

# **BACCALAUREATE EXPANSION: A STRUCTURAL PROPOSAL**

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At the core of Wisconsin's challenge in providing access for non-traditional students has been the issue of capacity. Over the past decade, as both the number of graduating high school seniors and the percentage of college bound youth have increased, the UW System's efforts to accommodate the growing number of traditional college-age students has made it increasingly difficult for the system to allocate resources to serve non-traditional students as well. This difficulty in providing access for adult students has been exacerbated by the inability of the public sector to provide funding consistent with the rise in student demand for the UW System's educational services. Given this imbalance between supply and demand, the end result has been predictable: the numbers of adult students served by the UW System has declined as resources have been focused on serving the system's "core" student population – traditional college age students.

At this juncture, if baccalaureate expansion for underserved populations is to be a priority for public higher education in Wisconsin, the issue of capacity must be addressed. And in doing so, public policy makers need to resist the siren call of predicating plans for increased capacity upon increased public investment in higher education, as there is little chance for any significant increase in the foreseeable future. Rather, increases in capacity need to be based upon structural reforms, especially more cost-effective use of resources, limiting duplication and channeling resources into those areas with the highest returns for students and the state. Indeed, any reasonable chance for long term increases in public investment for higher education will be predicated upon the ability of the state's higher education systems to demonstrate their ability to work collaboratively to address the state's educational needs in a cost effective fashion.

For the UW System, a key component in any potential structural changes to meet adult student demand for baccalaureate access is the UW Colleges. As an institution with access at the core of its mission, the UW Colleges has resources available to it which are uniquely capable of meeting the needs for enhanced baccalaureate access. Among these are location (13 campuses broadly distributed throughout the state), technological facility (online & compressed video), support systems designed to meet adult needs (adult advisors), and flexible faculty resources (not tied to program majors). Further, the institution has a history of dealing with significant numbers of adult students and has been at the forefront of efforts to develop collaborative programming for place-bound students.

Given its mission, history and resources, the UW Colleges is uniquely positioned to play a central role in a collaborative effort at providing enhanced baccalaureate access. Further, the evolution of the Wisconsin Technical College System, and particularly its increasing focus on transfer, suggests the need to rethink the role of the UW Colleges in meeting the state's higher education needs. WTCS institutions have traditionally served a large number of adult, place bound students, and an increasing number of these individuals are desirous of obtaining a baccalaureate degree in their local area at the completion of their technical college studies. Rather than competing for students and providing at least the appearance of duplication, the time has come to reshape the nature of the relationship between WTCS and the UW Colleges in a manner which is more complimentary, less competitive, and designed to effectively and efficiently meet critical student and state needs.

Central to such a reshaping of the relationship between these two "systems" would be an effort on the part of the UW Colleges to focus resources and develop programming to complement current WTCS and UW System offerings and serve the growing number of place bound students seeking baccalaureate access. The Colleges' efforts would be focused on identifying gaps in current WTCS or UWS programming which impede student progress toward baccalaureate access and utilizing its resources to fill these gaps. In order to enhance accessibility and cost effectiveness, the institution would utilize technology to develop online and hybrid delivery models wherever possible. To also enhance efficiency, the administration of these efforts would be carried out in combination with UW-Extension, another institution broadly distributed throughout the state with a long history of serving diverse populations.

The following is a list of possible curricular areas in which the UW Colleges could devote resources to enhance baccalaureate access:

1. Establishment of collaborative liberal arts associate degree programs with technical colleges in areas at a distance from UW College campuses. Several WTCS institutions are located in areas at considerable distance from UW College campuses. As a result, access to liberal arts associate degree programming, which is the foundation of most traditional baccalaureate curriculums, is limited. The development of collaborative liberal arts programs between WTCS institutions & the UW Colleges would enhance transfer opportunities for place-bound adult students in these regions.
2. Development with interested UW institutions of a collaborative Baccalaureate in Applied Science Degree for WTCS graduates in need of a baccalaureate credential to assist in their career progression. The BAS degree is structured on the “inverted major” concept, and is designed to meet the needs of students who hold an Associate in Applied Science degree from a WTCS institution. It would provide for full transferability of credits from the associate degree level and give technical college graduates upper division status upon transfer. The UW Colleges could provide the general education coursework required of program participants over and above their AAS degree, and collaborate with interested institutions to provide selected “emphases” in areas such as business and communications which are needed as a capstone to this degree.
3. Development of selected high demand baccalaureate programs (e.g. education, business) for adults unable to access existing programs at UW institutions. The UW System has found it difficult to satisfy the demand for adult access in several key curricular areas, such as education and business, in which the UW Colleges currently holds, or could acquire, faculty resources. The Colleges’ faculty, who are hired in the same market and subject to the same professional criteria as faculty at comprehensive universities, could be utilized to deliver baccalaureate programming either in collaboration with other UW institutions or offered singly by the UW Colleges.

The above proposal, if effected, could result in several fundamental structural changes. For the UW Colleges, these efforts to enhance baccalaureate access would result in its transformation into a “hybrid” institution which would continue to provide a strong general education base for students who wish to utilize it as “the best start,” while also being involved in providing selected baccalaureate options for place bound students.\* For WTCS institutions, these changes will enhance their efforts at providing seamless transfer options for their students. Additionally, as the UW Colleges shifts resources to the baccalaureate level, technical colleges may become the initial access point for an increasing number of first time college students.

These changes have promise to be a “win-win-win” situation for all elements of public higher education as well as for students and the state. Both WTCS institutions and the UW Colleges would be placed in a more complementary position for serving student and state needs as a result of the above. Further, UW four year institutions which currently are attempting to serve place bound students could have their resources augmented through collaborations. Those for whom the adult market is not a critical part of their mission would be relieved of the pressure to serve place bound students for whom resources do not exist except at the expense of their traditional student populations. And students and the state as a whole will benefit by having a more rational system of public higher education available which is focused on serving student needs in a complementary and collaborative fashion.

6/03/04

\* The development of “hybrid institutions” which offer a mix of associate & selected baccalaureate level work is particularly evident in states which have utilized “branch campuses” to provide access to public higher education. Penn State University, Ohio State University, and the University of South Carolina have all begun to offer baccalaureate level work in selected curricular areas through their branch campuses.