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Dear Werner:

This letter is intended to convey just a few ideas concerning the Glion IV conference proposed for next June. I believe these conferences have provided an important opportunity to bring together higher education leaders to address some of the most important issues facing the contemporary university. As I indicated in our phone conversations, I am not quite so pessimistic about the capacity to attract a number of presidents of American universities to the Glion IV conference. Many presidents would relish the opportunity to discuss in a structured way the issues facing higher education with their counterparts from Europe as well as with their American colleagues. Furthermore, Glion is a lovely environment, and many presidents (and spouses) are looking for an excuse to be far from their campuses during the June-July period.

While there probably is a need for several of the past Glion participants to guide the discussions, I believe that if most attendees were active university presidents/rectors/vice-chancellors, both the substance and energy level of the conference would be elevated quite significantly. Some American possibilities who come to mind include:

Chuck Vest, President, MIT
Mark Udolf, Chancellor, University of Texas
Bob Birgenau, President, University of Toronto
Judy Rodin, President, University of Pennsylvania
Rick Levin, President, Yale University
Mary Sue Coleman, President, University of Michigan
Marye Ann Fox, Chancellor, North Carolina State University
Michael Crow, President, Arizona State University
Bob Dynes, UCSD
Ralph Cicerone, UCI
Bob Berdahl, UCB
Al Carnesale, UCLA
Nils Hasselmo, President, Association of American Universities
David Ward, President, American Council on Education

(Here I would note that both Chuck Vest and Marye Ann Fox are both members of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, Michael Crow and Mark Udolf are leading institutions in regions undergoing incredible demographic and economic change, and Nils Hasselmo and David Ward, beyond being the leaders of the two major higher education associations in the United States, are also recent presidents of major universities, i.e. Minnesota and Wisconsin. Chuck Vest could probably also persuade the vice-chancellor from Cambridge to attend.)

If you want some fresh ideas on higher education policy issues, I would recommend Bob Zemsky from the University of Pennsylvania and Frank Newman from Brown, both of whom are on top of the issues involving the balance between market forces and public policy in higher education and experienced as former university leaders themselves.

In assembling such a group, I would suggest you first convince two or three presidents (perhaps Chuck Vest, Mark Udolf, and one of the UC chancellors) to commit, and then the rest would rapidly follow.

As to topics, I think we need a somewhat more provocative theme. Your idea about suggesting a “green field” reinvention of the university is intriguing. Suppose Bill Gates gave you \$10 billion to establish Gates University, with no strings attached. How would you build a new research university?

Another possibility would be a more systemic discussion of how research universities can (or should) provide leadership for the broader higher education enterprise needed by society. Here, the University of California and the Master Plan are perhaps the most interesting models, although this is a moving target in view of the demographic and economic realities faced by your state.

Another possibility is the role of the research university in influencing (and benefiting) from federal R&D policies aimed at addressing national priorities (including economic development and commercialization of research). Here participants such as Chuck Vest, Michael Crow, and Marye Ann Fox could be particularly strong participants.

One final observation: I believe the real benefit of such international meetings comes from the conversations and extended interaction of university leaders who can share experiences and learn from one another in a relaxed setting over several days. This suggests that the key priority should be attracting an exciting group of participants who not only face these issues, but through their leadership roles, can actually address them. It has always seemed to me that the formal program of the meeting is less important than the informal discussions that occur both in working sessions and in less formal dining or tour events.

Hope this is helpful. I view the Glion conferences as a very important opportunity for sharing ideas and building relationships among university leaders in Europe and North America, and I hope that they continue.

Sincerely,