest resources and the quality of educational experience is seriously compromised by the limited ethnic and cultural diversity of the faculty, staff, and students.”¹⁶

The plan also references overarching demographic realities which prevent African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and Asians Americans from fully participating in higher education. As such, these are the groups targeted within the plan.¹⁷

The Madison Plan is broken down according to its two overarching goals, “providing access” and “providing an excellent and diverse education.” The Plan approaches the subject of accessibility quantitatively, as each of the major goals in the section are attached to a numerical benchmark. For the goal of increasing student financial aid, the Plan aims to provide FASTtrack financial support for 150 economically disadvantaged students every year starting in the fall of 1988.¹⁸ For the goal of increasing minority recruitment, which is noted to be perhaps the most difficult piece of the entire initiative, the Plan aspires to double the number of undergraduate minorities over the following five years, bringing the fall 1993 entering group to 400.¹⁹ Finally, for increasing faculty diversity, the Plan intends to add 70 minority faculty over the following three years.²⁰ Although the second overarching goal, providing an excellent and diverse education, could certainly be measured more qualitatively, there are still numerical benchmarks attached to some of the goals within the category. For example, the Plan aims to close the retention disparity between all students and students of color, though it does mention that numbers don’t speak to the factors that contribute to retention rates.²¹ The majority of the goals

¹⁶ “The Madison Plan,” *UW-Madison Office of the Chancellor*, February 9, 1987, <https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Madison-Plan-19881.pdf>, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid*, 14.

in this category, however, involve the establishment of new diversity related capacities at the university. Like the Holley Report, the Plan recommends the establishment of both an ethnic studies requirement and a multicultural student center.²² Also, as a direct response to the racist events of the year prior, the Plan seeks to establish a non-discriminatory environment, specifically by recommending the formation of a student conduct policy committee that will adopt special or more severe sanctions for students that violate existing conduct rules but involve race, gender, etc.²³

As alluded to in the outlining of the numerical benchmarks, there are various timetables of implementation for each of the proposals outlined in the Madison Plan. Though the Plan's introduction is clear in stating that true progress does not occur quickly, a majority of the proposals were set to be completed by the upcoming September (1988) or the following September (1989). A few of the proposals have three year implementation periods, but the longest implementation period, five years, is devoted to the measures regarding student recruitment. Therefore, as a whole, the Madison Plan can be thought of as a five year endeavor, but all of its goals were reaffirmed in the 1993 Madison Commitment. Thus, like the rest of the campus-wide diversity's plan that would follow it, the Madison Plan was a decade spanning effort.

While Chancellor Shalala was celebrated for her quick response to UW-Madison's racial troubles, the student Minority Coalition was vocal in their opposition to the Madison Plan. The Minority Coalition felt that the Plan did not address the issues in a cohesive and unified manner.²⁴ Also, similar to how Shalala found the Holley Report to be separatist in nature, the Minority Coalition rebuked the Madison Plan for being assimilationist; they regarded the

²² Ibid, 12-16.

²³ Ibid, 17-18.

²⁴ Steve Casanova, "Coalition Waits on Response to Madison Plan," *The Daily Cardinal*, February 11, 1988.

proposals as patronizing, and viewed the issue of racism as being reduced to minority students' inability to adjust to a white institution, thus shifting the focus of minority retention away from the campus.²⁵ The Minority Coalition also pointed to the Plan's failure to establish strong policies against racial harassment, lending credence to their belief that the university tolerates a hostile environment towards students of color.²⁶ Beyond that, these students had ample evidence supporting their belief that the Madison Plan did not change the hostile environment of the campus; in October of 1988, the semester following the publishing of the Madison Plan, the Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) fraternity held a slave auction event, where fraternity members were sold off to do odd jobs dressed in afro wigs and blackface. The university's minority community once again erupted in protest, proving that the steps taken in the Madison Plan could not truly alleviate racial hostilities on campus. To make matters worse, both FIJI and ZBT did not face significant punishment from the university, as the administration cited free speech protections for their lack of action.²⁷

Despite glaring acts of racism continuing on campus, the Minority Coalition received tremendous backlash for their criticisms of the Madison Plan, and the diversity issue became harshly politicized. One Badger Herald editorialist wrote that the Minority Coalition is too leftist and Third-Worldist to accurately represent the interests of all minorities, and they question what the reaction would be if there was a group called the "majority coalition."²⁸ The same editorialist went even harder at the Coalition after Charles Holley praised Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, saying that the Coalition has "malignant hatred for the liberal principles of western

²⁵ Anthony Shadid, "Coalition Meets Shalala on Madison Plan", *The Daily Cardinal*, February 26, 1988.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Allison Geyer, "Speech Wars: Can First Amendment Defenders and Social Justice Activists Find Common Ground on Campus?" *Isthmus*, March 23, 2017, <https://isthmus.com/news/cover-story/can-first-amendment-defenders-and-social-justice-activists-find-common-ground-on-campus/>.

²⁸ David Gammon, "The Madison Plan: The Beginning of the End for the Minority Coalition," *The Badger Herald*, March 2, 1988.

culture which the university embodies.”²⁹ Another writer is even more forthright in his disapproval of what he sees as “preferential treatment” for minorities, stating that “liberals are the true racists” and that “lily white liberals need to stop treating blacks differently than whites, because that is not equality.”³⁰

Beyond the clear racial hostility that persisted following the initial implementation of the Madison Plan, the quantitative results of the Plan speak to a continuance of the university’s struggles with diversity. The Plan succeeded in its financial aid goals, offering 164 (goal of 150) freshmen aid under the FASTrack program in Fall of 1990, but the majority of these recipients were non-minorities.³¹ The Plan failed in doubling undergraduate minority enrollment over five years, as there were 238 minority enrollments in 1993 and the goal was 400.³² The Plan did succeed in overseeing the addition of 70 minority faculty members, however it took five years to do so and the goal was three (and the number of minority faculty decreased following the fifth year due to budget cuts).³³ The retention gap between minority students and the entire student body was not equalized, but minority retention rates were increasing.³⁴ But, despite these quantitative shortcomings, the Madison Plan oversaw the establishment of the Multicultural Student Center and the university’s first ethnic studies requirement, both of which profoundly changed the character of UW-Madison’s education and campus life. Both the student center and the requirement were originally recommended in the Holley Report.

²⁹ David Gammon, “Charles Holley’s UW Legacy,” *The Badger Herald*, March 8, 1988.

³⁰ John Chimura, “Blacks, Whites, and People: Clarence Pendleton and Preferential Treatment,” *The Badger Herald*, March 29, 1988.

³¹ “The Madison Plan Three Years Later,” The Madison Plan and Plan 2008 Records 1988-2008, Accession 2009/060, unprocessed collection. UW Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Accessed October 22, 2020.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Plan 2008

UW-Madison's next campus-wide diversity plan would not come from within the university, but from above it. In the spring of 1998 the UW System adopted Plan 2008, the successor to its previous long term plan Design for Diversity. The System credits itself as being the first university system to adopt a long term plan for racial/ethnic diversity, so Plan 2008 would build upon the supposedly groundbreaking experience gained from Design for Diversity throughout the previous decade.³⁵ In putting Plan 2008 into effect statewide, each of the 15 UW System institutions developed and implemented local plans, submitting them before the UW Board of Regents to ensure that they coincided with goals of the umbrella plan. Though Plan 2008 is clearly a top down endeavor, the umbrella plan states that the overarching framework was "developed collaboratively from the bottom up, through 110 different listening sessions held statewide with students, faculty, staff, community members, regents."³⁶ UW-Madison's Plan 2008 was submitted before the Board of Regents on April 15, 1998 and was officially adopted shortly thereafter. Each institutional unit within UW-Madison also created their own framework for how they would work towards the goals of Plan 2008, submitting them the following semester.

Prior to diving into UW-Madison's Plan 2008, it is important to have a contextual understanding of how the administration was dealing with racial issues at the start of the 21st century. The 2001 undergraduate application booklet lends credence to the belief that the university is concerned with diversity strictly for the sake of its image; the cover of the booklet shows students celebrating at a football game, and amongst the all white crowd is the badly

³⁵ "Plan 2008: Educational Quality Through Racial and Ethnic Diversity," *The University of Wisconsin System*, May 1988, <https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Plan-2008-UW-System.pdf>, 2.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

photoshopped face of a black student, Diallo Shabazz. The image quickly went viral, and the university stressed that the photoshop job was but one person's poor choice.³⁷ Shabazz, however, recognized a bigger problem: "The admissions department that we've been talking about, I believe, was on the fourth floor, and the Multicultural Student Center was on the second floor of that same building. So you didn't need to create false diversity in the picture — all you really needed to do was go downstairs."³⁸ Clearly, the university was attempting to sell a certain image of itself, an image that was not only fake but also an inaccurate representation of what diversity looks like on campus.

Although the photoshop incident is representative of an artificial desire for diversity, Plan 2008 begins by acknowledging the university's "continued commitment to diversity," as well as the progress that was made with the Madison Plan.³⁹ Even though progress was in fact made, the creation of plan 2008 involved analyzing its shortcomings alongside its successes. Unlike the Madison Plan, however, Plan 2008 includes an explicit definition of diversity and its importance: "Diversity of viewpoints, diversity of backgrounds, including gender and ethnic differences, as well as variety within academic specialties, are all vital components of the intellectual life of this great university. This not only contributes to the academic vitality of the campus, but also makes us more competitive among our peer institutions."⁴⁰ The plan also explicitly states who it will target in its efforts: African Americans, Native Americans, Latinx, and Southeast Asians.⁴¹ Although the plan is geared toward the recruitment, retention, and development of these groups,

³⁷ Deena Prichep, "A Campus More Colorful than Reality: Beware that College Brochure," *NPR*, December 29, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/12/29/257765543/a-campus-more-colorful-than-reality-beware-that-college-brochure>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ "Summary Report of UW-Madison Plan 2008: A Blueprint to Enhance Campus Diversity," The Madison Plan and Plan 2008 Records 1988-2008, Accession 2009/060, unprocessed collection. UW Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Accessed October 22, 2020.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

its success will benefit everyone, as “diversity doesn't just mean a campus population that is proportionately representative of target groups.”⁴²

Even though UW-Madison’s Plan 2008 contains many initiatives that are specific to Madison, the overarching goals of the plan are that of the UW System’s Plan 2008, many of which are very similar to the goals of the Madison Plan. There are seven goals in total: (1) Increase the number of Wisconsin high school graduates of color who apply, are accepted, and enroll in UW institutions. (2) Encourage educational partnerships and reach parents and children at a young age. (3) Close the gap in educational achievement; align graduation and retention rates for students of color and the student body as a whole. (4) Increase financial aid for the needy and reduce loan reliance. (5) Increase faculty, academic staff, classified staff, and administrators so that they are represented in the UW System workforce in proportion to the current availability in relevant job pools. Also work to increase their future availability as potential employees. (6) Foster institutional environments and course development that enhance learning and a respect for racial and ethnic diversity, (7) Improve the accountability of the UW System.⁴³

As alluded to in its name, Plan 2008 was a decade-long plan that spanned from the spring of 1998 to the fall of 2008. Thus, the Final Report on Plan 2008 was published in January 2009 by Vice Provost and Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) Damon A. Williams, who was hired as the university’s first full time CDO the semester prior.⁴⁴ In the report, Williams examines “diversity capacity” through models that were conceptualized by himself and Katrina Wade-Golden. According to Williams and Wade-Golden, there are three models of

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Plan 2008 Final Report Submitted by Damon A. Williams (January 2009), The Madison Plan and Plan 2008 Records 1988-2008, Accession 2009/060, unprocessed collection. UW Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Accessed October 22, 2020.

organizational diversity that exist on most campuses: the affirmative action and equity model, the multicultural and inclusion model, and the learning and diversity model.⁴⁵ The affirmative action and equity model is concerned with eliminating overt discrimination and increasing demographic presence of historically underrepresented minorities, women, disabled, and economically disadvantaged individuals. Williams notes that the efforts of Plan 2008 are primarily centered within this model, as exemplified by the successful added diversity capacities of the PEOPLE Pipeline Program and Scholarship, the POSSE Scholarship, and the FirstWave/Urban Arts Learning Community.⁴⁶ But, Williams still notes that progress has been made in the other areas as well. For progress within the multicultural and inclusion model, which emphasizes the creation of educational environments that support the experience and success of diverse social identity groups, Williams points to upgrades made to the Multicultural Student Center, the establishment of the Associated Students of Madison Diversity Committee, and the expanding of ethnic studies departments, programs, and classes.⁴⁷ For progress within the diversity and learning model, which is concerned with improving students cognitive and relational skills and enhancing student learning through incorporating diversity in the curriculum, Williams refers to SEED seminars for faculty, staff, and students, as well as the Leadership Institute and Office for Equity and Diversity-sponsored learning communities.⁴⁸

As for the university's progress with each overarching UW System Goal: (1) Targeted minority enrollment increased 65% over the duration of plan. (2) The educational pipeline was strengthened, as there was an increase in prepared high school graduates, but there was an increase in Wisconsin high school graduates of color in general. (3) The disparity in retention

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

decreased, but unfortunately the gap remained significant. (4) Needs based financial aid was stagnant. (5) There was an increase in minorities as a percentage of all categories of faculty. But there were significant differences in targeted minority group growth, as a majority of the overall growth was due to the addition of Southeast Asian faculty. (6) The university collected student diversity perspective data for the first time in 2006; the responses were generally good, but the procedure for addressing racial harassment remained an issue in the eyes of students. (7) For increasing accountability, each institutional unit that created a localized Plan 2008 published accountability reports online, the university began hosting diversity forums, and specialized orientations and trainings were developed for department chairs.⁴⁹

Despite the positive image of Plan 2008 and its outcomes provided by Williams in his final report, the time periods surrounding the plan's adoption and its closing were filled with conflict and hostility, supporting that notion that Plan 2008 was not only wildly unpopular, but also a failure in the eyes of students of color on campus. Prior to the presentation of Madison's Plan 2008 before the Board of Regents in April of 1998, a group of student organizations came together in opposition of Madison's efforts, calling themselves the 2008 Coalition. This coalition of students believed the university's Plan 2008 would not be effective because it did not adequately ensure retention of students of color, nor it did not create real accountability structures.⁵⁰ These students also believed the plan did not emphasize financial aid opportunities, and more broadly, they felt that Plan 2008 imitated past diversity proposals (like the Madison Plan) which did not fully accomplish their goals.⁵¹

UW-Madison professors also voiced their opinions on the university's efforts. Professor Emeritus of economics W. Lee Hansen submitted his own version of Plan 2008 to the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Claire Herbert, "Faculty Senate endorses Plan 2008," *The Badger Herald*, April 6, 1999.

⁵¹ Ibid.

UW-Madison Faculty Senate, and despite it being voted down, he made sure to have his opinion heard. In a special to the *Daily Cardinal* in April of 1999, Hansen asserted that affirmative action does not work, and the university should direct their efforts to strengthening their role in k-12 education.⁵² In supporting this belief, Hansen notes that very few Wisconsin high school graduates, particularly African Americans, qualify for admission into UW-Madison.⁵³ Professor Emerita of English Deborah Brandt responded to Hansen with her own special to the *Badger Herald*, stating that his attacks on affirmative action are short-sighted as he neglects the history of race and opportunity in America.⁵⁴ This affirmative action debate is important to note, for it would return to the forefront of diversity related discourse on campus at the close of Plan 2008, but the voices involved would not be limited to professors.

After Plan 2008 came to an end, it was clear that it did not get its intended results. While its system-wide shortcomings and its unpopularity prompted the UW System to begin collecting data to strategize for its next diversity plan,⁵⁵ “campus climate became a buzz-word for the failed Plan 2008”⁵⁶ at UW-Madison. It was widely regarded among students of color that their success in Madison was dependent upon the campus climate, and following Plan 2008’s inability to address persistent racial hostility, it is not surprising that one junior FirstWave student called UW-Madison “liberal but not open to change.”⁵⁷ Recognizing these grievances, CDO Williams assisted in the development of a new diversity ideology that would shape the university’s efforts going forward: Inclusive Excellence. As implied from its name, Inclusive Excellence emphasizes

⁵² W. Lee Hansen, “Diversity Plans not Dealing with Facts: Targeted Minorities do not Attend UW for Several Reasons,” *The Daily Cardinal*, April 8, 1999.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Deborah Brandt, “Professor Hansen’s Attack on Affirmative Action Short-Sighted,” *The Badger Herald*, May 11, 1999.

⁵⁵ Taylor Cox, “Plan 2008 Didn’t get Intended Results; UW Expects Changes,” *The Badger Herald*, March 4, 2009.

⁵⁶ Bekkah Blocker, “Student Success Depends on Campus Climate,” *The Badger Herald*, December 8, 2008.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

multiracial and multicultural inclusion alongside merely making sure there is a multiracial and multicultural presence on campus.

Whether it was because of the vagueness of the idea itself or because of the university's failure to adequately convey its meaning, Inclusive Excellence was attacked in a Badger Herald article, where one student stated that the term promotes the idea that inclusion is a form of excellence independent of other standards, therefore it legislates real academic excellence and standards out of existence. Another article, which was much more controversial and inflammatory, attacked affirmative action more generally. In his piece "Race Deserves No Place in University Admissions," Daily Cardinal columnist Andrew Carpenter argued that UW-Madison students are colorblind, and it is harder to be a racist than a minority on campus.⁵⁸ As such, he stated that the focus on race and ethnicity and not other forms of diversity sends a negative message to students of color, and goals like those of Plan 2008 send the message to minority students that they can't succeed on their own.⁵⁹ This supposed implication that minority students may not be as smart, in the eyes of Carpenter, is a mental obstacle for white students as well as a breeder of racial division among all students.⁶⁰ To make Carpenter's perspective even more problematic, he asserts that diversity plans perpetuate racial stereotypes and indoctrinate minorities into a system of handouts, not to mention, they force white students to wonder why the students of color sitting next to them in class got admitted to the university.⁶¹

Carpenter's article sparked an outcry from people across the university community, notably from the Dean of Students Office and the Multicultural Student Coalition. The week following the publishing of Carpenter's article, Dean of Students Lori Berquam reached out to

⁵⁸ Andrew Carpenter, "Race Deserves no Place in University Admissions," *The Daily Cardinal*, November 17, 2009.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

CDO Williams and prompted him to send a message to the campus community about the recent diversity dialogues. In this message, Williams reminds everyone that UW does not use racial quotas but rather a holistic admissions process.⁶² He also made sure to note that many of the opinions voiced regarding diversity had been respectful, and although student newspapers are entitled to freedom of expression, they must understand the implications of the publications for they could further marginalize students who already feel alienated.⁶³ The Multicultural Student Coalition was much more direct in their response to Carpenter, saying that he failed to acknowledge his privilege as a white student, and his use of colorblindness strips minority students of their identities and discounts real and present disparities.⁶⁴

The racial tensions and hostilities that were brought to light at the end of Plan 2008, as well as the dialogues surrounding them, go to show that minority voices and feelings were marginalized throughout the entire diversity planning process. As put by Jessica Pharm, an African American student, the university should not value or condone oversimplified and uninformed opinions about minorities and their place on campus.⁶⁵ Rather, the minority voice should play a central role in both diversity debates and planning. Clearly, the university had a long way to go in creating a successful and impactful diversity plan following Plan 2008, and new strategizing would be necessary going into the future.

Affecting R.E.E.L Change for Diversity & Inclusion (The R.E.E.L. Model)

⁶² Message to faculty from the Office of the Provost: Vice Provost for Diversity and Climate Damon Williams (November 30, 2009), Multicultural Student Center Records 1985-108, Box 4, UW Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Accessed November 13, 2020.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ The Minority Student Coalition, "Complexities of Diversity Require Campus Dialogue," *The Daily Cardinal*, November 24, 2009.

⁶⁵ Jessica Pharm, "Race Debate Needs Minority View," *The Badger Herald*, November 30, 2009.

Thanks to both the Madison Plan and Plan 2008, diversity measures (whether effective or not) were well embedded across university structures going into the 2010s. What the administration needed, however, was another comprehensive plan to coordinate their efforts. That plan would be Affecting R.E.E.L Change for Diversity & Inclusion, which was formally adopted in the spring of 2015. It was the first of the campus-wide diversity plans to be published fully online, and it was placed within a well updated and comprehensive diversity.wisc.edu website that made the past 30 years of diversity reports internet accessible (UW-Madison's Plan 2008 and its final report, interestingly enough, can't be found online).

The process in creating this new framework and its schedule for implementation was a multiyear affair, beginning in the fall of 2012. The official R.E.E.L. Model report credits the first stage in the process as being “the UW-Madison community seeks change,” which then resulted in administrative action: “Shared governance committees form & charges an ad hoc committee to develop a diversity plan.”⁶⁶ This Ad Hoc Diversity Planning Committee, which was comprised of a cross-section of students, faculty, staff, and community constituents, created the diversity framework that underlies the R.E.E.L Model in fall of 2014, after a two year period of collaboration and deliberation. From the goals established by this framework (which will be explored in the following paragraph), the Office of the Vice Provost and Chief Diversity Officer charged six separate committees to develop plans for their implementation. Starting in the spring of 2015, the plan, now known as the R.E.E.L. Model, began collaborative implementation with measurable results.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ “Affecting R.E.E.L. Change for Diversity & Inclusion,” *UW-Madison Division of Diversity, Equity, & Educational Achievement*, May 2015, https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Patricks-preferred-04.08.15-DF-REEL-Report-FINAL_Update.pdf.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

R.E.E.L. stands for retain, equip, engage, and lead, and the five key goals that underlie the model's framework can be divided according to these titular tenets. Under retain, the plan strives to improve institutional access through improved retention (framework goal 5), as well as improve institutional access through effective recruitment of diverse students, faculty, staff and through effective relationship building with the wider community (4). For equip, the goal is to improve coordination of campus diversity planning (2). For engage, the goal is to promote shared values for diversity and inclusion (1). Under lead, the goal is to engage the campus leadership for diversity and inclusion (3).⁶⁸ The model as a whole contains 18 initiatives that will be implemented in three phases over a ten period, with six initiatives being implemented per phase.⁶⁹

As the R.E.E.L. Model is still underway as of 2021, updates on the first and second phases of implementation have been published online in 2017 and 2020 respectively. Highlights for phase 1 include beginning the consistent collection of campus climate survey data, the establishment of an integrated institutional statement on diversity, and the establishment of the Diversity Inventory Project, a searchable online database of UW-Madison's diversity initiatives to help improve coordination.⁷⁰ Highlights for phase two include increased usage of the Green Zone model to identify students who may be experiencing academic difficulty, increased STEM support for students of color, and positive feedback about the annual diversity forum, which had seen a 279% increase in attendance from 2015 to 2020 with 96% of attendees saying they are very or extremely likely to attend a future forum.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "R.E.E.L. Change Implementation Progress 2016-2017," *UW-Madison Division of Diversity, Equity, & Educational Achievement*, 2017,

<https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/REEL-Change-Implementation-Progress-2016-17.pdf>.

⁷¹ "R.E.E.L. Change Phase 2 Updates," *UW-Madison Division of Diversity, Equity, & Educational Achievement*, Fall 2020, https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/REEL-Change-Phase-2-Update_ACCESSIBLE.pdf.

Although the aforementioned progress updates paint the R.E.E.L. Model in a positive light, student and faculty reactions have done quite the opposite. Prior to its implementation, students like ASM Chair Genevieve Carter expressed concern that the plan would not be receptive to input once it was underway, especially as compared to plans of the past.⁷² Although administrators have stressed open dialogue through forums and other discussions, students have reported feeling like they are stuck in a loop where nothing materializes. As put by student activist Kenneth Cole: “We’ve been having these types of conversations with administration for so many years now, it’s actually starting to get disrespectful.”⁷³ Beyond students, Professor W. Lee Hansen once again took a critical stance against the university’s efforts; in a *Badger Herald* letter to the editor, Hansen argued that the current diversity plan is just another dead-end, as “what it is sadly missing are connections to past and ongoing efforts to push forward on the goals of diversity. More attention is given to the cosmetics of the document, as evidenced in its too-clever title.”⁷⁴ Additionally, Hansen compared the university’s efforts to a constant spinning of wheels with little forward progress, as he failed to see the plan’s connection with the foundational 2014 report of the Ad Hoc Diversity Planning Committee as well as the 50 to 60 long-established minority and disadvantaged student programs.⁷⁵

A behind scenes look at the multiyear creation process of the R.E.E.L. Model works to prove Hansen’s assertions, as this process was clouded by miscommunication and lack of direction. According to Patrick Sims, UW-Madison CDO from 2012 to 2020, it was a risky yet

⁷² Julian Newman, “Campus Diversity Framework Near Completion Despite Concern over Lacking Student Voice,” *The Badger Herald*, April 16, 2015.

⁷³ Jonah Beleckis, “Staggering Forward: UW Madison’s Central Diversity Plan remains Clouded by Miscommunication, Lack of Direction During Drafting and Implementation,” *The Daily Cardinal*, May 2, 2016.

⁷⁴ W. Lee Hansen, “Letter to the Editor: Current Diversity Plan is Just Another Dead-End,” *The Badger Herald*, April 21, 2015.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

strategic choice to not include numerical benchmarks within the R.E.E.L. Model.⁷⁶ Although both the Madison Plan and Plan 2008 included such benchmarks, Sims felt that not doing so would allow different campus groups, colleges, or programs to have freedom in tailoring the recommendations to their specific needs.⁷⁷ Although this sounds good in theory, this decision may have further contributed to the vagueness of the plan, a vagueness that was only exacerbated by inadequate communication. According to Ryan Adresias, a graduate student and co-chair of the Ad Hoc Diversity Planning Committee, there were significant gaps in communication for engaging the campus leadership, as the committee only met with Chancellor Blank once, and CDO Sims was the only administrator to play a serious role.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the administrators who were integral to the framework's inception in 2012— former Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Paul DeLuca, former interim Chancellor David Ward and former CDO Williams—were no longer present at UW-Madison when implementation began in 2015.⁷⁹ To add to this disconnect, Adresias commented that the Ad Hoc Committee had little-to-no contact with the implementation committees and the offices that would actually conduct the implementation, like the Multicultural Student Center, the LGBT Campus Center (now the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center), and the Dean of Students Office.⁸⁰ In addition to inadequate communication, Adresias felt that a lack of accountability would further contribute to the plan's ineptitude. He noted that when editing the framework, the Faculty Senate made everything optional, “taking the few teeth that were in it, out.”⁸¹ But, overall, Adresias saw the plan as “low-hanging fruit,” for it

⁷⁶ Jonah Beleckis, “Staggering Forward: UW Madison’s Central Diversity Plan remains Clouded by Miscommunication, Lack of Direction During Drafting and Implementation,” *The Daily Cardinal*, May 2, 2016.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

could not address difficult goals: “We're really avoiding the actual hard stuff that we need to do, but our rhetoric has always been that we're really forward thinking, we're at the cutting edge.”⁸²

It is quite clear that “there is a consensus among key players—administrators, committee chairs and student leaders—that the goals of the diversity framework are what the university should be striving for, but disagreement, disconnect and discontent still surround the framework in practice.”⁸³ Like the campus-wide plans of the past, it can hardly be said that the university hit the mark in dealing with the subject of diversity. But, regardless, the R.E.E.L. Model is quite different from the Madison Plan and Plan 2008. As previously mentioned, the R.E.E.L. Model does not contain numerical benchmarks, nor does it contain specific budgeting. This speaks to how the plan is rather abstract and conceptual in nature, but in counteracting that, CDO Sims made sure to separate the framework from implementation. There is no such separation in the Madison Plan or Plan 2008, but Sims felt that separate implementation was needed because “something had to get more granular and specific.” Sims’ role, and role of the CDO more broadly, was also something that was new to the R.E.E.L. Model. Sims had quite a bit of discretion in shaping the plan, as he was given 80 initiatives from committees and condensed them down to 18 for the final product.⁸⁴ During the creation of both the Madison Plan and Plan 2008 there was no such CDO position, nor was so much administrative power over the plans vested into one individual (with the exception of Chancellor Shalala with the Madison Plan). The R.E.E.L. Model was also, by far, the most decentralized plan. Although it oversaw the establishment of a centralized database with the Diversity Inventory Project, it was purposefully decentralized so it could fit within different contexts on campus. Additionally, the R.E.E.L. Model was not as prominent on campus as past plans. When comparing the student newspapers

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

around the times of each plan, it is abundantly clear that the R.E.E.L. Model has generated much less diversity related discourse. In fact, a 2016 survey conducted by the Daily Cardinal found that nearly 80% of 3,500 respondents had never heard of the diversity framework.⁸⁵

Conclusion

With the Madison Plan, Plan 2008, and the R.E.E.L. Model, UW-Madison has pursued campus-wide diversity and inclusion for the past three decades. While official reports regarding these efforts have recognized their success, the opinions of individuals across the campus community, most notably students of color, have painted these efforts in a much different light. Recent incidents on campus also speak to a persistent hostile environment for people of color, which further speaks to the ineffectuality of the plans. But before exploring what the future may hold, one must see where the university is today.

From 2011 to 2020 there was a 4.9% increase in minority enrollment, and as of 2020 minorities are 18.8% of students at all levels.⁸⁶ Minorities comprise 19.8% of undergraduates, and as mentioned in the introduction, only one major public research institution has a lower percentage for this measurement, that being Iowa State.⁸⁷ The average for major public research institutions is 37%.⁸⁸ Although there is now no first year retention gap between students of color and the entire student body, there remains a seven point six year graduation rate gap, as it is 88% for all students and 81% for minorities.⁸⁹ There has been a 4.2% increase in minority faculty

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ "Diversity Update 2020," *University of Wisconsin Madison Office of the Provost: Academic Planning and Institutional Research*, October 2020, <https://diversity.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Diversity-Forum-2020-APIR-Diversity-Update.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

from 2011 to 2020, as 22% of all faculty identify with minority groups (but only 8.1% identify as non-Asian). By quantitative standards, there is still much work to be done for diversity at UW-Madison.

In terms of campus climate, which can be measured more qualitatively, the past five years has been anything but calm. #TheRealUW was a social media movement that occurred in the spring of 2016, where students vented their anger and shared their experiences of racism on campus. The movement once again pushed racist incidents to the public sphere but on a very large scale, exposing the university which has so often tried to portray itself as open and progressive. The movement was sparked after a threatening, vulgar, and racist note was slid under the dorm room door of a black student. Racist graffiti and visible examples of bigotry have also been present on campus, like the neo-Nazi symbols found on the UW Bookstore and near Engineering Hall in 2016, as well as the desecration of the DeJope Hall fire circle in 2017. The fall of 2019 also saw uproar as the annual homecoming video included footage of an all white student body. The Homecoming Committee took footage of minority student organizations but they were left out during the editing process. Regardless of whether this was intentional or not, the video worked to further marginalize students of color, and they protested and stood in solidarity against their lack of representation.

Regardless of the problems, conflicts, and shortcomings found within the history of UW-Madison's diversity planning, there is always hope for the future. But making real progress will require certain steps. The university must first look at what is working and what is not. Clearly the university is not doing enough to ensure a welcoming campus environment, nor is it addressing diversity issues in a solid and cohesive manner. Leaving specific measures up to institutional units, as was done with the R.E.E.L. Model, is not resulting in unified change. But,

as for what has worked, students have responded well to having their voices heard and to having their own spaces with adequate resources. For example, the various Multicultural Student Centers in the Red Gym are very popular, as well as the annual diversity forums. The administration must also recognize the issues that have persisted ever since they began their efforts. Again, there has been no slowing of racist incidents since the late 1980s, and the recruitment of African American and Native American students has been a consistent issue. Budgeting has also been a significant hindrance, but that could also speak to whether or not diversity is a priority for the administration. Ryan Adresias, the aforementioned Ad Hoc Diversity Committee co-chair, said he did not believe diversity is a priority for the university,⁹⁰ and this belief is supported by both budgetary constraints and the lack of diversity related communication among high level administrators. For real institutional change, diversity must be a priority throughout all levels of the administration, and this prioritizing should also be reflected within the university's spending as well.

Above all else, the voices of minority students are the keys to creating genuine change. Students of color have the best understanding of the racial issues that exist at UW-Madison, and they also have the most to gain from a more diverse and inclusive campus. Arguably the most groundbreaking document presented in this history was the Holley Report; it was the first report to recommend an ethnic studies requirement and the Multicultural Student Center, both of which profoundly changed the character of the university. Additionally, the report set in motion the next three decades of diversity related improvements, and all of this originated from the vision of students who "took over"⁹¹ the committee behind the report. So, clearly, the most substantive and

⁹⁰ Jonah Beleckis, "Staggering Forward: UW Madison's Central Diversity Plan remains Clouded by Miscommunication, Lack of Direction During Drafting and Implementation," *The Daily Cardinal*, May 2, 2016.

⁹¹ Oral History Interview with Donna Shalala. Interviewed by Laura Smail, 1988. OH #0357, UW-Madison Oral History Program, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/66138>.

impactful change comes from the bottom-up, from the self-determination of students of color.

Their leadership and their vision is what UW-Madison needs for fostering diversity and inclusion going into the future.