

Campus of the future

What plans are on the table for UW-Madison?

BY JAY RATH SEPTEMBER 8, 2016



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The concept for west campus promotes stormwater management and green infrastructure.

Gary Brown remembers 2005, the **last time** UW-Madison updated the master plan for its 936-acre campus.

Then, recalls Brown, director of campus planning and landscape architecture, the questions were about whether the university was going to run out of land. “Are we even going to be able to develop anymore?” Brown remembers wondering. “Are we going to have to think about a satellite campus? Because a lot of universities around the country are having to do that.”

A lot has happened in 11 years, including state budget cutbacks and a recession. And something else has happened: the rise of “distance learning.” Thanks to the internet, it’s possible to earn a UW-Madison degree in select programs without visiting the campus, or visiting just a few times.

In 1997 the late Peter Drucker, an influential economist and futurist, **alarmed academia** when, in an interview with *Forbes* magazine, he predicted that in 30 years universities would be “relics...[and] won’t survive.”

Now that the university is once again doing a master plan, it’s worth asking: Will we even need a campus in 50 years? In 20 years? In 10?

For example, the current UW **draft plan** recommends adding 2,000 visitor parking spaces over the next 20 to 30 years. But the pace of technology is such that Brown is reluctant to consider building new parking garages.

“In 20 years, is a car going to pick you up at your house, drop you off at campus and go pick up somebody else?” he wonders. “Do we need a parking garage? So we have to be careful about how much parking we should be building. We don’t want to build a bunch of ramps that sit empty.”

More than that may sit empty in 20 years. Rooms for performing arts and labs will always be needed, but lecture halls? Offices? In the future, a college or university may increasingly serve as an online nexus, matching students with instructors around the world.

“All of a sudden the students aren’t there. The faculty members aren’t there,” notes campus planning expert and futurist Michael Haggans, visiting professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology’s **Center for 21st Century Universities**. “But the institution is there.”

The school will perhaps serve as a name brand or imprimatur, guaranteeing a certain level of credibility and quality.

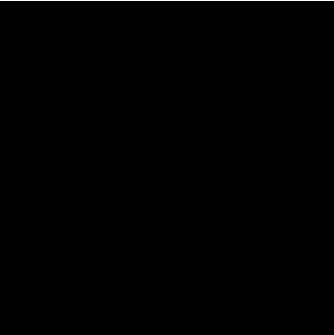
But this does not mean the UW-Madison campus is destined to become obsolete — or that it will cease to grow and change. In fact, Brown and his co-workers are cooking up a unique, futuristic vision for how the campus might look in a few decades.

Steven Cramer, UW-Madison vice provost for **teaching and learning**, says that the campus is on the precipice of a transformation.

“How we provide learning experiences and how we document and credential that learning will undoubtedly look much different in 20 to 50 years,” Cramer says. “We are in the early stages of very significant change.”

Imagine a park perched above the UW-Madison campus, allowing students to stroll through gardens and greenery, with tables chairs and food service. Imagine a better-defined campus, with clearly defined campus entrances, with Henry Mall extending to the Camp Randall Memorial Park, a new quadrangle south of Dayton Street, and a two-way bike lane on University Avenue, protected by plants and trees.

Imagine a campus with a much-reduced carbon footprint, which actually cleans city stormwater as it drains to the lakes; wetlands instead of parking lots, and a goal of zero waste by the year 2025.



Futurist and campus planning expert Michael Haggans says distance learning means students won’t have to be present to learn. “But the institution is there.”

These are some of the ideas that Brown and his colleagues envision for UW-Madison as they work on the campus master plan.

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UW updates its campus master plan each decade. The 2015 Master Plan, despite its name, is not complete. The process typically takes two years; a draft will be presented for [public comment Sept. 13](#) at 7 p.m. in Varsity Hall at Union South.

Master plan updates take a broad view. Specifics come later, with building designs and budgets.

“We do it because it’s important to continue planning for the future so we can direct and guide development, rather than being reactionary,” says Brown. State statutes also require the university, as a state agency, to develop long-range facility plans to support budget requests.

“Our first ‘campus master plan’ was developed in January 1850 by John Rague, an architect from Milwaukee, who envisioned a main edifice on a hill with four flanking dorms in a typical collegiate quadrangle on what would become Bascom Hill,” Brown says.

The 2015 plan assumes no increase in the enrollment of around 42,000.

Its goals revolve around making the current campus more modern and efficient. The current campus boundaries are expected to stay about the same, but its aging infrastructure needs to be modernized to equip the university’s classrooms and laboratories for the 21st century. There’s a desire to expand renewable energy and work toward becoming a zero waste facility. Reducing the number of cars with only one occupant and promoting alternate forms of transportation remain high priorities.

Few people would probably dispute these as admirable goals. But with technology upending the traditional model of higher education, will we even need this new and improved campus?

We may be so close to radical change that we can’t perceive it. “It’s that wonderful quote from [William] Gibson, the sci-fi writer,” observes Haggans, who currently serves as a visiting scholar to the University of Minnesota’s [College of Design](#). “He said, ‘The future is already with us — It’s just not very evenly distributed.’ I think that, yes, that [academic] transformation is already underway.”

But at the same time, he says, “the issues of digital transformation are only seen through a thicket of other issues.” Haggans points to a variety of factors affecting the UW and other schools: changing demographics in the upper Midwest, decreasing enrollments, the decline of state support and resulting tuition increases. “And what that leads to is a challenge to the normal model of growth for a lot of institutions.”

The core question, Haggans says, is, “How do you think about the kinds of physical implications for the campus in the future that are a function of the changes in technology — the same kinds of changes in technology that have affected the travel business and journalism and retail and other industries?”

Distance learning is a phrase that covers a lot of territory. It includes terms such as online learning, e-learning, distributed learning and massive online courses (MOOCs). It boils down to students who learn without being physically present in classrooms.

Distance learning is not new to UW. That’s the meaning of **the Wisconsin Idea**, formulated in 1904: “The boundaries of the campus are the boundaries of the state.” Knowledge is to be shared widely, with the public. During the Progressive Era, the Wisconsin Idea first took the form of agricultural bulletins with the latest research benefiting farmers, mailed to newspapers across Wisconsin.

Long before the internet, the UW embraced distance learning with radio. From the 1930s through the 1950s, the university’s station WHA **broadcast** full curricula across the state, meant for radios placed in rural grade school classrooms. Even art lessons were taught. (When the program crossed over to the new technology of television in the 1950s, instructors were surprised to find that radio art students were more inclined to use their imagination, while TV students were prone to copying.)

But distance learning never posed a threat to a conventional college or university campus until the rise of the internet. The situation is similar to that of newspapers in the early internet age, when they started to share their content online, for free. “Gee, what could go wrong?” jokes Haggans.

About 25 percent of this summer’s UW undergraduate courses were offered online. “This allows students who are on campus during the academic year to take a course or two while living at home and working part time during the summer term,” says Cramer.

This helps accelerate students’ progress toward a degree and saves them money, he says. During the fall and spring semesters, online courses are targeted to students who may be studying abroad or working part time in an internship. Such offerings remain a small percentage, but the number is growing.

“UW-Madison’s strongest 100 percent online presence is in professional programs such as nursing and master’s degree programs,” says vice provost Cramer. Even for students who are physically present, “you see a significant campus shift toward use of online tools to increasingly deliver course content.”

Cramer is loath to project the impact of future technological advances, saying only: “We know they will be profound, and our world will be much different.”

The current view of North Charter Street at Linden Drive, top, with a rendering of how it might one day look. In the background of the rendering is a proposed “land bridge,” which could include greenery, seating and food service.

Brown's thinking about college campuses was shaped early on by UW-Madison. "I grew up just north of Madison. I thought every campus had a lake until I started traveling around," says Brown.

He earned his bachelor's degree in landscape architecture at UW-Madison. He believes that half of what you learn in college is outside the classroom.

Accordingly, the master plan update includes a priority that perhaps sounds odd: enhance the campus' "sense of place." The 2015 plan will include the university's first ever open space and landscape master plan — what Brown likes to call "the space between buildings." It's something that distance learning cannot compete with.

"Here in Madison it really is all about the lake," Brown says. Everything on the physical campus comes back to that — or should, he believes, citing the Memorial Union Terrace as an example.

"Anywhere that I've been, you don't have that kind of space where the faculty, students and community come together and share their lives on a very regular basis," he says. "So what we're trying to do from a design perspective is carry that theme, or that idea of the lake, into the campus."

A great part of that will be the UW's first comprehensive stormwater management plan, included in the draft master plan. Runoff from as far away as the Nakoma Golf Club drains through campus, via Willow Creek. New campus wetlands, rain gardens and research areas will be introduced in many areas, notably replacing a large parking lot near the lakeshore dorms.

"The idea is to try and capture the stormwater, slow it down before it gets to the lake, clean it up, cool it off, let it infiltrate where it can," says Brown. Water treatment will be in plain sight. "People are very interested in that. And we want them to be interested, for our researchers to do more and for our students to learn about it."

Haggans is impressed. "As I see other campus planning efforts across the country, I believe the folks at the UW are taking the right steps," he says. "They're in effect reducing the carbon footprint of the institution."

Willow Creek could one day have seating along the water and connections back to a renovated Natatorium, shown on the right.

The master plan reaches beyond that, though, into aesthetics. A major priority will be creating what are called, in architectural parlance, "viewsheds." The plan aims to emphasize and create vantage points and views — such as looking out over Lake Mendota from Observatory Hill, or to downtown Madison from the top of Bascom Hill.

"It's important to us to be able to look back and see that lake, and know that we're part of this bigger system of this watershed and the Yahara lakes," says Brown. "We know the Native Americans — that's why they were here — that's why they put their effigy mounds on the tops of hills, because there was this connection of land and water and sky and views."

Will this be enough to keep the physical campus relevant?

"We now know — and there's lots of research I can mention — if you can look out a window and see green or trees or landscapes, you're actually more relaxed," says Brown. "You learn better. You're not distracted. You're actually increasing your cognitive abilities by being able to look out and see something beautiful and amazing, like the lake, like trees, like open spaces."

There's something special about the physical character of the campus, he says, "and we want to take advantage of that in the master plan. And that's back to the whole sense of place concept."

It also involves play. "I always talk about why we need big fields outside of the residence halls," says Brown. "We think about connections and adjacencies and the importance of how the campus lays out. I call it social engineering. It's clearly that."

Construction at the Memorial Union will be complete in the fall of 2017, reopening fully in November or December. With that finished, Library Mall can finally be cleared of construction equipment and trailers, then **redesigned** and reopened — after consultation with a neighbor. "There's going to be a lot of discussion with the [Wisconsin] Historical Society, because they like the original space that's out there," says Brown.

The new School of Music performance facility on the corner of Lake Street and University Avenue will break ground in October; the adjacent Extension building will eventually be demolished to accommodate the project's third phase.

The music school's current home, the Humanities Building on the corner of Park Street and University Avenue, is a 1969 example of brutalist architecture. It is still slated for demolition. In its place could perhaps go parking to serve the Memorial Union and Wisconsin Union Theater.

The towering Van Hise Hall will be demolished, returning much of Observatory Hill to green space. A dramatic walkway will follow the hill's curve, crossing over and above Charter Street. "It's an overhead land bridge, basically," says Brown. This might even include tables and food service.

HOERR-SCHAUDT

An L-shaped academic, research building would be constructed between Dayton, Johnson, Park and Mills streets. This would also create a new south quad, bisected by a pedestrian mall between Dayton and Johnson.

The historic dairy barn, home to the first silo in the United States, has been discussed as a museum for years. "Still an idea, still interesting," says Brown. Interactive classrooms will be part of infill development behind the School of Veterinary Madison, abutting Campus Drive. New green space will be placed at the Horse Barn, one of the oldest buildings on campus.

On Dayton Street near the Kohl Center is the massive Southeast Recreational Facility, or "SERF," the only workout facility besides the Natatorium, behind the agricultural campus. It is a sad fact that the SERF has no air conditioning. Already under design, a rebuilt SERF will have a competition pool with spectator seating, all-new recreational and wellness facilities, new gyms and running tracks. The Natatorium will receive a major upgrade.

Behind the Social Sciences Building, on Observatory Drive, a stepped walkway will relieve erosion and offer better access to the lakeshore path below.

The former artist-in-residence building between Babcock Hall and the Stock Pavilion is still scheduled for **demolition**, to allow Babcock expansion.

Over 20 to 30 years, 2,000 visitor parking places may be added. In face of changing transportation modes, this would be done “slowly,” Brown says, as people understand how transportation trends settle out.

In the distant future, there could perhaps be a new parking ramp at the intersection of Spring, Randall and Monroe streets, a block from Union South. But again, Brown says, “maybe we won’t even need that ramp.” The nearby Field House deserves an upgrade, but just how that will happen is still being discussed. Its huge windows offer many possibilities.

Behind the former hospital complex that fronts University Avenue at Charter Street, infill could include underground parking and a new building.

But just because these ideas are in the plan doesn’t mean they’ll be done.

“It’s actually fairly likely we will do many of the things based on the Campus Master Plan — eventually,” says Brown. “In 2004, we had completed over 80 percent of the recommendations from the 1995 Campus Master Plan. In 2014, we had completed 35 percent of the recommendations from the 2005 Campus Master Plan.”

For Brown, the process of thinking about the future UW campus spurs existential thoughts about higher education in general.

“Why is it important to have a physical campus, as opposed to me sitting in my bedroom in some distant place, in my shorts or pajamas, and learning that way?” Brown wonders. “That’s okay, and that’s another option, but we know that people learn faster and better if they’re interacting with people face-to-face in a classroom.”

Although distance learning is likely to continue growing, Haggans says it doesn’t have to be viewed as competition with traditional educational methods.

“The short version for me is that I view it as both/and, rather than either/or,” he says. “The traditional campus will continue to exist for a long time into the future because it has some distinct values.”

Cramer agrees. “Most certainly a physical campus will be relevant for the foreseeable future,” he says. “UW-Madison is a research university, and as such, laboratories, studios and other facilities are necessary for the research and creative endeavors here.

“At the same time, learners at all levels are attracted to those great minds and those same facilities where they can practice their learning — they want to rub shoulders and be a part of that discovery, creativity and learning,” he adds. “And Madison is a pretty nice place to do so.”

Editor’s note: This article was corrected to note that renovation of Memorial Union will be completed in the fall of 2017, not this year.

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Shell games?

"On Dayton Street near the Kohl Center is the massive Southeast Recreational Facility, or "SERF," the only workout facility besides the Natatorium, behind the agricultural campus."

There are actually three main workout places, including the oldest and nicest, the Camp Randall Memorial Sports Center, otherwise known as the "Shell". It is a mid-century architectural wonder containing a huge running track, skating rink and excellent cardio and weight facilities. It is used by a very diverse community of about 800 students, staff, faculty and members of the public each day.

Where did the author get this very specific statement that effectively "disappears" a vital part of our campus? Does it have anything to do with the behind-the-scenes scheme for a transfer (after the SERF is rebuilt) of this valuable "public" asset to the Athletic Department for their "exclusive use"?

<https://www.facebook.com/savetheshell/>

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Eschew Obfuscation

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Yes, but, what was the percentage of summer course participants who were enrolled only in online classes?

It's an obvious question.

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