

A Brain Gain Strategy for Wisconsin: The Center for Adult Access

Joint proposal from the UW Colleges and UW-Extension

Introduction

The crucial need to foster a highly educated and skilled workforce across the nation in order to be competitive in the global economy is widely understood. In the released report by the Business–Higher Education Forum entitled “Building a Nation of Learners,” the authors note that the United States must become a nation of learners in which students can “achieve proficiency in the basic, lifelong learning skills,” while “providing ongoing education and training tailored to both individual needs and workplace demands.”¹

The desire to meet the needs for lifelong learning is recognized in Wisconsin as well. It is clear to many, including members of the Wisconsin Technology Council who study the challenges posed by the Knowledge Economy, that

The educational attainment of a worker [has become] a key differentiator in the market for human resources. The higher the educational attainment of the worker, the more knowledge the person can apply to the job, thereby increasing the worker’s overall effectiveness. Higher education, therefore, is an essential ingredient for a knowledge-based economy because knowledge is the key input to increasing economic productivity and fostering technological innovation. In short, whether it wants to be or not, Wisconsin is involved in a global economic competition in which success or failure will be determined by how well the state and its people can do in a knowledge economy. The essential resource for success in a knowledge economy is a highly trained and educated workforce.²

The demand for higher education will continue to rise driven by both students and employers at a time when public higher education institutions face diminishing state resources. Achieving this vision of lifelong learning for Wisconsin calls for more-flexible responses on the part of providers to meet learners’ needs.

Situation Analysis: Workforce Development Needs in Wisconsin

The statistics for 2001 indicate that Wisconsin’s per capita income is below the national average (\$29,270 versus the national average of \$30,472) and considerably below per capita incomes in Minnesota (\$33,101) and Illinois (\$33,023). Unfortunately, the trend data indicates that Wisconsin is falling further behind both the U.S. average and the Minnesota per capita income into the future.³ Clearly, there is a need to create significantly more high-paying employment opportunities within the state’s economy. But, if those opportunities were available, is Wisconsin’s current workforce adequately prepared to meet the increased demand for education,

¹ The full report can be accessed @ www.bhef.com.

² Wisconsin Technology Council, “A Knowledge-Based Economy, Vision 2020: A Model Wisconsin Economy,” (2002) @ www.wisctec.com/vision2020.htm.

³ David J. Ward Presentation, “Vision 2020: An Agenda for Change in Wisconsin,” NorthStar Economics, Inc., August 4, 2003.

training and skills required? The statistics here are not encouraging. In 2001, Wisconsin ranked 30th among the states in terms of the percentage (24.7%) of the workforce that has a four-year degree. This compares with Minnesota at 8th (30.5%) and Illinois at 16th (27.3%). In addition, the statistics on net migration of college graduates indicates that between 1989 and 1999, Minnesota experienced a gain of 141,055 persons with a four-year degree, whereas Wisconsin experienced a net loss of 50,772. In short, not only did Wisconsin rank low in the percentage of the population with a four-year degree, it is continuing to fall further behind as more degree-holders move into neighboring states such as Minnesota.⁴ The inevitable conclusion is that “Wisconsin has a shortage of knowledge workers.”⁵

How can we significantly increase the percentage of the state’s population with a four-year degree? One tactic is to increase the numbers of students who enter postsecondary education directly from our secondary schools. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education’s report entitled “Measuring Up 2002: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education” notes that the proportion of Wisconsin students who go on to college immediately after high school “remains good compared to other states,” and that “a good percentage of young adults (ages 18-24) enroll in college-level education.”⁶ It appears that Wisconsin is serving the needs of the traditional student and can be justly proud of a very high access rate

However, the same study notes that “a fairly low proportion of working-age adults (ages 25-49) enroll part-time in education or training beyond high school.” Whereas the authors of the study assign an overall grade of B in participation, they assign the state a D+ for working-age, adult participation.⁷ Our own UW System records indicate that despite the efforts to increase service to nontraditional students, the actual numbers served have been decreasing. In 1991, the total of undergraduate, nontraditional students served was 28,518. By 1999 that number had decreased to 21,060. In a similar vein, the number of nontraditional, graduate students had declined from 19,217 to 16,192. Although there are some indications that not all the nontraditional students are captured by this figure, the trend is very consistent.⁸ And, as Dennis Jones, President of the National Council of Higher Education Management Systems, indicated in his recent appearance before the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, although current access is at about 45%, the fact is that 80% should have some postsecondary education in order to fulfill workforce development needs for now and the future.⁹ Clearly, providing access to higher education opportunities for nontraditional students is going to continue to be an issue in the future.

⁴ David J. Ward Presentation, “Vision 2020: An Agenda for Change in Wisconsin,” NorthStar Economics, Inc., August 4, 2003.

⁵ “Building the New Wisconsin Economy, Context Paper.” September 16, 2003, p. 12, Complete document @ www.bnwe.info

⁶ The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up 2002: The State-By-State Report Card for Higher Education*, p. 59.

⁷ The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up 2002: The State-By-State Report Card for Higher Education*, p. 59; 182.

⁸ University of Wisconsin System, *Achieving Excellence: The University of Wisconsin System Accountability Report, 2000-01*, p. 27.

⁹ Charting a New Course: Revenue Authority and Other Opportunities Working Group, University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, Meeting Minutes, (September 4, 2003).

In summary, many of Wisconsin's nontraditional student citizens do not have a four-year degree, and have little opportunity to pursue the very learning opportunity deemed to be an important factor in increasing individual incomes and in upgrading the quality of the state's workforce. This suggests that one way to increase and retain the needed brainpower is to target the nontraditional student population within Wisconsin and to provide that audience with opportunities and encouragement to acquire four-year degree programs. Not only will this strategy offer the opportunity to improve significantly the quality of the existing workforce, it also focuses efforts on a group of people who are most likely to remain living in Wisconsin and continue as productive workers and community members.

In short, if the current educational pipeline for traditional-aged learners is already functioning at near-peak efficiency and we are not yet able to attract a significant number of baccalaureate-educated workers to relocate in Wisconsin, then we must provide opportunities for our existing workforce to retrain, re-educate and retool to meet the competitive demands of the global economy.

In "Building the New Wisconsin Economy," the authors point to the basic economic development questions that must be addressed including:

- "How do we achieve geographic diversity in a knowledge economy?"
- Can we create 'critical masses' of skilled workers that would attract jobs to an area?"
- Is it realistic to believe that balance can be achieved between rural and urban areas?"¹⁰

We must address the question of how we can link people and access to the needed education and training without requiring significant relocation on the part of our citizens. This is an important element in achieving the geographic diversity in the knowledge economy required by a state whose population is more geographically dispersed than many. Thus, a key element in any proposal must be its contribution to promoting ease of access across the segments of Wisconsin's educational enterprises, meeting the call to "a bold reorganization and investment in education and people."¹¹ And, as Dennis Jones has indicated, the situation must be addressed from the standpoint of what an educational system can do, and not just from an individual campus perspective.¹²

A Brain Gain Strategy for Wisconsin: Establish a Center for Adult Access by the UW Colleges in Conjunction with UW-Extension

The purpose of the initiative is to increase adult participation in public higher education in Wisconsin. The focus of the effort would be providing access for place-bound adults. Activities to achieve this goal would be fund 103-based within the UW Colleges and developed and administered by the UW Colleges Office of Continuing Education. The Center would complement the services currently available through the UW System's HELP (Higher Education Location Program) unit, in order to establish a statewide information system for career development counseling and access to associate degree opportunities available to Wisconsin

¹⁰ "Building the New Wisconsin Economy, Context Paper." September 16, 2003, p. 4, Complete document @ www.bnwe.info.

¹¹ "Building the New Wisconsin Economy, Context Paper." September 16, 2003, p. 3, Complete document @ www.bnwe.info.

¹² Charting a New Course: Revenue Authority and Other Opportunities Working Group, University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, Meeting Minutes, (September 4, 2003).

citizens. The UW Colleges would provide leadership for the Center's initial emphasis on the development of collaborative liberal arts associate degree programs for place-bound adults.

As part of a recruitment and retention effort to expand the numbers of adult students served by the UW System, the HELP program would serve as a clearinghouse providing linkages between interested students and the pathways to pursuing two- and four-year degrees across the system as it currently does for traditional students. This initiative would also expand access to UW System baccalaureate programs. Consistent with its long-standing responsibility for coordinating statewide credit outreach through the UW degree-granting institutions, and its advocacy for adult learners, UW-Extension would provide leadership for this effort to retain more adult students within the UW System to pursue baccalaureate degree programs. UW-Extension would work with UW degree-granting institutions to develop and support both institution specific and multi-institutional collaborative baccalaureate degree programs that expand access and realize efficiencies through the use of online technology and other modalities appropriate to the time- and/or place-bound adult. These efforts would utilize a range of funding models (101-103, as well as 104, service-based, and distance education pricing), and would be developed and administered through the UW-Extension's Division of Outreach and E-Learning Extension, building upon the extensive experiential base of UW-Extension in facilitating collaborative models with the UW System and drawing upon the expertise that resides in continuing education units at each of the campuses.

The Center would have the following goals:

- To expand the opportunity for adult students to pursue and achieve the associate degree as a step toward acquiring a baccalaureate degree.
- To provide a robust mechanism for the UW System to better serve adult students, particularly those who face time and place barriers to achieving the baccalaureate degree.
- To enhance the responsiveness of adult-oriented programs on UW campuses.
- To provide a mechanism for collaboration with the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) institutions in serving adults who use those institutions as an entry point for pursuing a baccalaureate degree.
- To increase the number of baccalaureate degree-holders among Wisconsinites to exceed the national average.

In order to achieve these goals, the Center would engage in the following activities:

- Offer associate degree programming to meet adult needs for higher education at times and in locations convenient to nontraditional students.
- Establish a broad mix of course offerings, including hybrid and online options, designed to meet the needs of place-bound students.
- Develop collaborative programming with the WTCS campuses and UW System institutions.
- Provide resources on a contractual basis to UW System institutions to deliver their baccalaureate programming at a distance from their campuses.
- Take better advantage of alternative programs aimed at adult students on UW campuses.
- Strengthen collaborations between UW campuses and Wisconsin employers to provide educational opportunities to employees.

- Provide resources to the UW Colleges, UW-Extension and other UW institutions to develop selected multi-institutional, consortial, degree programs in fields which meet adult student needs. Such programs would expand the program array within the UW System to better meet the needs of adult students in a cost-effective and collaborative manner.

In support of the Center the state would establish a state-funded financial aid package tailored for nontraditional-aged students who are pursuing either a two-year degree or a four-year degree completion program as an incentive to encourage students who do not have access to employer-funded tuition-remission program to pursue degrees. Such a state financial aid package is particularly important because many working adult students who study part-time will not be eligible for traditional federal financial aid programs aimed at full-time students.

Resources

Funding to support the initiative would be generated from the following:

- Reallocation within the UW Colleges
- Reallocation within UW-Extension
- Tuition and fees revenue from the program
- Reallocation within UW System matched by additional GPR (general purpose revenue) funding from the state in the 2005-07 biennium
- External grant funding

Budget

	2004-05 50 students	2005-06 200 students	2006-07 500 students
Expenses	155,000	420,000	855,000
Tuition	30,000	120,000	300,000
New Base	125,000 (reallocation)	300,000 (new GPR)	555,000 (new GPR)

The goal of the Center is to create a true learning society in Wisconsin—one that creates and sustains the workforce needed in the knowledge economy and that attracts knowledge workers into the state.

Come to Wisconsin: The Learning State!