Introduction

In March, 2013, the Winona State University (WSU) Teaching, Learning, and Technology Services (TLT) team received the original notecards on which the attendees of the fall, 2012 meetings with WSU President Dr. Scott Olson had written their responses to his question, “What are your hopes and dreams for WSU?” A group from TLT, including Ken Graetz (Director), Chad Kjorlien (Faculty Development Coordinator), Norb Thomes (Learning Systems and Services Coordinator), and Robin O’Callaghan (Senior Instructional Designer) transcribed these responses verbatim and began an analysis with the following primary goals:

- Conduct a qualitative analysis of the ideas, using observer impression and multiple observers, to assign codes that characterize an entire idea or idea segment, answering the question, “What is this idea about?”
- Organize the codes into a network diagram indicating the frequency with which each code was applied, as well as its potential relationship with other codes.
- Publish the results of these analyses online, where they can be evaluated, refined, and used to support future conversations.

This is an interpretive technique open to multiple interpretations. The observers’ goal was to tell the story that these ideas suggested to them as faithfully as possible, valuing each and every response. The goal was not to greatly reduce or summarize the ideas or to generalize from the group of people who submitted ideas to the larger campus population, as would be done in a quantitative study.

This analysis is also not complete and will continue into the summer months. The network diagram does not include ideas offered by alumni gathered via an online survey and discussions are ongoing among the TLT observers regarding coding. Additional codes may be added and some codes may be combined or reworded.

Method

Idea collection. Ideas from WSU faculty, staff, students, and alumni were collected through multiple channels during fall, 2012. By design, anyone could submit any idea at any time. Dr. Olson scheduled several open meetings with students, faculty, and staff and attended a number of department and program meetings wherein ideas were written on notecards. He issued a call for ideas to be submitted via email and invited alumni to submit ideas using an online survey. Ideas submitted via email were provided to TLT with identifying information removed. Unless individuals identified themselves within the idea, all ideas were submitted anonymously. The total number of people submitting ideas as well as their department, role within the university, and other identifying information was unknown. It was clear from some of the notecards that multiple people submitted ideas on the same card and that some individuals filled several notecards. It is also possible that some of the same individuals attended multiple sessions or submitted ideas via multiple channels.

Idea management. TLT transcribed verbatim anything written on the notecards into a shared document. Ideas gathered via email and using the online survey were exported into a local file and shared with the TLT
team. Several members of the TLT team then separated responses that clearly included multiple ideas (e.g., where multiple ideas were demarcated using bullets or numbers). If the response could not be reliably decomposed into multiple ideas, it was left alone. The resulting 2448 responses were loaded into ATLAS.ti™, a software application designed to facilitate qualitative data analysis. This tool allows observers to generate codes as they review the ideas, assign codes to ideas, edit existing codes, review how frequently a code is being used, and many other related tasks. It also supports the visualization of codes in the form of a network map, constructed by observers, to describe their interpretation of how codes may be related.

**Coding.** In this case, coding refers to the assignment to an idea of a word or phrase that answers the question, “What is this idea about?” This is a subjective interpretation that can vary across observers. After a preliminary review of all the ideas, four observers from TLT (Ken Graetz, Chad Kjorlien, Norb Thomas, and Robin O’Callaghan) developed an initial set of codes emerging from the data. These codes were then entered into Atlas.ti. Working independently, two observers began associating these codes with each of the 1341 ideas submitted via notecards and email. Alumni ideas have not yet been coded. Both observers were free to add codes as needed to better characterize the ideas. Multiple codes could be assigned to each idea. When each observer had finished coding all of the ideas, the two Atlas.ti files were merged, retaining the originals for later analysis. Each code and the ideas tagged with that code were then reviewed. Several codes judged to be qualitatively identical were merged, resulting in a set of 169 codes. At least one code was successfully applied to all but 20 of the 1341 ideas (98%).

**Network Maps.** Some preliminary network maps were constructed to illustrate the observers’ impression of the breadth and depth of the ideas. Specific ideas are not listed on these maps. They do include the frequency with which the code was used (i.e., ground) and the number of other codes to which the code is linked (i.e., density). In each node of the network diagram, the first number is the ground and the second is the density. Given that these maps are very preliminary and will change as the analysis continues, these numbers should be interpreted carefully. Atlas.ti allows observers to define the link between nodes using a letter attached to the link. In these network maps, “O” = “Is a,” “R” = “Is associated with,” “P” = “Is a property of,” “G” = “Is a part of,” and “N” = “Is a cause of.” For clarity, many of the links between interrelated nodes have been omitted and the links will certainly change as the analysis continues.
Next Steps

In June, the TLT team will finalize its analysis of the ideas, including those submitted by alumni, and publish a final report online. The codes will be refined and two additional observers will apply the codes to the ideas, bringing the total number of observers to four. Please send any questions or comments to kgraetz@winona.edu.