

## Talent, Diversity and the Global University, 10/8/2009

Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to talk and the opportunity to reflect on the nexus of talent, diversity, and the global university. As dean of International Studies, these are concerns which occupy me deeply.

Today, it is clear that the nature of universities is changing. We operate increasingly under the conditions of globalization, with speed and intensity in the movement of people, ideas, knowledge, capital, and technology. Ours is a framework of growing large-scale competition among institutions—for students, scholars, degrees, funds, partnerships. At the same time, we hear a seemingly paradoxical call for deeper and broader collaboration within academia, between institutions, and with our key stakeholders. It is a landscape that, to quote my colleague Amy Stambach, “engenders dramatic opportunities for cooperation and development and, at the same time, is characterized by profound inequities and uncertainties that breed tensions and conflicts.”

The result of global forces at work is a reality that yields not a “flat” world, but a difficult terrain of peaks and valleys. Despite its interconnection and interdependence, global reality is multilingual, multicultural, and multi-centered.

“For Wisconsin and the world”, going forward, the Campus strategic framework points to a horizon where our “globalness” and our “Wisconsinness” work in synergies that give our institution both roots and wings. The document is an invitation to be together the architects of a leading research university of global reach and influence that remains

firmly grounded in the Wisconsin values of excellence, innovation, and public service.

In the past few years, our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners have revealed a heightened awareness of the global forces shaping our world and of the transformation that universities are undergoing. Of us, they have demanded more international experiences, an expanded frame of thought, and greater global reach, connections, and influence, as they, themselves, seek to change the world—and to change it more profoundly than have previous generations—for communities half way around the world, across the State or in our neighborhood.

I'd like to suggest a dual approach to the question of how the twenty-first century university transforms itself under the conditions of globalization, namely, by focusing on talent and engagement. And as I will primarily discuss “global talent” today, I would like to sketch for you, very briefly, the contours of “global engagement.”

“Global engagement” refers to the role and responsibility of universities in a global era. It is a concept that underlines the development of our knowledge organization as a responsible global citizen, harnessing the power of research and education to address human challenges—wherever they occur—and building the partnerships required, across disciplines and across oceans, to make the world a better place. For instance In the spirit of Wisconsin and the world, I see our campus making substantial advances to address issues of sustainability and global public health.

The other aspect of university transformation vis-à-vis globalization is talent, an evolving concept that I find intriguing and directly related to

our changing global reality and to our gathering today on diversity and inclusive excellence.

Just a few years ago, leading human resource firms portrayed the talent arena as existing in a state of heightened competition, if not war. Narrow pipelines feed few, exclusive talent pools from which leading firms hand-pick their international leadership. The practice has proved polarizing in educational, economic, cultural, and ethnic dimensions, and limiting in terms of the innovation needed to address a set of complex and urgent challenges at the intersection of the economy, the environment and society.

These views and practices are still with us, but they are no longer universally accepted. Allow me to quote from a leadership report entitled “Tomorrow’s Global Talent” “being a successful company over the long term, in a world of unprecedented challenges will mean looking for people from different social and educational backgrounds, with different social networks and with different personal interests to ensure the breadth of diversity of thinking to see and make connections and to be able to respond in innovative and new ways.”

It’s a perspective that puts a premium on diversity and innovation. Again, from “Tomorrow’s Global Talent”: “Talent ... is all around us waiting to be unleashed. [...] ‘talent’ should not be seen as a rare quality, but a diverse, multifaceted one that exists in everyone; it is abundant.”

An area in which I see us making a significant difference is in advancing the discussion that re-envisioning what we mean by "talent."

The hallmarks of global talent are diversity, innovative thinking, and multiplicity of perspectives. Rethinking, identifying, and engaging global talent has become the search for excellence in a world that functions under the conditions of globalization, with its movement of people and ideas. Diversity is at the core of this drive for excellence. Why? Because we are moving toward a multi-centered world that emphasizes collaboration as much as competition in a complex fabric of cultures, background, nationalities, and ethnicities. The idea of a diverse workforce is taking on new meaning. Diversity is synonymous with creativity, versatility, and inventiveness—built on diverse human perspectives, experiences, and interactions—and is the engine of a knowledge economy that tackles complex challenges that play out on a global scales with deep local impacts.

Our focus on developing global talent has meant going beyond the notion of global competence. Global talent subsumes and expands the notion of global competence while shifting emphasis from the areas of competence to the globally competent **graduate** in his or her education and career. It is the person, therefore, rather than an inventory of skills, that becomes the focus of our work.

A Global talent emphasis means educating graduates across professions for a multicultural and multilingual world; it means celebrating their skills and achievements; and it means building local/global talent alliances with business, government, and non-profits. It requires a flexible, committed, and entrepreneurial network of internal and external partners that provide knowledge, opportunities, funding, and nurturing.

[What do we gain by shifting focus from skills to putting individuals stage center? In short, a great deal. Individuals are unpredictably

creative, they have energy and resilience; Individuals fuel innovation and creativity. But global talent is not about individualism, on the contrary, it is a focus on the individual in his or her capacity to understand, connect, give and receive information, build mutually beneficial partnerships, and address problems for the public good.]

Our focus on talent has opened up new vistas, with a greater attention on our communities of students and faculty, our ability to connect, our capacity to innovate, and the energy and imagination needed to begin to tackle major challenges across Campus, across the State, across the world.

Today, I invite you to think differently and broadly about talent. Not as a scarce quality possessed by an elite group, but one that exists in everyone. not rare, but abundant.

Talent is multifaceted; it is about connection and inclusiveness. Rethinking, discovering, and engaging talent does not lead to a single path for development, but creates multiple, intersecting paths that identify, reveal, and engage its diversity across the complexity in which we live as citizens and professionals, across Campus, in Wisconsin and the world.

