



UniverCity Alliance
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

UniverCity Alliance Urban Futures Survey **Topline Summary & Suggestions**

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In January 2019, the UniverCity Alliance (UCA) administered a survey to several colleagues whom we'd identified as interested in understanding and brightening humanity's shared urban future. The purpose of the survey was to better understand campus-wide capacity in this area and possible interest in standing up an Urban Futures "community of practice" among those here researching, teaching, or practicing in it. The survey was emailed to 163 people and got 73 responses (a credible 45% response rate), from individuals located in 46 different departments and 69 other centers of activity on campus.

TOPLINE SUMMARY

The survey results and individual comments repay attention (by consent, available to all who take the survey), but can be easily summarized.

- There is current a wide and diverse level of involvement by faculty and other colleagues in urban communities – research, field experiments, all manner of social and policy engagement. Those involved are not just the "usual suspects" (planning and landscape architecture, social work, civil engineering) but come from a vast range of departments and programs. The policy range of the work is also vast: from better design of trauma-sensitive social services to better measurement of resource flows, to the integration of better data on all manner of social behaviors into more agile, and iteratively experimental, policy initiatives. By location, the work is about evenly split between domestic and foreign places.
- At the same time, the work is more scatted and disorganized on campus than most respondents desired. There was overwhelming interest in more opportunity to learn about cognate work from others on campus and in deeper connection to researchers and practitioners from outside it; an equally great interest in at least exploring

opportunities for substantive work together; and the shared infrastructure of shared knowledge and staff needed to do that knitting.

- Clustering the responses, there seem to be a variety of nodes of interest, each drawing from many disciplines, around new problems and promise in solving for equity, sustainability/resilience, and efficient democratic government in several areas: health and the built environment, affordable access to housing and optimally co-located basic goods (transportation, communication, education, health care, food, water, open space), energy and materials flows, climate change and safety, community cohesion and resilience, and public budgets. Across all of them, there was also great interest in appropriate use of new technology in design and, of course and always, the effects or private power.

Together, this is a pretty vast range of interests. But we're cautiously optimistic that a spatial lens on them may give some tractable focus, especially when coupled with high-road development's questions of any community: how can we reduce waste here, add value here, and capture and share the benefits of both here, and then do that again?

SUGGESTIONS

What this suggests for action seems fairly straightforward in skeletal outline, but with much to be done in the next two months to put some flesh on those bones. That's why we're organizing one on ones and group discussions with many of you during that period. Our hope would be to come back with concrete suggestions, and plans for operationalizing them, by early May. Below, after the highlighted **Goal** indicated in each of the four "fairly straightforward" next steps below, we mean those suggestions.

#1: Speakers series – There seemed definite interest in an organized speaker series exploring different aspect of the vast topic of broadly high-road urban systems. The response we got already to the Howe and Ramaswami events suggests the desirability and desire for more. Of course, these speakers might be from outside campus, as those two scholars were, or on campus. **Goal:** a schedule and list of speakers for next year.

#2: Networking events – One thing that was clear to us was the people would welcome a greater number of low-key, low-commitment, but not entirely unstructured, networking events. They might be start with poster sessions in the nodes of interest noted above, or one or another subpart of any of those nodes. **Goal:** a schedule and suggested design of 2-4 such events for next year.

#3: Work groups by interest area – As areas of common concern get clarified, so too will the gain from cross-fertilization of existing work, or joint undertaking of other. We certainly don't want to push this, but also don't want to stand in the way. So one thing we'll be asking folks in the next couple of months, along with vetting what we took as multiple but not unlimited

nodes of convergent interest, is what processes or platforms they'd favor for encouraging (not forcing) collaboration within them. **Goal:** Process and focus for 4-5 such groups.

#4: Shared services and their finance – Even a modest Urban Futures community of practice will require some staffing and a good deal of volunteer labor. We were delighted to find that many respondents were quite happy to give some time to defining and recruiting others to all of the above areas. On an interim basis, UCA itself can provide staff assistance with most of them, but if this takes off as we hope and expect it will, demands for help will soon outpace what we have on offer now. So we need to get working agreement on the services that would be useful to the group (beyond the obvious like logistics for event, notice on funding opportunities, assistance in organizing to grab those), what quality and quantity of FTEs we think that will require, and what can be grabbed from current de facto surplus and where we might find new money if needed. **Goal:** List of services, staffing requirements, and means of financing.

We hope you enjoy reviewing the survey results in their entirety, and welcome any comments or questions on this memo.