

Academic Planning Statement #2
(ACPS-2)

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

The Application of Job Market and Placement
Information to Academic Planning

Approved by the Regents

February 7, 1975

THE APPLICATION OF JOB MARKET AND PLACEMENT
INFORMATION TO ACADEMIC PLANNING

Background

Among the policy issues addressed by the Department of Administration to the UW System is the question of the effectiveness of limiting enrollments in selected academic programs on the basis of placement and job market information.

For reasons which will be developed in this paper, the UW System, in common with institutions of higher education generally, finds information on current placement or job market conditions to be of little value as the basis for program decisions which would require enrollment limitations in selected academic programs. Such information does influence student selection of programs, and in this way may affect enrollments.¹ But the effect follows from student choice, rather than institutionally imposed quotas, and the University System believes that this is wiser academic and public policy.

However, the question of using placement and job market information is not limited to the wisdom of imposing enrollment limitations. In developing its capability for both short range and long range academic planning, the UW System is using placement and job market information in: (a) audit and review of existing academic programs; (b) review of proposals for new academic programs; (c) planning priorities for the development of academic programs; and (d) developing effective career counseling for students and prospective students. The specific question addressed by state government therefore falls naturally within a larger policy question in the area of academic planning and decision making.

This broader policy question has been extensively discussed by the institutions and central administration in the last year, and it will be useful at this time to summarize the current position and practice of the System and its institutions relative to the use of placement and job market information, and to project possible lines of development for such uses.

The purpose of this paper

This paper is designed:

- (1) To explore the issues underlying use of job market and placement data in academic program decision and planning;
- (2) To describe current University practice in using such information;
- (3) To state the "next steps" proposed by the System for improved use of placement and job market information.

The paper will be used as the basis for policy discussion with the institutions and their faculties, and with the Regents as well as with state government. Refinement of its propositions and projections should result from such discussion.

I.

Issues underlying use of job market and placement information
in academic program decisions and planning.

¹ For example, UW campuses report decreases of up to 47% in teacher education enrollments between 1971 and 1974. This effect seems clearly related to placement information and job market projections.

The use of job market and placement information in academic program decision making and planning is highly controversial. To understand this, one must recognize that such uses have been only recently proposed or undertaken in America; that they seem to proceed from a conception of universities quiet contrary to a major historical purpose of universities; and that uses of current information pose a host of technical problems leading to the most serious concern about the methods through which use could be undertaken.

These propositions can be briefly illustrated by a summary description of the historical nature of American public universities, and the methods traditionally used in academic program decision making and academic planning. Why were universities founded?

Oversimplification is inherent in any brief answer to this question. But assuming this risk, the following observations should be held in view in any discussion of the uses of job market and placement information in academic planning.

American public universities were not founded simply to serve society by providing highly trained people to fill specified jobs. To be sure, they did accept and perform this mission. But they performed it by perceiving that the knowledge and methods of learning inherent in study of basic arts and sciences could be applied to such goals as personal fulfillment, citizenship, and vocation. By placing traditional studies in the context of the personal aspirations of students, and the needs of society, American public universities sought both to invigorate traditional studies, and to enlarge the contribution that knowledge could make to the improvement of society and the human condition.²

This marriage of traditional scholarship to practical societal goals has been central to the strength of American public universities. The strength derives, however, from institutions capable both of remembering and maintaining that which is traditional and fundamental to higher learning, while seeking the added value to be realized through finding the connections between tradition and the needs of people and their society.

Remembering and maintaining that which is fundamental means that universities have as one basic reason for being the mission of recovering, extending, organizing, criticizing, and communicating the cultural and intellectual resources of their society and civilization. The mission is a "public good" in that its fulfillment protects the state and its citizens from loss of connection with their cultural and intellectual resources. All civilized societies have viewed this as a vital need, basic to the well-being of society, and particularly important in a democracy. For universities, it is the fundamental mission in that no other institution in society maintains the community of scholars necessary to its achievement.

The added value possible to public universities is that of organizing patterns of study or experience which give individuals maximum opportunity for personal growth and fulfillment, including preparation for the professional, technical, and leadership roles needed by their society.

In organizational terms, complex public universities are often perceived as providing basic studies through Colleges of letters and science, or liberal arts and vocational studies through various professional schools or programs. This is

² The mission of the University of Wisconsin System as stated in the merger implementation statute (36.01(2) Wis. Stats.) states this position clearly: "The mission of this System is to develop human resources, to discover and disseminate knowledge, to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses, and to serve and stimulate society by developing in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities; scientific, professional, and technological expertise; and a sense of purpose. Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended education, and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the System is the search for truth."

much too simple a view of the way in which basic academic disciplinary knowledge is related to the vocational and professional goals of students, and of the way in which knowledge from practical disciplines and the professions extends and informs the basic disciplines. The point to be made is that the public university should not be thought of as an institution designed simply to serve a current or projected job market, nor as an institution designed simply to maintain and extend knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Effective academic planning seeks to maximize both goals through their potential for mutual reinforcement.

How has academic planning been conducted?

Universities founded for the purposes asserted above planned academic programs by mediating two major considerations?

1. The internal definition given by the community of scholars to the nature and range of studies which were essential to comprehend the intellectual and cultural heritage of their society, and to develop enhanced personal competence for learning, or competence for entry into highly organized professions.

This process of internal definition has generally defined the basic sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts characterizing higher learning, as well as the studies needed for entry into the professions.³

The criterion or value emphasized in the process of internal definition has been quality, and the differential characteristic of universities has been a commitment to qualitative protection and enhancement of the intellectual and cultural resources of a society and its people.

2. Student demand, or the numbers of persons wishing to enhance their general understanding and competence for learning, or to develop particular kinds of professional competence, or both. The consideration of student demand emphasized the value of access or opportunity for personal growth as influencing the design of the academic program.

Given these considerations, universities have generally asked that students distribute some part of their learning across the range of studies representing major dimensions of their cultural and intellectual heritage. They have also encouraged specialization, or concentration on one or more of such studies, or on studies leading to particular kinds of professional or vocational competence.

In short, the range and size of programs were determined by the joint consequences of considerations internal to the nature of higher education, and considerations involving the total number of students wishing opportunity, and the distribution of their preference. Planning responded to two major values or criteria: (a) the value of quality through definition of the nature of higher learning; and (b) the value of access or individual growth by offering people the particular kinds of opportunity they desired.

The historical bases for academic planning did mediate the relationship of higher education to the job market through the pressure of student demand. That is, students generally perceive university education not only as a means of personal growth, but also as an avenue to enhanced opportunity for employment, and for realizing higher career aspirations. Student demand and aspirations have unquestionably supported the rapid expansion of professional programs within the university context, including not only the traditional learned professions such as medicine and law, but also a multiplicity of emerging professions, such as teaching, agriculture, engineering, and allied health fields, nursing, industrial technology, business, and others thought to be supported by and supportive of basic universities studies.

The first extensive use of job market analysis as a basis for academic

³ The internal university definitions of competence needed for entry into various professions are, of course, influenced substantially by accrediting standards set by the professions and government.

planning came in relation to studies designed to support expansion of opportunity in professions where high costs, sometimes joined to pressure for admission controls by the profession itself, had served to create a shortage of particular categories of professionals. Job market and placement studies, joined to studies of student demand served to enforce the need for resources to expand opportunity. In this sense, universities became selective users of job market information to support expansion in such areas as medicine, dentistry, law, engineering and technology, urban and environmental planning, nursing, pharmacy, and so forth. They also received and sought federal assistance aimed both at encouraging students to enter fields thought to be in short supply nationally, and at encouraging universities to expand opportunity in such areas. Such uses have supported the historical use of student demand as one of the bases for planning, and have been undertaken without much thought as to their possible application in other contexts.

In the last five years, the rapid expansion of higher education joined to rising costs has caused increased attention to efficiency as a third value or criterion in academic planning. The question is raised with increasing frequency as to whether or not society should continue to support certain types of opportunity for higher education at current levels if it appears that the combined forces of available opportunity and student demand are producing more highly educated people than the job market will require.

The radical nature of the question needs to be observed if one is to understand the sharp and often negative reaction it has aroused in the academic community. Carried to its ultimate logic, the question seems to propose that job market projections rather than the choices of citizens seeking education should determine the size and kind of opportunity to be made available. Higher education would thus be treated as a service institution for the state rather than as an institution serving the public good generally and citizens individually. If the ultimate logic is thought to apply to both basic higher educational studies as well as professional programs, the question seems to challenge the very reason for being of studies which are primarily aimed not at preparation for a particular vocation, but at enhancement of the individual and civilization. Institutions founded to preserve, enlarge, and communicate the cultural and intellectual heritage might now be judged on the basis of criteria associated with career preparation rather than higher education.

Difficulties in the application of job market and placement information to academic planning

Given these considerations, some critics would dismiss any use of job market and placement information as antithetical to the fundamental nature of higher education. However, the generality of response has been more moderate, and has emphasized some of the critical difficulties in using such information wisely. The academic community generally has accepted efficiency as a criterion which it must apply to its own planning, and which must modify (but not supplant) planning decisions made on the basis of considerations internal to the academic community, or considerations responsive to student demand.

From this perspective, job market and placement data are accepted as relevant to the processes of academic program decision making, and academic planning. It is one of several kinds of information related to the efficiency of a particular program in responding to individual and societal need. But the question remains as to how such information can be useful rather than the source of poor decisions and planning. The difficulties inherent in use may be summarized as follows:

1. If major consideration is given to placement or job market information in shaping the form of universities, we may overlook the major contribution made by universities to the employment needs of society. The American university system has developed for this society an expanding population of people with enhanced intellectual skills, capacity for learning, and versatility in meeting the demands of emerging occupations. This resource has been a major reason for the capacity of our society to fill occupational needs in a rapidly changing technological society; i.e., as business, industry, and government define new roles and needs, there are people who can fill these roles and needs with relatively short-term orientation or training. This consequence of an expanded base of well educated people has been amply documented in major economic studies

demonstrating that the productivity for the American economy is directly correlated with investment in higher education. It would be folly, even from the perspective of economic planning, to damage the major resource developed by higher education in search for a better fit between the current curriculum, and the current profile of job market needs. To do this would be to abandon development of "versatile people" able to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society in favor of curriculum always in tune with the past or present, but never in tune with the future.⁴

2. Closely related to #1 is them is the mistake of assuming that college graduates who do not find immediate employment in a field closely related to their major field of study represent a misplaced public investment, and a waste of time and money by the individual. This is not the case. For example, persons preparing for certification as teachers are also undertaking a general or liberal education as the major aspect of their studies. Certification is an added value which affects little, if at all, the development of personal competence in the general or liberal education sense. The fact that many people who prepare as teachers find employment in business, industry, or government is not evidence of misappropriation of resources or time, but of the functioning of the societal resource created by well educated people. That non-school employers often express a preference for teacher education graduates was confirmed in the early 1974 discussions of the relationship between manpower projections and teacher education programming held on University of Wisconsin campuses.

3. The notable inaccuracy of long-term job market projections, and the damaging consequences of overreaction by higher education or by students to short-term placement information or projections, needs to be underlined.

In well-documented cases in engineering a teacher education, students have overreacted to current placement information by choosing alternative educational goals. The student entering higher education will not complete a baccalaureate objective for at least four years, and more probably for at least from five to ten years. He or she may complete a post-baccalaureate goal in less than six, or as many as a dozen years. The problems of current graduates finding employment in a particular field have frequently induced a decline in entering enrollments, and a shortage of prepared people at the point in history they enter the market.

4. The dubious consequences of planning efforts which deliberately diminish the importance of individual choice in our society, while highlighting market planning, needs to be observed. The best evidence is that uncoerced freedom of choice by individuals is a better guide to planning effective and efficient institutional services than heavily centralized planning of the choices people ought to make. In the former approach, some people may make unwise choices but the aggregate consequence will be that institutions will serve most people well. In the latter approach, mistaken judgments generate a coerced lack of wisdom for many people.

5. General saturation of the job market in a specified profession may not speak at all to the affirmative action goals of society, the UW System, and its institutions. Care must be exercised that general scarcity of employment opportunities in occupations requiring high levels of entry preparation not be allowed to obscure the opportunities which are and should be available to members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women. Factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity are beginning to influence short and long range job market projections and the need for educational support to fill needs projected on this basis.

Universities should and do develop a capability for rapid implementation of short-term training to meet short-term marketplace needs. In the University of Wisconsin System, this capability is one of the missions of University Extension

⁴ It is worth observing that the question "Should we restrict access to higher education in the absence of job market opportunity for graduate?" might well be reversed. "Should we not expand access in such a condition?" In the absence of planning aimed at using the talents of young people, restricting educational opportunity would exacerbate rather than temper problems of unemployment and the public costs that would follow.

which uses the established resource base of the system to plan and undertake cooperatively with Universities and Centers, the short-term tasks of continuing education or public service in response to urgent public need. However, the universities themselves do not and should not plan academic programs in the basic disciplines, or for entry into professions, on this basis. To do so would be to abandon the use of internal definition of the nature of higher learning, and to abandon the criterion of quality as a distinguishing characteristic of higher education.

II.

Current University Practice in Using Placement and Job Market Information

Mindful of the limitations and pitfalls described in the foregoing section, the University System seeks informed use of placement and job market information in decisions relating to academic programs and academic planning. Use is therefore selective and emphasizes the fact that such information must be employed as one part of the information available in reaching a complex decision. Current uses may be summarized in terms of: (a) policy; (b) program review; (c) long-range planning; and (d) student counseling.

A. Policy

The criteria established by the Regents review of new academic programs, and audit and review of existing programs, include "societal need" as one of the six major criteria.

These criteria appear in the document ACPS-1 (revised), which now serves as the basic statement of system planning principles. The criteria are supported by the forms for program review appearing in the document ACIS-1.

Examination of "societal need" includes consideration of available information on student demand for a particular program, available information on placement experience of students receiving such preparation, and any forecasts of job demand on a state or national basis. Information on trends over a period of years is obviously considered of greater value than single year information.

B. Program review

1. New academic programs. Strong emphasis is given to societal need as a criterion for approval of new program proposals. The university is entering a period of limited growth, and in the next decade a probable decline in numbers of students seeking traditional baccalaureate level programs. In the absence of strong demonstration of probable societal need, decisions will favor the use of available resources to strengthen where needed the quality of existing programs rather than establishing new cost centers. In the case of high cost post-baccalaureate professional programs, the question of societal need would be salient to any decision for expansion.

2. Review and audit of existing programs. The university system will seldom move to eliminate an existing program simply on the basis of placement information, or negative job market forecasts. The more effective avenues to efficiency are: attenuation, consolidation, or elimination of existing programs in the presence of significantly low or declining student interest; consolidation or elimination of low enrollment courses not deemed essential to the quality of a total program; consolidation or elimination of programs judged to be qualitatively suspect and holding little promise of enhancement. A decision to attenuate, consolidate, or eliminate a program on the basis of the criteria stated above would be reinforced by unfavorable placement or job market projection information. A strong demonstration of societal need for the program based on placement data and job market projections could lead to a decision to strengthen the program and seek to increase its attractiveness to students.

C. Long-range academic planning

All institutions of the System are now engaged in long-range planning as part of a process for creating and maintaining a Long-Range Academic Plan for the

System. Draft plans are in place for all of the institutions, and the process of integrating institutional plans with system planning principles and objectives is underway. Emphasis is being given to the development of the planning process at all levels of the university, to the end that biennial updating will be standard practice.

The long-range planning process involves creation and continuous review of systemwide priorities for the development of academic programs. This task was undertaken in connection with the 1973-75 and 1975-77 biennial budgets. Priorities for 1977 and beyond will be developed through the system long-range academic plan prior to development of the 1977-79 budget.

Job market information is used in developing long-range system priorities, together with information on student demand projections, and societal need as defined from the perspective of the problems faced by contemporary society.

For purposes of long-range academic planning, trend information on the job market in large categories of employment (such as technology, health science, human service, etc.) is of more value than information about a particular occupation within that category. This derives from the fact that projections of need for particular occupations are inherently inaccurate, but projections concerning large categories seem somewhat more reliable. Planning based on large-scale trends may be undertaken with some confidence since persons preparing for a particular occupation within a large category would have considerable versatility in moving into related occupations.

D. Career counseling

The university system recognizes its responsibility to provide students with both advising on educational choices, and counseling on career problems or choices. The system and its institutions emphasize individual choice by students, but seek to support informed choice. In short, the informed free choice of students is a central guide to academic planning and program decision making. Career counseling supported by the best available current information on placement and the job market can manifestly support informed free choice by students. The responsibility is currently exercised in the following ways.

1. The system maintains toll free telephone advisory service⁵ for citizens of Wisconsin on the educational offerings of the system, including information on the programs which would relate to the occupational or professional objectives of those who inquire.

2. All institutions maintain advisory services for students and prospective students on their educational offerings, the relationship of these to occupational or professional interests, and counseling on career interests. Career counseling is generally supported by opportunity for interested students, on a fee for service basis, to undertake aptitude testing and more intensive counseling.

3. All departments and schools maintain information on placement of graduates, and professional schools maintain information on the job market for students and prospective students. Fields whose graduates traditionally face precarious career problems (such as those in the performing arts), advise students about those problems. The system believes that this kind of information, other than in summary form needed for long-range planning, is best maintained in detail at the program level, rather than the system level since; (a) such decentralization assures the greatest communication of useful information to those needing it at the lowest cost; and (b) decentralization also assures the greatest currency for the information.

4. The University System provides instruction in career counseling.

III.

⁵ This service, entitled HELP (Higher Education Location Program), has been particularly well received by current and prospective UW System's students.

Next Steps

1. The University System is seeking, in cooperation with VTAE, funding for a current study of placement experience of graduates. If this research can be undertaken, it is hoped that it will provide the data base for development of more sensitive research on the long-term career, or life satisfaction consequences of various patterns of higher education.

2. The System and its institutions should undertake the process of study, discussion and information sharing needed to generalize the use of "best practices" on career counseling within the System.

3. The System and its institutions should emphasize planning designed better to relate a limited spectrum of basic, or core studies to a broad range of potential professional or occupational applications. The recent trend toward increased use of educational plans relating campus-based studies to internship or field experience provides one avenue for maintaining both continuity for the community of scholars and scholarship protected by universities and flexibility in the relationship of this community to a rapidly changing society.

4. The System, in conjunction with appropriate State Planning Agencies and professional groups, should seek to develop more accurate, categorical trend information on future societal needs. Information of this type (i.e., future trends in the Health Sciences, etc.) would have a substantial effect on the efficacy of the academic long range planning activity of the System and its Institutions.