

2-14-2012

UW Tacoma Advisory Board: Executive Summary & Appendices

Fern Tiger Associates

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Recommended Citation

Fern Tiger Associates, "UW Tacoma Advisory Board: Executive Summary & Appendices" (2012). *Background Information*. 1.
https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/strategic_background_15-16/1

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Executive Summary



Under the leadership of a new Chancellor, approximately 80 representatives of the six University of Washington Tacoma (UWT) Boards of Advisors and a dozen senior faculty members and administrators convened for a first-ever joint Summit on January 13, 2012, to “chart the collective ambitions” of the group, and to creatively impact the action plans of the University as it seeks to accomplish and expand the vision of its founders.

On that Friday afternoon, the dedicated group engaged in an extensive series of activities, conceived and facilitated by Fern Tiger Associates.¹ The session activities were designed to foster consideration of the best ways for UWT to be the integral community partner it strives to be; to articulate opportunities for the University to work hand-in-hand with the broad community; and to think about how to reach beyond existing definitions of an urban-serving university, to become an urban-empowering university.

Armed with extensive background data delivered in the form of a “Summit Briefing Book” prior to the meeting, Summit participants engaged in productive, energetic, and informed discussions, resulting in a collective sense of the mandate for the future. Following initial activities and discussion, the group quickly coalesced around an ideal description of UWT that they envision in 2020: an *innovative, transformational, economic engine for the South Sound*.

With this notion as a backdrop, a set of ten overarching, often inter-connected themes emerged. Together, these themes may be understood as a framework for action to guide UWT over the coming years. A brief overview of the themes follows:

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS Through its academics offerings, UWT must play a central role in contributing to the economic and educational vitality of the South Sound region.

CAMPUS AS ASSET The UWT campus itself can and should be used to create exciting connections between people and ideas.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY The South Sound’s physical beauty, combined with the region’s progressive mindset present an opportunity to demonstrate international leadership in environmentally sustainable practices.

1. Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) is a 30-year-old firm that works primarily with nonprofit and public sector organizations – focusing on strategic communications, organizational sustainability, community engagement, and creative solutions that advance the purpose of mission-driven organizations. The firm’s history is filled with projects and long-time relationships that have influenced the direction of scores of nonprofits, governments, and philanthropic foundations – helping them to grow and mature, while thinking innovatively about their future and the issues they need to address in order to bring about long term change.

FTA’s portfolio includes award-winning work with a wide range of start-up and experienced nonprofits, community organizations, select corporate clients, school districts, state and local governments, public agencies, universities, hospitals, and foundations. The firm’s staff provides a multidisciplinary and innovative approach to projects, and a comprehensive blend of strategic and creative skills and decades of experience in the field.

REGIONAL DIVERSITY The South Sound region would benefit from broad efforts to emphasize and support diversity through community connections and outreach.

K-12 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES A dedicated focus on K-12 student outcomes can lead to an improved public education system and stronger regional economic opportunities.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS An extensive regional array of civic and nonprofit organizations offers the opportunity for expanded outreach and much-needed partnerships.

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS The South Sound business sector seeks innovative solutions to entrenched economic issues, offering unique opportunities for partnerships as well as leadership.

LEADERSHIP UWT has the opportunity to take a leadership role in numerous areas, but must resist the call to be all things to all people.

STUDENT/ALUMNI/FACULTY RESOURCES UWT students, faculty, and alumni constitute powerful resources which can be tapped in new ways.

PROGRAM FUNDING Locating and securing financial resources is an ongoing challenge which must be met with continually creative ideas.

In the course of discussions, potential challenges and roadblocks were identified and considered – primarily funding, leadership, vision, and time – yet, there was also a sense that these challenges could be overcome. To this end, some key directives emerged, including: the development of alternative funding sources (beyond the state and tuition); the need to unite around a core set of ideas (that emerged from the Summit); the importance of building and supporting the leadership to carry out these goals; and the importance of moving beyond the “underdog mentality” into a sense of pride and purpose for the region. The session concluded with a call to action and a palpable sense of renewed mission, vigor, and excitement, which must now be channeled into concrete activities to set strategies and advance the future direction of the University and the region.

This report attempts to capture and summarize the insightful, innovative thinking put forth that afternoon. In addition to the analysis presented in the body of this report, an extensive appendix details session activities and materials. It is anticipated that the results of this session will be the genesis for future discussions and action – in committees; across the university; and throughout the South Sound community.