

Joint UWS/WTCS Committee on Baccalaureate Expansion

Report Summary

December 2004

BACKGROUND

A vibrant state economy depends, in part, upon its ability to transition to a knowledge-based economy. An economy built on the acquisition and application of knowledge is the driving force for new technologies, businesses, and industries. Key indicators of a successful shift to the new economy are the proportion of jobs requiring at least baccalaureate level education and the proportion of adults age 25 and over who are baccalaureate degree holders. Together, these measures give an indication of labor market demand for higher education and the ability of the state's workforce to meet that demand. Currently, Wisconsin lags behind the national average on both measures.

To put this in some perspective, Wisconsin currently ranks 9th among the states in the percentage of its population 25 years or older who hold an associate's degree, but 30th among states in the percentage with a bachelor's or higher-level degree. Just to move the state's baccalaureate degree ranking to the national average would require Wisconsin to produce or attract more than 72,000 additional college graduates. Currently, Wisconsin produces approximately 28,000 graduates each year.

Wisconsin's continued ability to compete successfully in the regional, national, and global marketplace will depend on our ability to mobilize our technical colleges, public university system, and private colleges and universities to both increase the educational attainment of our workforce and foster the creation of new jobs in the knowledge economy. How well Wisconsin's colleges and universities can adapt to meet these changing needs in the workplace will play a significant role in determining the long-term economic prosperity and vitality of the state.

It is clear, however, that the educational systems can not do this work alone or in isolation. Increasing the number of baccalaureate degree holders must be coupled with opportunities for meaningful employment that will keep these graduates in the state and attract other graduates to the state. Therefore, this effort must be a partnership with state and local government, business and industry, labor, and other sectors that can together help achieve our goals. Since producing graduates is a fundamental purpose of higher education, the educational sector can and should put its focus on the supply side of this equation.

PROCESS

To this end, the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents and the Wisconsin Technical College System Board appointed a joint committee of board members, senior administrators, faculty, and students called the Committee on Baccalaureate Expansion (COBE). This committee's charge was to examine the number and nature of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin as compared with other states, determine why Wisconsin is lagging behind, and recommend cost effective and collaborative strategies to provide access and opportunities to expand the number of baccalaureate degree completers in the state.

This effort has involved examining data on degree production in Wisconsin versus other states, reviewing strategies used in other states to enhance degree production, and seeking input from decision makers and stakeholders in Wisconsin. It has also involved considering strategies to expand access to new or existing degree programs, developing recommendations about specific strategies for the two Systems to pursue, and identifying a process for implementing these recommendations.

The Committee was guided by a set of principles that established the vision and focus for its work, and a framework for its recommendations. These principles include the following:

- **Enhance student success:** Irrespective of the specific initiatives the Committee recommends to increase the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin, the preparation and success of students must be the primary focus.
- **Focus on quality:** In the efforts to increase the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin, the quality of the state's postsecondary educational programs and the educational enterprise as a whole must be maintained or enhanced.
- **Multifaceted approach:** Increasing the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin requires a multifaceted approach that includes experimenting with new kinds of educational programs and degrees as well as exploring new ways to structure the state's educational institutions, deliver instruction, communicate with prospective students, parents, and employers, and provide access and encourage retention and graduation for working adults, low and moderate income students, and persons of color.
- **Market-driven solutions:** Labor market demand and student need should inform efforts to create additional opportunities to complete a baccalaureate degree. These efforts should foster and encourage the state's workforce to seek further education and training over the course of their careers and for personal enrichment.
- **Supply and demand:** Increasing the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin through educational initiatives must be accompanied with efforts to create more meaningful employment opportunities that will keep baccalaureate degree holders in, and attract other baccalaureate degree holders to Wisconsin.
- **Long-term commitment:** The development of recommendations and an implementation strategy are just the first steps in the process. The state's two public postsecondary systems have made a long-term commitment to monitor implementation of the recommendations, evaluate these alternative approaches to increasing student access, retention, and completion of baccalaureate degree programs, and promote widespread adoption of successful strategies.
- **Securing additional resources:** The ability to appropriately pilot or implement the recommended initiatives, and subsequently expand the successful initiatives to attract and graduate a significant number of additional students, will require sufficient new financial and human resources.
- **Assessing progress:** Any initiatives selected for pilots or implementation should include an assessment component to gauge their impact on increasing the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

In developing its recommendations, the Committee placed a priority on identifying innovative and cost effective ways to expand access to higher education in ways that would meet the educational needs of working adults, students of color, and low to moderate income students. With 16 technical colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), 13 four-year campuses, 13 two-year campuses, and a statewide Extension program in the University of Wisconsin System (UWS), and numerous private colleges, Wisconsin offers a high degree of access to postsecondary educational opportunities for traditional college-age students. Nevertheless, opportunities for working adults to complete a baccalaureate degree within these institutions are somewhat limited. Similarly, persons of color and students from low to moderate income families are underrepresented in many of the institutions.

This emphasis led the Committee to propose a set of 13 strategies that include developing new or expanding access to existing degree completion options, promoting efforts to improve retention and graduation through increased outreach and financial aid, and encouraging efforts to increase awareness and availability of new and existing postsecondary educational opportunities. Any one strategy alone is unlikely to produce a significant number of additional baccalaureate degree holders, but a combination of these strategies implemented over time may have significant results. While some of these initiatives can be implemented at the individual campus level, others better lend themselves to a systemwide or statewide approach.

Specific strategies include:

- A. Baccalaureate of Applied Science or General Studies for Career Advancement:** Develop UWS degree completion programs in Applied Science or General Studies targeted to working adult students with an Associate Degree who want or need a general baccalaureate degree for their career advancement.
- B. Baccalaureate Degree Completion Programs in Fields with High Student and Labor Market Demand:** Develop new or expand existing UWS baccalaureate degree completion programs (2+2 or similar models) in areas of high student and labor market demand.
- C. Expand Availability of Existing UWS Baccalaureate Programs to WTCS and UW Two-Year Institutions:** Offer UWS baccalaureate degree programs in specific majors to students at WTCS and UW College campuses who are unable to attend a four-year institution.
- D. Associate of Science Degree Programs:** Develop career-focused, pre-major associate of science degree programs within WTCS liberal arts colleges that are aligned with specific UWS majors.
- E. Collaborative Degree Programs:** Develop collaborative (1+1, 1+3) degrees between WTCS and UWS institutions with WTCS providing 30 credits of instruction that would partially satisfy UWS general education requirements upon transfer to a UW College or UWS baccalaureate institution.
- F. Reduce Financial Barriers for Low Income Students:** Make increased financial aid a high priority in budget requests of both the WTCS and the UWS. Undertake long-term planning efforts with the WTCS and the UWS to address increasing access and retention of low income students by removing the financial barriers to higher education in Wisconsin.
- G. Graduation Completion Project:** Identify, encourage, and provide incentives to students who have completed a substantial portion of credit requirements but have dropped out of college, to come back and complete their degrees.
- H. Comprehensive Access Gateway to Learning:** Develop statewide communication and outreach strategies to inform prospective students, parents, and employers about educational opportunities in Wisconsin.
- I. Credit for Non-Traditional Learning Experiences:** Develop a coordinated mechanism to assess and assign college credit for learning gained through work, military service, and other educationally related experiences.
- J. Alternative Delivery Options and Coordination:** Explore systemwide and statewide approaches to developing, coordinating, and promoting on-line learning and other delivery alternatives to residential, on-campus degree programs.
- K. Pre-College Programs:** Assess, enhance, and promote pre-college programs to determine how best to encourage underserved populations to aspire to and prepare for college.

- L. Early Assessment and Intervention Programs to Promote College Readiness:** Develop and implement early assessment and intervention programs to encourage high school students to assess and enhance their preparation for postsecondary education.
- M. Expanded Academic and Career Advising Initiatives:** Expand academic and career advising programs and services, such as those focused on helping students make successful transitions within and between postsecondary institutions, to support and encourage retention to degree completion.

IMPLEMENTATION

In the course of its deliberations, the Committee identified a number of signs that point to important changes in how the two Systems are meeting the educational needs of the state. These include increased collaboration between the UWS and the WTCS at all levels including the governing boards, system staff, college administrators, and faculty; increased interest and engagement of the UWS and the WTCS in nurturing and supporting a vibrant economy for Wisconsin; and increased awareness and support for collaborative efforts already occurring at the colleges and universities within and between the two Systems. Implementation of the Committee's recommendations should build on these collaborative efforts to better meet the needs of students, employers, and the state as a whole.

During the development of the recommendations, the Committee asked the UWS and WTCS institutions to indicate their current involvement or potential interest in pursuing one or more of the proposed strategies. Based upon this information, the Committee concluded that several of the initiatives could commence during the 2005-07 biennium. These strategies focus on developing new degree completion options or expanding access to existing programs, and promoting efforts to improve retention and graduation through increased outreach and financial aid. Some of the other strategies will require preliminary work by faculty and staff to evaluate and update existing efforts so that when resources become available, these strategies could more readily be implemented in the future. Still others will require additional work by faculty and administrators from the UWS and the WTCS to build support and understanding of ways the strategies can best be implemented. The Committee recommends that, as part of the implementation process, institutions set up pilot projects to determine the viability of some of the initiatives before investing significant resources in their full development.

The Committee further recommends the creation of a joint UWS/WTCS committee to oversee the implementation of these strategies. The charge for this committee would be to coordinate and oversee the development of pilots, organize further study of several recommended strategies, and plan for the evaluation and implementation of other initiatives.

The Committee fully realizes that implementation of its recommendations will require funding. In some instances, reallocation of existing resources may be sufficient to fund initial piloting and program design work. For other recommendations, such as the financial aid initiative and other strategies to support student success, the UWS and the WTCS are seeking additional state funding in their 2005-07 biennial budget requests. Fully implementing any of these strategies at levels that would have a significant impact on student access, retention, and baccalaureate degree completion, however, will require the infusion of additional funds from the state and other potential sources.

PROJECTIONS

Predicting the actual number of additional baccalaureate degree holders that any of the Committee's recommended strategies might yield is difficult at this time. The Committee hopes that by implementing pilot projects across a broad range of alternative strategies and institutions more can be learned about the potential yield, costs, and challenges associated with implementing these strategies.

The Committee's work suggests that adopting strategies that would increase the number of students enrolling in the UW System to complete the last two years of a baccalaureate degree could, over time, help to close the gap in educational attainment bringing Wisconsin closer to the national average. By 2010, Wisconsin would need to produce about 72,000 more college graduates just to equal the national average for the percentage of baccalaureate degree holders in the state's population age 25 and over. As the table below indicates, to close 10% of the gap by graduating 7,200 more baccalaureate degree holders over a ten year period, the UW System would need to enroll an additional 2,200 upper division students each year. Similarly, to close 50% of the gap, the UW System would need to enroll an additional 11,100 upper division students each year for ten years.

Closing the Gap: Increasing the Proportion of Baccalaureate Degree Holders in Wisconsin		
Percentage of Gap between Wisconsin and U.S. Average	Additional Annual Upper Division Enrollments Required	Total Additional Graduates Expected (after ten years)
10%	2,220	7,200
25%	5,550	18,000
50%	11,100	36,000

The added costs of serving these additional UW System students would need to be funded through a combination of tuition and state GPR funding. At current levels, the GPR support needed to serve each additional student is about \$4,200 a year. The estimated annual increase in GPR support needed by the UW System just to close 10% of the gap in educational attainment would be about \$9.3 million.

These projections further assume that there is sufficient demand for the initiatives recommended in this report. While Wisconsin ranks 30th among the states in the percentage of its population who hold a bachelor's or higher-level degree, it ranks 9th in the percentage of its population who have completed an associate degree. This group of associate degree holders may provide a sufficient market for a number of the recommended initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Implementation of a combination of approaches to expand access to educational opportunities could significantly increase the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Wisconsin. However, increasing the number of baccalaureate degree holders is only part of the solution. Closing the gap in educational attainment in Wisconsin must be a joint effort of the state's higher education systems, business and industry, labor, state and local government, and others. Producing additional college graduates must be accompanied with the creation of more job opportunities to keep these graduates in Wisconsin and attract additional college graduates to the state. The Committee's education-based initiatives must be connected to job creation initiatives to help Wisconsin move toward a knowledge-based economy that requires and rewards a higher level of educational attainment. Together, these efforts will lead to greater economic vitality for Wisconsin.

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