



Red & Blue

A conversation series about bridging the divide

Zeidler Center Dialogue Report 2 – Higher Education

May 15th, 2018

Thank you to the Pabst Best for hosting this event.

© All Rights Reserved, Zeidler Center for Public Discussion, 2018.
Any part reprinted from this report must include Zeidler Center attribution.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
ANALYSIS.....	5
QUESTION ROUND ONE: “DESCRIBE A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE YOU’VE HAD WITH THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN WISCONSIN OR ELSEWHERE THAT IMPACTED YOU AND INFLUENCES YOUR PERSPECTIVE TODAY”	5
1.1 High Education Costs, Debt and their Impacts on Affordability.....	5
1.2 Exposure to Different Perspectives and Building Relationships in College.....	6
1.3 Academic, Parental, and Community Support Roles’ in Post Secondary Education.....	7
1.4 Multiple Pathways through Post Secondary Education.....	7
QUESTION ROUND TWO: “WHAT WOULD AN IDEAL WISCONSIN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM LOOK LIKE TO YOU? WHAT WOULD YOU EXPECT OR WANT A STUDENT TO EXPERIENCE BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THEIR TIME IN HIGHER EDUCATION?”	8
2.1 Affordability.....	8
2.2 Multi-track Approaches and Pathways for Post Secondary Education.....	9
CONNECTED CONVERSATION.....	10
3.1 Pathways for Post Secondary Education	10
3.2 Free Education.....	11
3.3 Stereotypes by the “Other Side”	11
PARTING WORDS.....	13
FEEDBACK FORMS.....	14
ANNEXES.....	17

Executive Summary

This report discusses the themes and thoughts shared during the second “Red and Blue Dialogue,” a conversation series sponsored by the Millennial Action Project and facilitated by the Zeidler Center. The dialogue took place on Tuesday, May 15th, 2018 at the Pabst Best Place in Milwaukee, WI. During the dialogue, participants were asked two questions about Higher Education by trained facilitators from the Zeidler Center:

1. *“Describe a personal experience you’ve had with the higher education system in Wisconsin or elsewhere that impacted you and influences your perspective today.”*
2. *“What would an ideal Wisconsin higher education system look like to you? What would you expect or want a student to experience before, during, and after their time in higher education?”*

If time permitted, participants were invited to engage in the Connected Conversation, prompted by the following questions:

“Regarding higher education policy, have there been ways that your values and perspectives have been stereotyped by the “other side”? If so, what is it about who you are and what you care about that makes those stereotypes especially upsetting?”

“Regarding higher education policy, are there some stereotypes of your own party that you feel are somewhat deserved—even if they are not fully true?”

“What aspects of the other party or candidate do you admire—or at least understand to be reasonable counter-balances to excess on the side you generally support?”

“Given the challenges we face, what dreams do you have for yourself, your family, community, or country?”

“What steps can you take toward making one dream real?”

During the first Round of discussions, participants discussed four broad themes – high education costs and debt; exposure to different perspectives in college; the role of academic, parental, and community support; and multiple pathways to obtain post secondary education. Most participants highlighted high education costs, debt, and their impacts on affordability. Some participants noted how costs and the prospect of graduating with debt influenced what institutions they chose to attend. Other participants reflected on the rising costs over time with regards to sending children to school. Finally, participants acknowledged the availability or lack thereof of financial assistance from their parents or scholarships as a determinant how and where they pursued higher education. One participant captured the sentiment of many, “As I look at the system today I see the cost rapidly rising and affordability becoming an issue. I feel prosperity depends on education and lowering the cost is something that should be looked at and reach a good range for 2- to 4-year colleges.”

During the second Round, participants focused on the cost and affordability of post secondary education. They also focused on the multiple pathways or track that should be considered to lower education costs or best match the skills and interests of students. Most participants highlighted post-secondary education affordability as a key issue and “a challenge and concern” – many participants thought post secondary costs were unaffordable while limiting student choice of institutions and leaving them with debt. Participants suggested alternative approaches to lowering costs such enhanced need-based financial assistance and engaging in civic duty in exchange for lowering costs. Some participants discussed providing different tracks or pathways for post secondary education beyond the traditional 4-year track. Alternative pathways could focus on technical and vocational alternatives for students, provide additional time and preparation for high school students transitioning to post secondary education, or address lowering the costs associated with post secondary education.

For the Connected Conversations aimed at tying together thoughts shared during Round 1 and 2 discussions, participants elaborated perspectives on alternative post secondary pathways, the concept of free post secondary education and affordability, and post secondary education stereotypes of their respective political parties. Some participants thought colleges were stereotyped as liberal institutions. While some thought Democrats were misunderstood as advocating free education for all, others thought conservatives were misrepresented as expecting everyone (including those that would require financial aid) to pay for higher education. Overall, as participants parted ways, they expressed optimism citing feeling invigorated and energized. Most felt they had engaged in a civic engagement where they learned how “congruent” they were while appreciating the open-mindedness of others.

Questions about this dialogue may be directed to:

Zeidler Center for Public Discussion
(414) 239-8555
office@zeidlercenter.org
www.zeidlercenter.org

Question Round One: *"Describe a personal experience you've had with the higher education system in Wisconsin or elsewhere that impacted you and influences your perspective today"*

Participants' answers to question one fell into three categories, those of institutional stories and different worlds, stories of inadvertent and blatant racism, and participants' feelings of discomfort, sadness and pain.

1.1 High Education Costs, Debt and their Impacts on Affordability

As participants discussed their personal experiences with the higher education systems in Wisconsin or elsewhere, most highlighted high education costs, debt, and their impacts on affordability. Some participants noted how costs and the prospect of graduating with debt influenced what institutions they chose to attend. Other participants reflected on the rising costs over time with regards to sending children to school. Finally, participants acknowledged the availability or lack thereof of financial assistance from their parents or scholarships as a determinant how and where they pursued higher education.

The prospect of taking on educational debt or managing existing educational debts impacted decisions participants made regarding when and how to pursue higher education. A college-bound participant shared that they were not able to pursue their desired institution of choice to pursue their dream in Arts education although they had "got into all those schools because I worked hard in high school...reality set in and due to cost considerations I am relegated to a campus where the arts and humanities are being downsized and outright eliminated."

"My college experience was a struggle for me as I juggled full time employment and full academic load... I still have no degree because I face paying out of pocket loans and grants – I have a family and my mom so now my issue is financial."

"Debt—I had lots of it and it was a real problem... It was a struggle to pay for school and living."

"I was married at that time and she was upset about my level of debt- we were dealing with this debt and trying to get help with it"

"I just think it is crazy the amount of money college is and the amount of debt students come out of college with."

Participants also noted the rising cost of a college education.

"...in the late 80s and I paid \$800 for tuition. My summer job could pay for my tuition and my school helped me find a job once I graduated. My son attends UW Madison"

and his tuition is \$25,000 and I realize inflation has went up but it isn't that bad, the numbers don't match up."

"I remember 20 years ago or so that the valedictorian received a free 4-year ride for college. As a man in my 50's I recall my tuition at University of Illinois being \$877.00 a semester. I feel we need to make it easier for those who want to attend and achieve a higher education and look at the return on the investment for our youth and be willing to help fund higher education."

Participants also noted that financial assistance from their parents and financial aid were an integral part of making higher education affordable and achievable. In reflecting how a promising young student was ultimately unable to attend college, a participant noted, "... when it was time for her to apply and move forward to a post secondary institution, there was "NO" support, for her financially, personally, nor academically, from her family, community, and the counseling staff at her high school."

"...my parents really wanted and supported me to pursue a higher education so they took out a second mortgage to pay for my tuition at UW-Madison. ... I am very fortunate to say that I will be coming out of college debt free because of my parents support."

"...my family really couldn't afford to send me to the university but was looking more at community colleges. I did receive a full scholarship to the University of Wisconsin Madison otherwise I could not have afforded the fees, books etc."

1.2 Exposure to Different Perspectives and Building Relationships in College

Participants told stories of how higher education opportunities introduced them to different perspectives, influenced how they built relationships, and shaped opinions. Participants shared that higher education afforded some participants the opportunity to build "social skills" and "helped shape the rest of [their] life."

"I feel that the experience of being away from home and interacting with people from all over the world – It helped make me the man I am today"

"The impact for me was the diversity at UWM. I met people who never met Jewish people or Black people."

"There was an intensive fencing tournament with students from the US, Czech Republic, Australia – all over"

Post secondary experience provided a platform for building relationships.

"The relationships and connections that I forged while at my post secondary institution have helped enhance my life thus far."

"...during my sophomore year in college I had several professors that I respected and developed lifelong relationships with."

Participants described some post secondary school environments as polarized – "tilted to one end of the political spectrum" noting that: *"...we've been losing interest in teaching people how to critically think but to choose a side. [It] feels like we're slipping fast and moving into a tribalist college culture."* One participant thought that, *"the right wing has attacked public university, institutions of higher learning, and [they are] against breeding an idea that challenges their own."* Despite these differences, participants acknowledged that post secondary institutions also encouraged debate – "we were taught to appreciate the opposition, we learned counterpoint development, and thus became more interpersonal people."

1.3 Academic, Parental, and Community Support Roles' in Post Secondary Education

Participants shared stories about the role academic, parental, and community support play in guiding students through post secondary education. One participant told the story of a "good, bright, and smart student" who "either didn't have the support she needed at school or at home or with friends, and she began to go down the no college route. When it was time for her to apply and move forward to a post secondary institution, there was "NO" support, for her financially, personally, nor academically, from her family, community, and the counseling staff at her high school." Ultimately, she did not go to post secondary education.

Some participants observed that their own journeys through post secondary education could have benefited from academic, parental and community support. One participant observed, *"I did well my first semester in college and felt so confident that I signed up for lots of classes my second semester...I focused on social life and soon was drowning...I wish I had someone to help me navigate things."* Another participant recalled, *"I remember when they (professors) mentored me and the transformation... Navigating the machine (higher education) was difficult—more help would have been appreciated."*

1.4 Multiple Pathways through Post Secondary Education

Some participants shared observations about how non-traditional pathways or focusing on electives for post secondary education could lead to meaningful outcomes.

"I felt that required subjects were not relevant to what I needed; felt 50-60% I didn't need then or now...I felt the electives were the most valuable –freedom to choose versus required courses. I learned most from the classes that pertained to my career choice; lots of time in college was wasted."

"There is keen tension between requirements of the craft and a regular Bachelor's Degree... The needed skills have to occur outside of the traditional 4 year program for the sake of the craft"

"I was able to take classes outside my discipline and that's where I learned the most."

Question Round Two: *"What would an ideal Wisconsin higher education system look like to you? What would you expect or want a student to experience before, during, and after their time in higher education?"*

2.1 Affordability

Most participants highlighted post secondary education affordability as a key issue and "a challenge and concern" – many participants thought post secondary costs were unaffordable while limiting student choice of institutions and leaving them with debt. Ideally, post secondary education would, "make college affordable", "offer opportunity for students to refinance their loans and afford tuition, housing...", and enable students to "go in and out (of college) without occurring and crippling debt."

"Affordability is critical. We are not in the 1950's anymore, a factory job does not support a family anymore, that world no longer exists."

"I would like to see it be more affordable realizing for a living wage one must have higher level of education than K-12."

While one participant thought, "Two years of college should be free, at least", other participants suggested alternative approaches to lowering costs such as "strong, progressive need based financial packages for 2 year and 4 year curriculums"; "financial considerations"; and engaging in civic duty.

"In college you could serve society and get some of your college paid for."

Participants also viewed financial literacy as part of the solution to lowering costs.

"We now have one more child to steward through the process of matriculation through this entire process... financial consideration and family support for this child will be paramount in his experience..."

"I feel debt was pushed on me ---"Don't you need more money for...?". I did not know skills for self advocacy. Students need help preparing financially, academically and emotionally. Wish I had this kind of help."

"Eighteen is young to make the decision to take on massive amount of debt. Higher Ed system should be tailored to interest of students and community, not banks and corporations"

"I like them to receive training on budgeting regarding student loans, grants a good financial understanding as I was taught before in senior high and junior academy."

2.2 Multi-track Approaches and Pathways for Post Secondary Education

Some participants discussed providing different tracks or pathways for post secondary education beyond the traditional 4-year track. Alternative pathways could focus on technical and vocational alternatives for students, provide additional time and preparation for high school students transitioning to post secondary education, or address lowering the costs associated with post secondary education. "There must be a balancing between values of higher education and a liberal degree while applying practice skills and incorporating modern concepts."

Some participants felt that a 4-year post secondary track was not ideal for all high school students.

"...some high school students should avoid college all together... [There could be] different tracks or paths for different learners, such as hands on trade, direct program, and liberal arts"

"...outreach to rural areas, such as opportunities for advanced learning with tech schools, more preparation."

"Different kinds of higher ed—you can build a specific skill or get a broader education..."

"In Wisconsin we have 4 year, 2 year and technical schools so there are alternatives for people – everyone is not destined for a 4 year college. People should have the option to change without stigma – from 4 year to 2 year."

"...have more of a focus on industry and private partnerships with companies."

"...focus on continued education to be relevant as industry changes and a learning mindset both informal and formal."

Participants also discussed pathways that included additional mentoring and guidance while in high school or before enrolling into college. Among the skills that could be taught pre-college include, "soft skills, communication, body language and teamwork...People skills are so important". Ideally, a system would be developed that "prepares the student beyond academics such as figuring out what is the best fit for the student in regards to talents, gifts and interest."

"Students should be mentored in high school to figure out which path is best for them, their interests, and their learning styles, so that they are not forced into anything that would make them unhappy."

"I would like to see inclusive partnerships with middle schools and even elementary schools. I try to help students prepare for college and what will greet them on the other side of their education."

"There is pressure to go to college but kids can travel, work, do public service, [or] own businesses... Be open for more options to explore and learn what is life outside the college bubble."

Regarding lowering costs, participants noted that society needed to address "How to structure college for less debt ... Not everyone needs four years."

Connected Conversation – *"Regarding higher education policy, have they been ways that your values and perspectives have been stereotyped by the "other side"? If so, what is it about who you are and what you care about that makes those stereotypes especially upsetting?"; "Regarding higher education policy, are there some stereotypes of your own party that you feel are somewhat deserved—even if they are not fully true?"; "What aspects of the other party or candidate do you admire—or at least understand to be reasonable counter-balances to excess on the side you generally support?"; "Given the challenges we face, what dreams do you have for yourself, your family, community, or country?"; "What steps can you take toward making one dream real?"*

Participant's comments during the "Connected Conversation" continued discussions about alternative post secondary pathways, the concept of free post secondary education and affordability, and post secondary education stereotypes of their respective political parties.

3.1 Pathways for Post Secondary Education

Participants clarified that it would be inaccurate to say that, "17, 18 year olds don't know what they want or don't know what they are doing." It would be more accurate to suggest that, "nowadays college is expected as the next step in student's lives, but college is not always right for everyone - in fact, college can be very wrong to people; it is not the best way they could develop. They may not know their major, but they know their skills, interests, and approaches."

While some participants perceived the option to switch majors would enable students to explore what they were interested in or enjoyed, other participants noted that this choice was only available to students who could afford the costs associated with changing majors. For example, changing majors could require more time spent in college.

"It is nice to have options, because it opened my eyes and allowed me to switch majors. But, you must be able to afford college to switch majors."

"My parents said that they would pay for my first three years, but I would have to pay for my last year. I've paid for all my children to go to school now though, for they have the freedom to pursue what they want and find what makes them happy without the stress of debt."

"Yeah, my goal is to pay for all my children to go to college without stress or worry, because that is a terrible thing I have to go through."

Participants acknowledged that options referred to more than the ability to switch majors and included other pathways to success – "Kids who don't do well in high school won't do well in college. We need to keep their options open to succeed."

Some participants thought that the challenges associated with the current post secondary education pathways were political or bureaucratic, citing "concerns about the current Secretary of Education" or [needing to] "roll back Obama regulations – higher education as a gold standard."

3.2 Free Education

Participants noted that the concept of free education had not been adequately discussed in earlier rounds. Participants had differed on what they perceived as free and its pros and cons.

Some participants considered a "full ride" or scholarship as a "free degree" – "I have often been told that a bachelor degree is the new high school degree. This approach is a big reason why I choose a free degree at a school I only feel okay about, than my expensive dream school." Taking this approach enabled them to expend more money for a graduate degree. "I thought I should save the expense until grad school."

Some participants were uncomfortable with the word "free" citing that, "having something free devalues it." Others thought that a "minimal price tag makes it [education] more valuable." Participants also raised concern about the true cost of free education – "to get higher education for free, what are you willing to pay?"

3.3 Stereotypes by the "Other Side"

Participants were asked to share their perspectives on whether they thought their values on higher education had been stereotyped by the other side. Participants shared the following:

Some participants thought colleges were stereotyped as liberal institutions.

"College is a factory turning students into liberals. People who come from different backgrounds may have a change in perspective over time."

"I went to a liberal law school and I felt it was all about indoctrination and propaganda. Professors should be fair and high quality. Conservatives invoke fear."

Participants had differing thoughts on the concept of self-responsibility for the cost of education and outcomes.

"I am a product of the school voucher program. It hurt me that some thought school choice was a way to defraud the government or skim from public schools. It is important to find a way to discuss bipartisan solutions for the good of all children. Start from the ground up with local and state solutions for education."

On the right "You've got to pay" I'm thinking not all can pay.

"Free college for everyone I don't think they [Democrats] mean that literally. I am inclined to think accessible versus free."

A conservative participant thought, *"Their [Government] spending troubles me and I find fault that the government is paying to train workers whereas back in my day the company's trained their own workers. I disagree for government providing money to train workers, etc. I see this as corporate welfare."*

Participants shared their perspectives on Affirmative Action and its challenges.

"In my Asian Circles we are discussing "Affirmative Action" How do you make it fair for everyone without cut offs and quotas for how many get in."

"At some colleges and universities, they have generations that go to same school as tradition and that gets one in regardless of "Affirmative Action".

Parting Words – *What's ONE WORD that you're taking with you from this experience?; Ask participants to make a parting comment about something they are taking with them to the large group time and to bring their conversation to a satisfying close.*

Participants were asked to share one word summarizing their experience with the Red & Blue Dialogue Series discussion. Among the group of words that were expressed include:

- Invigorating, energized;
- Good, hopeful, great; and
- Collaborative, civic engagement, more congruent, understanding, open-minded.

Participants also shared some parting thoughts noting the need for flexibility and listening to other perspectives.

"There should be a theme of flexibility in the educational system, no stigma in choosing a 2 year college over a 4 year and flexibility to try what you want in high school."

"We need to get past the binary way of thinking and have better dialogues around solutions."

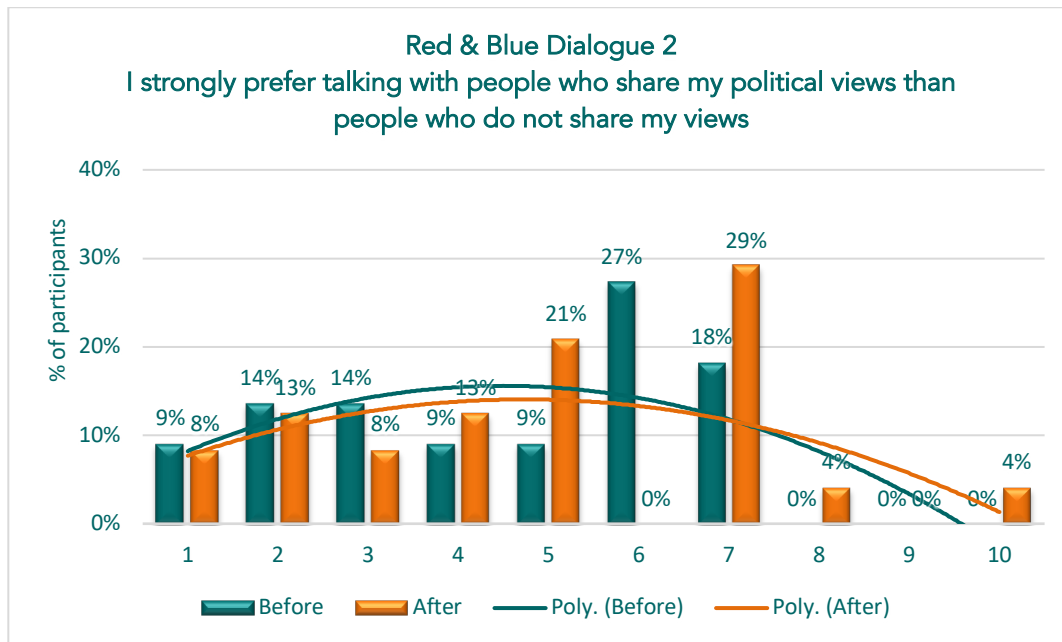
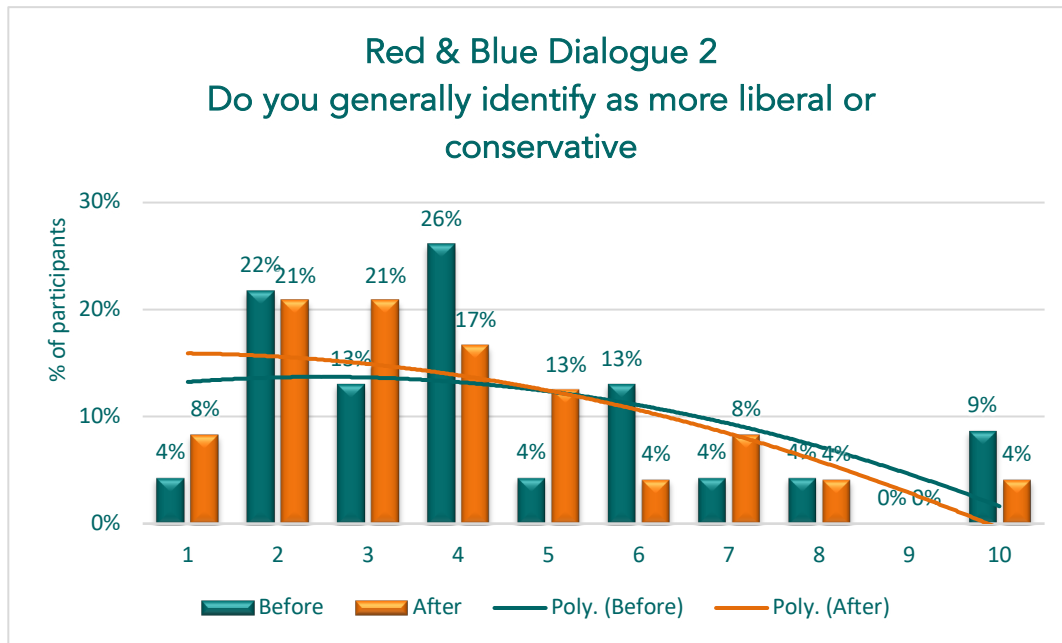
"It is important to bring to higher education strong preparation and purpose. Give the latitude and scope to find like-minded and those who differ."

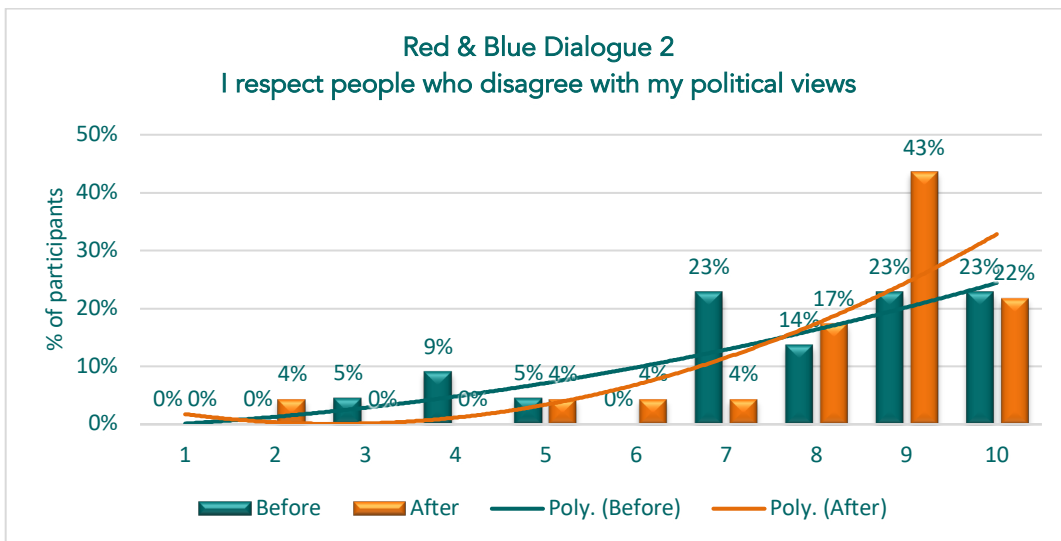
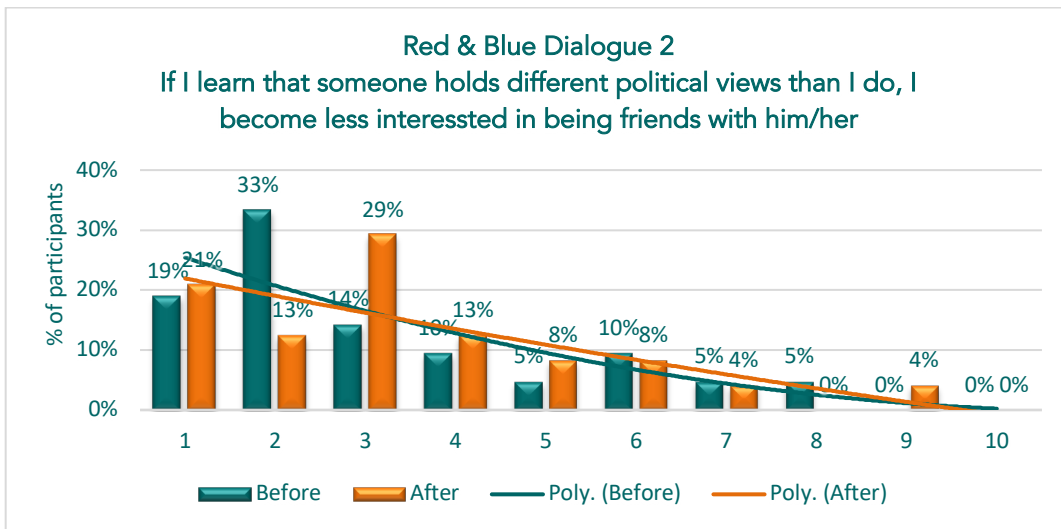
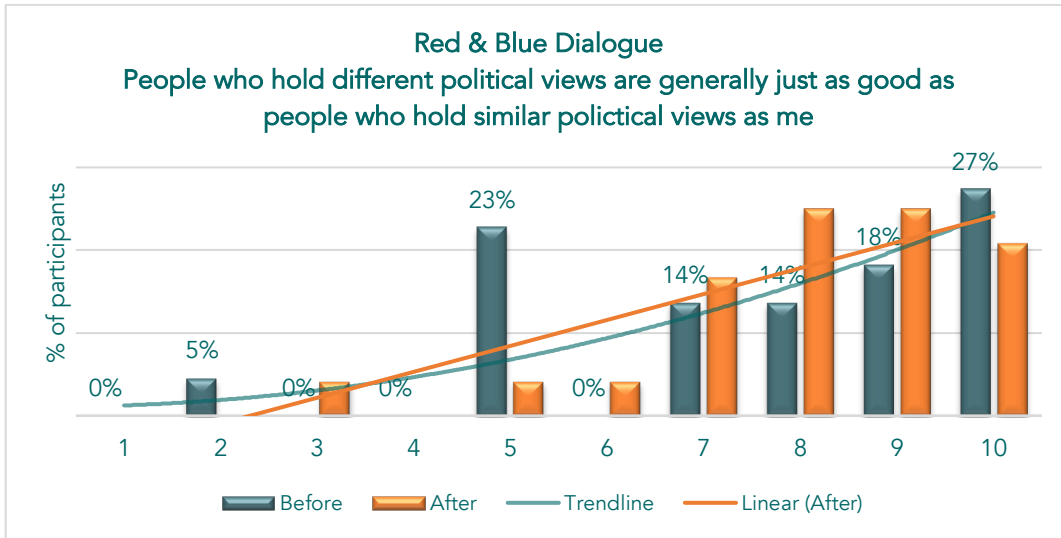
Participants recognized post secondary education costs as an issue that warranted continuous and evolving discussion.

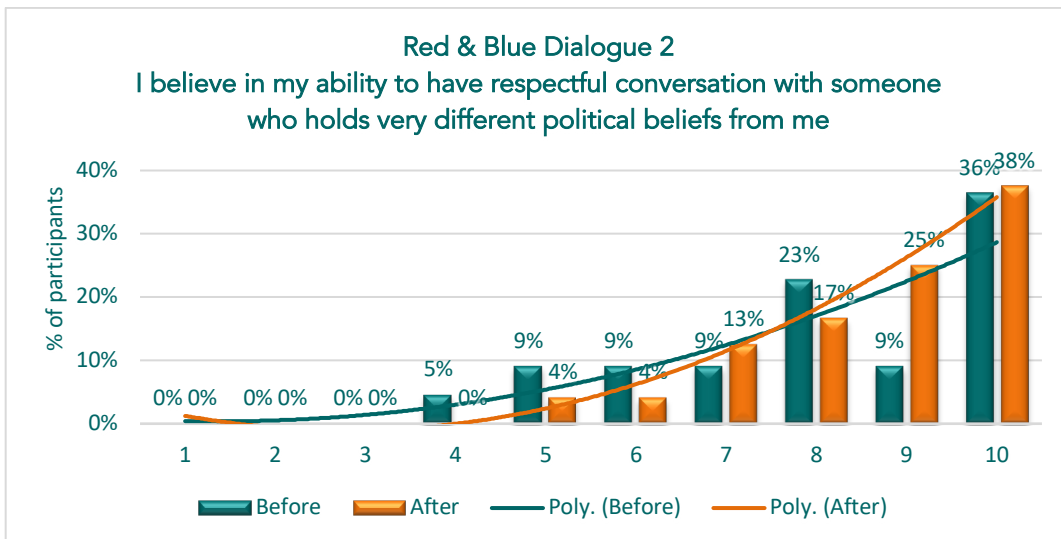
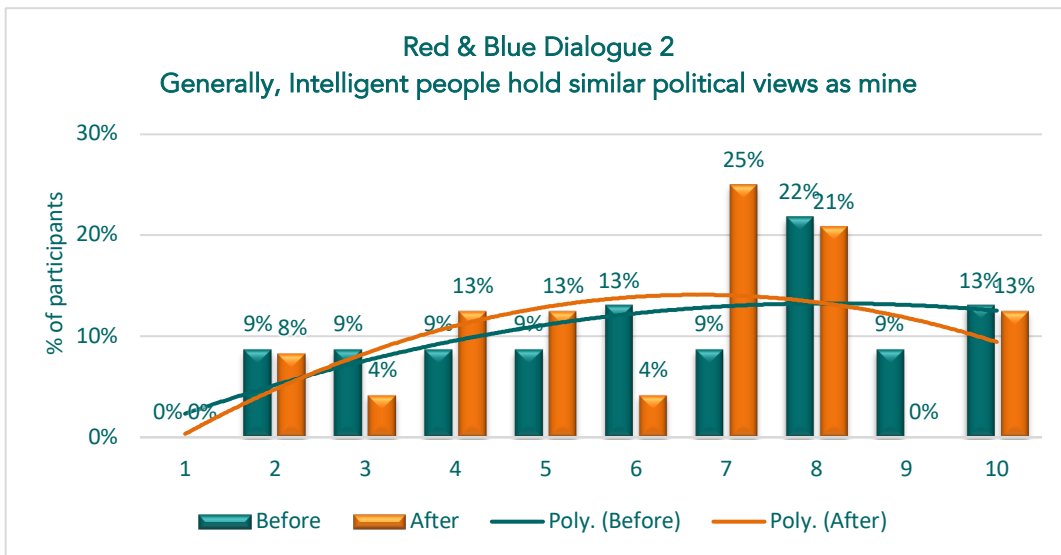
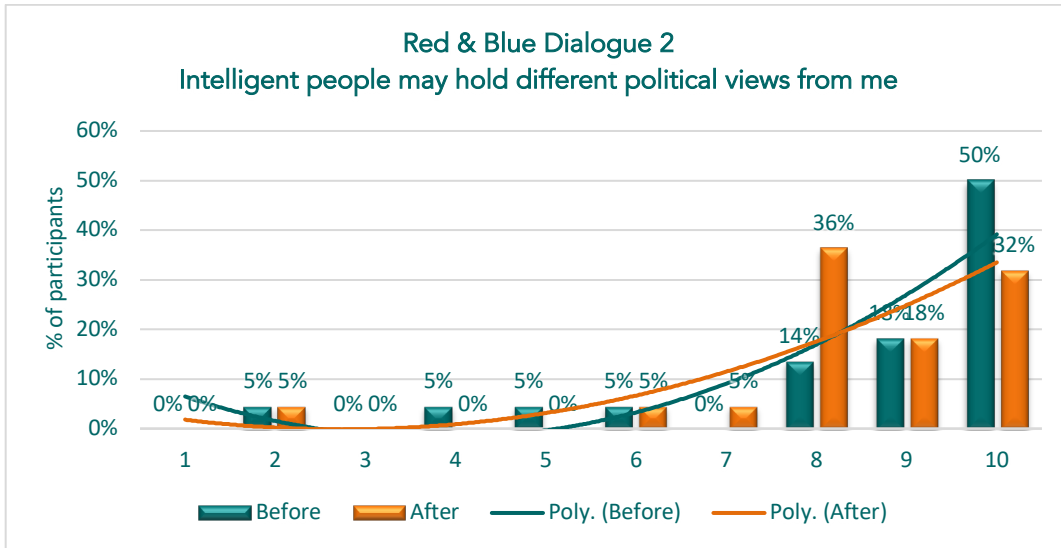
Costs should be controlled. Cost-free is unrealistic but it should be manageable.

If more money was put into the system it would increase opportunities without the cost to students.

Feedback Forms







Annexes

Question Round One: *"Describe a personal experience you've had with the higher education system in Wisconsin or elsewhere that impacted you and influences your perspective today"*

- I have witnessed in my community a young Hispanic woman, during the course of her high school time demonstrate focus, academic excellence, drive and determination, she wanted to be a Physician. However; when it was time for her to apply and move forward to a post secondary institution, there was "NO" support, for her financially, personally, nor academically, from her family, community, and the counseling staff at her high school. She is now working at the same hospital that I have my practice and each time I see her.... " I think to myself, we all failed her"
- After high school, I wanted to attend an East Coast "Liberal Arts" school I did and my experience there helped shape the rest of my life. I was challenged academically, and I feel that the experience of being away from home and interacting with people from all over the world. It helped make me the man I am today.
- My college journey is just beginning[I graduate this Friday, May 18th] It was my intention to attend a school on the East Coast, because the field I plan to enter is "Arts" based and I feel that New York would have been a better place for me to begin the journey. However; reality set in and due to cost considerations, I am relegated to a campus where the arts and humanities are being "Downsized and outright eliminated". I will continue to pursue opportunities to possibly transfer to an institution that would be more supportive of my efforts to achieve my life goals.
- I hail from a very small Wisconsin Town and my parents have refinanced their mortgage to provide me an opportunity to go through school and not emerge in debt. I consider it an honor to have the parents that I have and I appreciate their willingness to support me financially as well as their belief in me.
- A few anecdotal stories...during my sophomore year in college I had several professors that I respected and developed lifelong relationships with. I posed the question to my calculus instructor "What good is this form of Mathematics going to do for me later in life" His answer, was that it is a "WORK OUT" for the mind... The relationships and connections that I forged while at my post secondary institution have helped enhance my life thus far.
- I am always reminded of the experience of a young girl I know named Bertha. She was always a good, bright, and smart student. But, somewhere around 12, 13, 14 years old things went downhill. She either didn't have the support she needed at school or at home or with friends, and she began to go down the no college route. I knew Bertha through her mother, who was part of the cleaning staff at the hospital I worked at. One day, I saw Bertha working there alongside her mother and the other cleaning staff. I think we as a community committed a great disservice to this girl. She had much more potential than what was offered within the community.
- I am originally from the Rocky Mountains, but I went to college all the way on the East Coast at a liberal arts school, which was a great opportunity to interact. I liked college, I graduated

college, and I really had fun with extracurriculars, which really helped develop who I am today. Debate was encouraged, we were taught to appreciate the opposition, we learned counterpoint development, and thus became more interpersonal people. That's what I love about college, how I changed as a person.

- I am just in the beginning of my college journey, but it has been a struggle. I have always wanted to go to the East Coast at a liberal arts school – that was the dream. And I got into all of those schools because I worked hard in high school, but ultimately I was unable to attend them because of finances. I am now planning to attend UWM, which I never thought would happen in a million years. Don't get me wrong, it is not a bad school, it is just not where I would have imagined myself. I have a full ride, which is the main thing that curved my decision. I am going to acting school, which is another reason why I didn't want to go to school in the Midwest. It's really funny how the best acting school in the state is one with resources that are consistently depleted.
- I am from a small town in rural Wisconsin by Eau Claire where almost no one goes to college. But, my parents really wanted and supported me to pursue a higher education so they took out a second mortgage to pay for my tuition at UW-Madison. Their help allowed me to pursue the degree I want (which is poly-science and non-profit work), instead of going into something "safe". I am very fortunate to say that I will be coming out of college debt free because of my parents support. I just think it is crazy the amount of money college is and the amount of debt students come out of college with.
- I think I am the oldest one here. I have three short stories that I want to share. First, it was my sophomore year at UW-Madison and I was in my calc class. I was always the kind of kid who liked to question authority, so I asked my teacher, "How will calculus help me?" To which he said – it is a work out for your mind. I never thought of it that way, it was very enlightening. Second, I transferred to Whitewater and also transferred my major from accounting to marketing. Although I was now pursuing a different profession, I learned it was not what you know, but your social skills. Third, I was in a fraternity at Whitewater where all my friend's GPAs were under 3, but they are all doing very well now, which again show the importance of social skills.
- I was a high performing high school student. I did well my first semester in college and felt so confident that I signed up for lots of classes my second semester. I focused on social life and soon was drowning and was put on academic probation. I got lots of pressure from my family because I was doing poorly and the cost of college. I wish I had someone to help me navigate things. For me there was lack of support and lack of preparation. I work with college bound students now and help them navigate grades and level of debt.
- I went to a private college and got in for free with a scholarship. It was tilted to one end of the political spectrum and I was uncomfortable. Some of my friends made fun of a very conservative student and I broke off from those friends. I was married at that time and she was upset about my level of debt- we were dealing with this debt and trying to get help with it. Both experiences were powerful- the political and the debt that came with my education. I was on a strategic planning subcommittee and I got off because they would not address the issue of how expensive education was.
- I knew what I wanted to do in college and got out in four years. I felt that required subjects were not relevant to what I needed; felt 50-60% I didn't need then or now. There was lots of

hoop jumping. I felt the electives were the most valuable –freedom to choose versus required courses. I learned most from the classes that pertained to my career choice; lots of time in college was wasted.

- In 1975, I moved from Arizona for the UW System, and the Wisconsin Idea. I don't have a degree but I read a lot and about the UW System. I drove taxi in Madison and spoke with lots of speakers that came to town. I learned about the ecosystem and set on a path of technology.
- Debt—I had lots of it and it was a real problem. Higher Ed was a valuable experience. Epiphany growth moments came with interactions with professors. I remember when they mentored me and the transformation. I took ten years to graduate. I was able to take classes outside my discipline and that's where I learned the most. Navigating the machine was difficult—more help would have been appreciated. It was a struggle to pay for school and living.
- Received degree in accounting from U of I, Urbana, Champaign. This was in the late 80s and I paid \$800 for tuition. My summer job could pay for my tuition and my school helped me find a job once I graduated. My son attends UW Madison and his tuition is \$25,000 and I realize inflation has went up but it isn't that bad, the numbers don't match up.
- I don't have a lot of experience in these past few years. My initial concern is if it's a privilege or a right. In college I had friends from Trinidad and Tobago and all the way up to their masters their education was granted because they were a citizen. I became a teacher at Edgewood high school in Madison, WI and there was the NDEA grant, National Defense Education Act. We would interview people from Trinidad and Tobago because how their system was set up they had to choose the path of Science or the Arts at 19. Mind you these careers would be what they stuck with the rest of their life. So our questions would be about how they felt when starting in a specific area but having to switch. There the problem was different, but I thought it was unfair for young people to have to make decisions at such an early age.
- I paid \$343.14 for tuition and \$650 for dorms. I have 3 college degrees. I taught higher education in critical thinking and the working definition is "the ability to defend beliefs against {missed this piece} own. I feel that we've been losing interest in teaching people how to critically think but to choose a side. Feels like we're slipping fast and moving into a tribalist college culture and the focus now is "you better get something that will get you a job." I did my dissertation on "challenging your own beliefs when believe your own experiences are true."
- I started at UWM and switched my major a few times. The impact for me was the diversity at UWM. I met people who never met Jewish people or Black people. I do think the right wing has attacked public university, institutions of higher learning, and [they are] against breeding an idea that challenges their own.
- I went to UW Madison when it was a lot cheaper. My son graduated from UW Madison and my other son went to private liberal college.
- As an undergrad in college in Pillsbury, I was in my 1980s sophomore class during the nuclear age. I was initially going to school for technology but my interests changed to policy because of the politics of that time. It occurred to me that people made decisions. If there were different people at the table there would be different decisions being made. It is not by magic. When a decision is to be made it is subject to influence, misunderstanding, etc.

- During my undergrad, my most important experiences occurred off-campus. I was in a program in DC when I had housing, a mentor, etc. More schools should offer the same kinds of programs. I got networking opportunities and job offers. Some students felt they could not do the program because they had no money. California Public Schools offer something similar. There is value in getting off campus. It creates more informed citizens with greater perspective.
- For undergrad I went to Sonoma State just north of San Francisco. There was an intensive fencing tournament with students from the US, Czech Republic, Australia – all over. There is keen tension between requirements of the craft and a regular Bachelor's Degree. How do you fulfill both without having a Bachelor's Program [at Sonoma State]? It all points to it being unsustainable. The needed skills have to occur outside of the traditional 4 year program for the sake of the craft.
- I was involved in student governance – political, organizational and bureaucratic. There are committees that accepted or declined programs and classes. It created barriers for students in that credits would unnecessarily be added to programs. There should be shared governance with students participating in the decision making.
- As I searched for colleges in and out of state I found UWM Madison to be a fraction of the cost of those out of state. I attended UWM Madison and studied engineering. As I look at the system today I see the cost rapidly rising and affordability becoming an issue. I feel prosperity depends on education and lowering the cost is something that should be looked at and reach a good range for 2-4 year colleges.
- As a parent of a student of UWM Madison I had a positive experience going through freshmen orientation with my son, it was top notch. The campus is beautiful and the sports history is exciting. I remember 20 years ago or so that the valedictorian received a free 4 year ride for college. As a man in my 50's I recall my tuition at University of Illinois being 877.00 a semester. I feel we need to make it easier for those who want to attend and achieve a higher education and look at the return on the investment for our youth and be willing to help fund higher education.
- Personally I am proud to have put two daughters through UWM Madison coming away with two bachelors and one Masters out of that system.
- My college experience was a struggle for me as I juggled full time employment and full academic load. In addition my mother became ill and I had to take on her care and I had to drop out of some of my classes to care for her and then life took over as I started failing my classes and was put on SAP (Academic Probation) I still have no degree because I face paying out of pocket, loans and grants I have a family and my mom so now my issue is financial.
- My higher education started back in California where my family really couldn't afford to send me to the university but was looking more at community colleges. I did receive a full scholarship to the University of Wisconsin Madison otherwise I could not have afforded the fees, books etc. My family earned their degrees through community colleges and I believe the quality of education is affected by where you live and the variety of struggles faced at each level whether community college or the university.

Question Round Two: *“What would an ideal Wisconsin higher education system look like to you? What would you expect or want a student to experience before, during, and after their time in higher education?”*

- I am a parent of 6 children and my spouse and I have supported five through school and it has paid off, for they have experienced a life 180 degrees away from myself and my husband's. We now have one more child to steward through the process of matriculation through this entire process... financial consideration and family support for this child will be paramount in his experience, which in my estimation will well worth all the effort extended by our entire nuclear and extended family.
- In my view: there needs to be:
 - Institutions should be committed to the holistic growth and development for the student
 - Affordability is a challenge and concern
 - The experience should be...filled with, curiosity, a sense of empowerment and a commitment to life learning/education.
 - Once graduation occurs, the former student should be a contributor to the community from whence they emerged.
- The impact of technology on education must and should be utilized in a POSITIVE manner.
- The recognition that some high school students, should avoid college all together
- High School and College advisors, should bring their “A” game in assisting students
- The Development of real “People Skills” should be something that all students should be aware of while attending a post secondary institution.
- Affordability is right up there with the concerns for students
- Outreach by University Systems should be increased, especially in rural areas
- S.T.E.M. and Classic Studies should be focused on the high school level
- Strategies to account for a lack of resources for all students who attend post secondary institutions.
- I know I desire to be involved in The Arts my current affiliation with a local arts organization has been very supportive of my efforts and I wish that, that support could be transferred to the institution where I have been accepted as a student.
- I have six children and have sent five of them through college. My ideal college system would have three parts. First, different tracks or paths for different learners, such as hands on trade, direct program, and liberal arts. Second, students should be mentored in high school to figure out which path is best for them, their interests, and their learning styles, so that they are not forced into anything that would make them unhappy. And third, find other more productive ways to enhance the process.
- This is what Wisconsin should do: provide classroom experiences to help students grow as a person and challenge their ability to know, make college affordable, develop a sense of fun at school and empower lifelong learning and curiosity, and encourage students to make a positive outcome and difference in their community.
- Since I am only in the ‘before’ part of college I haven’t had much reflection or experience to entirely shape what I want college to look like. What I worry about is ‘after’ - that UWM will

not have a great acting training program and that I will not be prepared for the real world through them, that I won't know how to market or advocate for myself. This made [us] think of the question: is it possible for a university to accurately cater to all interests or majors? Or should different majors be in different parts of the country because of better opportunity, and that by encouraging some students to stay in-state it is a great disservice? As for during, I hope I am academically challenged, because I love to learn and I hope to learn so many wonderful things. And as for the before, my own experience was really rough because I was a dreamer. I wanted to go to these elite liberal arts schools on the East Coast, which was realistic academically for me, but not financially. So, when I had to settle I was disappointed. So I want guidance counselors and the likes to encourage their students to dream, but also be realistic with them so they are not let down in the end.

- What higher education should have are three things: one, affordability and opportunity for support. Two, outreach to rural areas, such as opportunities for advanced learning with tech schools, more preparation, revision to act 10 - because it really hurt the opportunities for rural children to learn about a wider variety of things - , and better classes and teacher training. It's crazy that I never heard about the subjects economics or human geography before I went to college. And third, opportunity for students to refinance their loans and afford tuition, housing, food, security, and more funding for programs will not be cut.
- Two things. Affordability is critical. We are not in the 1950's anymore, a factory job does not support a family anymore, that world no longer exists. Two years of college should be free, at least. This is a national priority. Second, students should get what they put in, uphold their academic responsibility (as well as the school), and develop people skills. People skills are so important.
- Find what you are interested in and what you want out of college; it should be a two-way street. Should get diverse opportunities. Focus on learning. Some professors are great at research but not good at teaching. They should be able to do what they are good at. How to structure college for less debt would be important to figure out. Not everyone needs four years.
- Would like to see a restoration of UWM System. Pre Tommy Thompson-there were empowered state employees. UW System was the envy of the world. UW should explain its requirements.
- Different kinds of higher ed—you can build a specific skill or get a broader education. Eighteen is very young. Everyone should be able to go to college. If you focus just on technology, you will miss out on how to build a better society. There should be a system for building communities.
- I would like to see inclusive partnerships with middle schools and even elementary schools. I try to help students prepare for college and what will greet them on the other side of their education. I feel debt was pushed on me ---"Don't you need more money for...?" I did not know skills for self advocacy. Students need help preparing financially, academically and emotionally. Wish I had this kind of help.
- Eighteen is young to make the decision to take on massive amounts of debt. Higher Ed system should be tailored to interest of students and community, not banks and corporations. There is pressure to go to college but kids can travel, work, do public service, [or] own businesses. Dad pressured me "You better go now or you will never go back". Be open for

more options to explore and learn what is life outside the college bubble. Having small class sizes was most valuable for me.

- Free or next to free and higher education valuing critical thought. The university should be a place for everyone to express free-thought.
- Low-cost, valuing higher education not just at a university but tech schools, people valuing school if we were to have free education, Arts are seen as important, everyone required to get different perspectives (have a year-long freshman studies class), high schools set up to push kids toward college
- Before college getting education to prepare them in high school (there's too much focus on standardized test), in high school learn soft skills, communication, body language and teamwork. Make education more meaningful and less theoretical.
- We have psychosis about taxes here. I object to the word higher education because that means there's a lower. I think we could have education more steeped into reality and do things to a field we're interested in. How do we create an environment to think critical?
- I think UW Madison does a really good job having their pockets of intellectual communities. I get that we're not going to have a single community that serves the needs of everyone. I don't think access should be threatened by college being too expensive. I think we fall short on civic education. In college you could serve society and get some of your college paid for.
- It's hard to think of an ideal...But putting more money into the UW System would be an important piece. People have insane amounts of debt; schools have been shutting down dorms. There needs to be more flexibility in the high school curriculum. Some have no idea what to do in college. Not everyone has the opportunity to explore in their first year of college.
- In every age there is a complaint that "it's not like it used to be." People need to be able to speak in the workplace. Preparation to do that needs to be stronger. There should be an instituted gap year to explore different directions.
- We need to get past funding issues and have more flexibility in the system. There must be a balancing between values of higher education and a liberal degree while applying practice skills and incorporating modern concepts.
- In Wisconsin we have 4 year, 2 year and technical schools so there are alternatives for people – everyone is not destined for a 4 year college. People should have the option to change without stigma – from 4 year to 2 year...The goal after degree should be to support one's self. Call it formative time – recognize that and allow changes in direction.
- My ideal: I would like to see it be more affordable realizing for a living wage one must have higher level of education than K-12. Before, I would like the student to be financially intelligent and time management preparedness. During: I'd like to see student identify a strong support system and not take on a heavy load. After: I like to see student stay involved with the university and participate in the research and planning for the next generation to get there.
- My ideal is that I'd like to see a student go in and out without occurring and crippling debt from the outcomes of seeking higher education. Before: I'd like for them to have a good primer (a real idea of what college is like) my family was educated through community college and I had no idea of what was needed attending a university. During: I would like to see them

with a proper course load with decent and proper advisement by counselors and staff. After: A chance to stay connected with the university and maintain a relationship.

- My ideal: I'd like for them to have strong, progressive need based financial packages for 2 year and 4 year curriculums preferably if I had choice in STEM field, "I might be biased". Before: I like them to receive training on budgeting regarding student loans, grants a good financial understanding as I was taught before in senior high and junior academy. During: I'd like to see them have more of a focus on industry and private partnerships with companies. After: I want them to focus on continued education to be relevant as industry changes and a learning mindset both informal and formal.
- Ideal: I'd like for it to be an incredible memory and transformative. I'd like to see citizens ready for the future at an affordable cost. Before: I'd like to see a system that prepares the student beyond academics such as figuring out what is the best fit for the student in regards to talents, gifts and interest. During: I'd like to see them challenged and given a broad experience and developing critical thinking skills through continued guidance. After: I'd like them to show gratitude and appreciation for being ready to become a part of workforce.
- My ideal: I'd like to see the cost be cheaper. It seems we continue to discuss debt and erasing of debt and I wonder why the cost are going up causing more borrowing of money. Before: I'd like for them to be ready starting out proficient and not having to take remedial courses to make up for what they didn't get in twelfth grade and leading to twelfth grade. I'd like for them to know where their skill set is. What do you like doing? What is your gift? During: I think they need to work on learning to deal with people because people skills are important. "If they are not feeling it, change it". After: I'd like to see them have a job they like and to just find their groove. I'd like to see them ready for transition.

Connected Conversation – *"Regarding higher education policy, have they been ways that your values and perspectives have been stereotyped by the "other side"? If so, what is it about who you are and what you care about that makes those stereotypes especially upsetting?"; "Regarding higher education policy, are there some stereotypes of your own party that you feel are somewhat deserved—even if they are not fully true?"; "What aspects of the other party or candidate do you admire—or at least understand to be reasonable counter-balances to excess on the side you generally support?"; "Given the challenges we face, what dreams do you have for yourself, your family, community, or country?"; "What steps can you take toward making one dream real?"*

- Direction
- What does the future hold . . . for me the next generation?
- Who's expectation (mine-family-community)
- College is not for all

- Education vs. Indoctrination
- “Know Thy Self”
- Affordability
- I heard some of you say that 17, 18 year olds don’t know what they want or don’t know what they are doing. And although I would agree with you to an extent, that yes, some kids don’t know, others are very very confident and sure of themselves. Like, me - I’ve known that I have wanted to be an actor since I was ten years old.
- Yes, I would agree. But what I think we were trying to say is that nowadays college is expected as the next step in student’s lives, but college is not always right for everyone - in fact, college can be very wrong to people; it is not the best way they could develop. They may not know their major, but they know their skills, interests, and approaches.
- I have often been told that a bachelor degree is the new high school degree. This approach is a big reason why I choose a free degree at a school I only feel okay about, than my expensive dream school. I thought I should save the expense until grad school.
- You’re right about the expectation that the bachelor degree is the new high school degree. The higher education system has turned into a factory. But I caution you about majors - you are allowed to switch and change to find your true happiness.
- Your first two years in college are always the same; it is like a sample platter.
- It is nice to have options, because it opened my eyes and allowed me to switch majors. But, you must be able to afford college to switch majors.
- Would you do it again the same way, the same path to find your passion and the extra semester?
- Yes - but of course it took longer.
- Yes, fortunately I have a full ride so I also have some lean room.
- My parents said that they would pay for my first three years, but I would have to pay for my last year. I’ve paid for all my children to go to school now though, for they have the freedom to pursue what they want and find what makes them happy without the stress of debt.
- Yeah, my goal is to pay for all my children to go to college without stress or worry, because that is a terrible thing I have to go through.
- Again, I just wanted my children to be happy. One is a librarian, another works in public health.
- Kids who don’t do well in high school won’t do well in college. We need to keep their options open to succeed.
- Yeah, they are set up for failure.
- Rolling back of Obama’s regulations; higher Ed as gold standard. Not concerned about long term outcomes. Like boot camp idea.
- Accreditation problem with private colleges—students pay for college and then the college loses its accreditation. They prey on students of color and others who cannot afford public universities.
- Concerns about the current Secretary of Education
- It’s a problem when young people get large loans or scholarships and have never had that much money—some use it wisely and some don’t. Young people need to learn about credit.
- The ratio of guidance counselors to students is about 400 to 1.

- Mentors for students are needed to help give them more real world application.
- Need to make the distinction between whether students are naïve about the money or being taken advantage of for other's profit.
- We did not really bring up the idea of free education.
- I hate the word "free".
- Requirements shift—lifelong learning is necessary.
- Having something free devalues it.
- Minimal price tag makes it more valuable.
- Put more investment in and you will put more time and effort.
- Restructure how the system is set up—allow for greater access. Should higher Ed be structured by job requirements vs. degrees?
- College is a place to learn how to learn.
- In order to be an accredited university you have to show how get students out in 4 years.
- I heard something about UW wanting to give free education.
 - Yeah that has to do with our higher Ed learning debt bill.
 - They're trying to figure something out for certain economic levels getting free higher Ed. I think the only thing is they have to keep their grades up.
 - Grandpa – because he's funny.
- I think the question to ask is, to get higher education for free, what are you willing to pay?
 - We just gave \$4.5 billion to Fox Conn and they have made a promise but there are tax breaks for 15 billionaires.
- College is a factory turning students into liberals. People who come from different backgrounds may have a change in perspective over time.
- Money needs to be put into the system for innovation to the bureaucracy. All need to get behind a 2 dimensional way of thinking – serve both perspectives equally.
- I am a product of the school voucher program. It hurt me that some thought school choice was a way to defraud the government or skim from public schools. It is important to find a way to discuss bipartisan solutions for the good of all children. Start for the ground up with local and state solutions for education.
- I went to a liberal law school and I felt it was all about indoctrination and propaganda. Professors should be fair and high quality. Conservatives invoke fear.
- In my parents' day, you could pay your tuition and fees with your summer employment. What happened?
- There is a decrease in state funding. Before 80% of education was covered; now less than 20% is paid and is impacted by the lending and budget cycle.
- We need to get out of 2 dimensional thinking – state and institution. The institution can address credit loads that impact cost.
- *Stereotypes of your own party...*
- "You have to go to college to earn a decent wage" I disagree....
- "We need good loan programs" I think we need to take a closer look at the programs "Yes"
- Perceptions by Democrats re: Free College for everyone I don't think they mean that literally I am inclined to think accessible versus free.
- On the right "You've got to pay" I'm thinking not all can pay.

- Extreme right wing: Their spending troubles me and I find fault that the government is paying to train workers whereas back in my day the company's trained their own workers. I disagree for government providing money to train workers, etc. I see this as corporate welfare.
- I'd like to see more Privet Partnerships: The education going along with the times and taking education and putting it into context.
- Technical College/University: I am concerned and feel we need to look into the transferring or nontransferable credits from technical to university level.
- There is a difficulty for students getting classes they need to take first for their chosen programs when entering the university systems.
- My first semester I dropped out of classes not knowing I should have withdrawn for lack of knowledge. I had to take remedial math and English because I had trouble taking test (my reason for failing out of some earlier classes.
- I agree on taking a look at the transferring of credits because it could be a matter of agreeing on standards.
- After looking at the flex options I found it is not a degree program but a certificate program.
- In my Asian Circles we are discussing "Affirmative Action" How do you make it fair for everyone without cut offs and quotas for how many get in.
- At some colleges and universities they have generations that go to same school as tradition and that gets one in regardless of "Affirmative Action".

Parting Words

- Invigorating
- Understanding
- Collaborative
- "Open-Minded"
- Relaxing
- Relaxing
- Invigorating
- Understanding
- Collaborative
- Open-minded
- Stronger counter balance to political ideas.
- Must be distinction between gaining skills and getting an education.
- Ivory tower folks should confer with educators.
- System is an old system—can do things very differently.
- Expectations and what's required is shifting; value different things at different levels.
- Civic engagement
- Challenge to change
- We all value higher education
- Return on investment

- Challenges
 - There is too much being spent on sports but when Badger's win people go out and spend, it benefits tourism and we get international recognition.
 - There should be a theme of flexibility in the educational system, no stigma in choosing a 2 year college over a 4 year and flexibility to try what you want in high school.
 - We need to get past the binary way of thinking and have better dialogues around solutions.
 - Costs should be controlled. Cost-free is unrealistic but it should be manageable.
 - It is important to bring to higher education strong preparation and purpose. Give the latitude and scope to find like-minded and those who differ.
 - Why does a higher ranking law school charge more than a lower rank when there is no change in costs just prestige.
 - Any institution expands based on their own interests. Find mechanisms to level the playing field so there are no inequities
 - Not to denigrate college sports but it privileges those who won the genetic lottery.
 - If more money was put into the system it would increase opportunities without the cost to students.
 - If sports were removed what would be the replacement? It could kill prestige and enrollment. This would have to happen at all institutions at once so that no university is impacted more than another. One would do professional sports and THEN come back for the educational function.
 - I feel energized.
 - I feel great!
 - I feel hopeful.
 - I feel good!
- I feel we are more congruent than I expected since we come from across different lines and experiences. 85-90% overlaps.