



UW System - Colleges and Extension Restructuring At-A-Glance

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The University of Wisconsin System's Restructuring Project was the largest change to the system's structure since the system was first established via merger in the 1970s. It has also been one of the most ambitious efforts ever involving the reorganization of higher education institutions.

At the time the UW System Board of Regents approved the Restructuring Project in 2017, the UW System was at a significant crossroads. Changes in the state's demographics, declining enrollments, shrinking funding bases, and other critical factors were negatively impacting the university overall, with the 13 two-year UW Colleges particularly vulnerable.

After an initial 18 months of project work, on July 1, 2018, the UW Colleges' 13 two-year campuses joined with seven of the UW's four-year comprehensive or research institutions as branch campuses. UW-Madison now administers Broadcasting and Media Innovation (which includes Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio), as well as Cooperative Extension and the UW Conference Centers, all formerly part of UW-Extension. UW System now administers the Division of Business and Entrepreneurship; Continuing Education, Outreach and E-Learning; Instructional Communications Systems; Wisconsin Humanities Council; and the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service. UW Colleges Online has been aligned with the four-year UW receiving institutions.

By merging the UW Colleges and UW-Extension with several four-year institutions, we leveraged the strength of those institutions, expanded access, and provided more educational opportunities.

Main Objectives Achieved

- Maintained and expanded access to higher education by offering more general education and upper-level courses at the integrated branch campuses. Branch campuses now have more access to courses at comprehensive universities. Some comprehensives have begun offering bachelor-level programs at additional campus locations, and some are developing new programs with their branch campuses.
- Identified and reduced barriers to transferring credits within the UW System. Nearly 12,000 student records were transferred and over 14,000 students were enrolled at UW Colleges when they transitioned to branch campuses.
- Maintained affordability by continuing current tuition levels at the branch campuses (post-merger) for general education courses.

- Further standardized and regionalized administrative operations and services to use resources more efficiently
- Leveraged resources and shared talent at our institutions to get more students into and through the educational pipeline, better aligning the university to meet Wisconsin's projected workforce needs.
- Enrollments at branch campuses as of May 2020 were on the rise, despite the COVID-19 pandemic

Creating a New Identity

As the UW System advanced its work beyond the restructuring phases, we began to see new roles for the branch campuses. Several branch campuses became centers for advanced-level programming. The UW System is expanding access to bachelor's degree programs and master's programs to the branch based on market demand and regional needs. This allows for more advanced degree programming to be offered in mostly rural locations across the state.

Collaborations and articulations with the Wisconsin Technical College System are in place to ensure a more seamless transfer experience for students between university systems.

A few of the branch campuses have assumed the identity of being colleges within the overall structure of the main campus. Faculty expertise from the branch campuses is integrated into the main campus programs and departments to enrich the students' exposure to their expertise.

Lastly, professional development opportunities are expanded for faculty and staff members at the branch campus locations to ensure coherence in student success strategies. The integration of the branch campuses is shaped by the needs of the region, the strategic priorities of the main campus, and the students who enroll. The Wisconsin Idea is present in new formats, new programming, and in the new identities of the branch campuses.

Due to restructuring, we are now better able to address current and projected enrollments and financial challenges, and—very importantly—we maintain our vital presence in local communities. The UW System is one of the largest employers in Wisconsin, and our impact on the state's economy is measured in the billions of dollars. Business and community leaders continually stress the crucial economic and cultural roles that UW institutions play in their regions.

Restructuring Issues

Due to declining enrollments and financial resources, UW System administration began a review of the viability of UW colleges. From 2010–2017, the UW Colleges enrollment dropped by 32 percent. During that time, enrollment in UW Colleges Online steadily increased by 104 percent, serving as a reliable source of revenue to offset some of the in-person enrollment declines. This caused the overall UW Colleges enrollment numbers to appear higher than the in-person reality. Similarly, at the comprehensive four-year universities, enrollment decreased by 5.4 percent since 2007.

The UW Colleges sought to maintain affordable tuition at all campuses even with declining enrollment. The affordability of UW Colleges was the driving decision factor for many students at the UW Colleges, allowing the campuses to be accessible to many non-traditional students.

The UW System hoped to address these challenges in a way that would best serve the state of Wisconsin by upholding its commitment to higher education and research, serving all citizens of the state, including those in rural communities. To create a more accessible path to higher education and increase enrollment, the UW System would need to improve the affordability of two-year and four-year degrees while enhancing the educational opportunities for students who chose to pursue Associate degrees. The UW Colleges campuses would continue to be critical higher education access points for first-generation, low-income, and under-served students.

Restructuring Proposal

To ensure the future viability and sustainability of all our campuses, in November 2017, the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents [approved a resolution](#) to restructure UW Colleges and UW-Extension. In January 2018, the UW System submitted its [Application for Substantive Change](#) to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

In June 2018, the [HLC approved the UW System's application](#) to restructure UW Colleges and UW-Extension.

Joining the Branch Campuses

The individual locations that made up UW Colleges were to become branch campuses to UW System universities beginning July 1, 2018. The branch campuses would operate as separate units from the four-year universities while aligning their missions and internal organizational structure. Students at the branch campuses would continue to earn two-year degrees that would be easily transferrable to other UW institutions.

Seven UW four-year institutions were designated as receiving institutions (RIs) for the 13 former UW Colleges, now UW System branch campuses. Four-year institutions submitted proposals to be paired with branch campuses. During the decision-making process of which two-year campuses would be matched with which four-year institutions, a variety of factors were considered: location and proximity, transfer rates, existing partnerships, and the compatibility of programs. The President, in consultation with members of the President's Cabinet, ultimately decided on the pairings.

The following UW College campuses were aligned with the UW four-year institutions:

UW Four-Year Receiving Institution	UW Colleges Campus	New Branch Campus Name
UW-Eau Claire	UW-Barron County	<u>UW-Eau Claire – Barron County</u>
UW-Green Bay	UW-Manitowoc UW-Marinette UW-Sheboygan	<u>UW-Green Bay, Manitowoc Campus</u> <u>UW-Green Bay, Marinette Campus</u> <u>UW-Green Bay, Sheboygan Campus</u>
UW-Milwaukee	UW-Washington County UW-Waukesha	<u>UW-Milwaukee at Washington County</u> <u>UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha</u>
UW Oshkosh	UW-Fond du Lac UW-Fox Valley	<u>University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Fond du Lac Campus</u> <u>University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Fox Cities Campus</u>
UW-Platteville	UW-Baraboo/Sauk County UW-Richland	<u>UW-Platteville Baraboo Sauk County</u> <u>UW-Platteville Richland</u>
UW-Stevens Point	UW-Marathon County UW-Marshfield/Wood County	<u>UW-Stevens Point at Wausau</u> <u>UW-Stevens Point at Marshfield</u>
UW-Whitewater	UW-Rock County	<u>UW-Whitewater at Rock County</u>

Dividing UW-Extension Units

UW Colleges and UW-Extension were merged in 2005 to reduce administrative costs as a response to decreasing financial support from the state. Because of UW Colleges merging with four-year institutions, UW-Extension needed a new administrative home so it would not have to incur the resource costs of operating as a separate entity. UW-Madison submitted a proposal to the Office of the President to house UW-Extension solely at UW-Madison since units of Extension had previously operated through UW-Madison prior to the creation of UW Colleges and Extension.

UW System Administration decided to split Extension units between UW System Administration and UW-Madison. The following units of UW-Extension are administered by UW-Madison and UW System Administration:

UW-Madison	UW System Administration
Division of Extension UW Conference Centers Division of Broadcasting and Media Innovation (BAMI)	Institute of Business and Entrepreneurship (formerly Division of Business and Entrepreneurship) UW-Extended Campus (formerly Continuing Education Outreach and E-Learning) Wisconsin Humanities Council Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS)

Project Implementation

The [decision to restructure](#) the UW Colleges and UW-Extension was announced in October 2017, and the [Board of Regents approved the decision](#) in November 2017. The initial timeline broke the project into multiple phases over the course of two years with the goal of completing the UW Colleges and UW-Extension closeout by June 30, 2020, as approved by the HL C. The HLC's approval was necessary for the UW System receiving institutions to be able to grant associate degrees to students at the branch campuses. It was also necessary for the branch campus students to continue their eligibility for federal financial and state funding.

The restructuring was designed to be a multi-year effort with key anticipated stages and milestones. The project Steering Committee defined these stages and milestones as the following:

Stages

1. Board Approval
2. Project Scoping and Infrastructure
3. Implementation Planning, including detail for the critical path for July 1, 2018, and framework for later milestones
4. Implementation
5. Stabilization

Milestones

1. Board of Regents Approval
2. Proposed Plan to Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
3. Approval from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
4. Operational Reporting Structure Transition
5. 12 months following project initiation
6. 18 months following project initiation

Major Phases

1. **Phase 0 (Preliminary Planning):** November 9, 2017, to June 30, 2018
2. **Phase 1:** July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019
3. **Phase 2:** July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020

Phase 0 was a preliminary planning phase, which began with the Board of Regents' approval of the Restructuring Project. The goal of this phase was to submit the restructuring proposal to the HLC.

Phase 1 was to prepare for the transition of the branch campus administrative functions to the receiving institutions while allowing the branch campuses to still function relatively independently. Phase 1 was projected to end with the successful transition of the branch campuses' administrative functions to the receiving institutions.

In **Phase 2**, the receiving institutions would undertake the integration of operational planning and services from the two-year campuses. Phase 2 was also designated the closeout for UW Colleges and UW-Extension with an expected end date of June 30, 2020.

Restructuring Progress Review

In January 2018, the UW System submitted an [Application for Substantive Change](#) to the HLC. The [HLC approved the application](#) in late June 2018, prior to the initiation of Phase 1. This approval signaled that the UW Colleges accreditation was dissolved, shifting the quality assurance responsibilities to the receiving institutions.

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) conducted a six-month review during a Focused Visit on December 3-4, 2018, to examine progress by UWSA and the Receiving Institutions in restructuring UW Colleges and UW-Extension.

Following the Focused Visit, HLC's peer review panel submitted its findings to the HLC's Institutional Action Committee. In March 2019, it upheld the panel's recommendations that no further review or reporting was needed for the Restructuring Project. This is the final HLC decision on UWSA's restructuring. [Read a detailed summary of HLC's final actions.](#)

Project Planning and Implementation Overview

The restructuring project is sponsored by UW System President Ray Cross and is advised by a Steering Committee that is made up of representatives from UW System Administration, UW Colleges, and UW-Extension, as well as each of the other UW institutions. Shared governance is integral to this process, and the Steering Committee includes faculty, staff, and student representatives from each governance group. The Steering Committee helps oversee the planning and implementation of the project.

Regional restructuring teams were chosen by the Chancellor of each four-year receiving institution. Regional teams translate current processes, norms, and cultures into a new context; coordinate with and report to the Steering Committee at key milestones and deliverables; represent the project on campuses; and have a chair who is a primary point of contact for the region.

Functional teams planned for functions that have a system-wide impact; identify common and consistent solutions that cross regions and review regional team recommendations. The functional teams were:

- Athletics
- Finance
- Financial Aid
- Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
- Human Resources
- Student Recruitment
- Student Visas

Project Planning and Governance

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Functional teams were established to identify common and consistent solutions across regions and review regional team recommendations.

Project Structure

The UWSA Project Management Office (PMO) was formed to handle a project of this size and complexity to foster and track project progress. The Project Management Office worked closely with the regional and functional teams from January 2018 through October 2019.

Steering Committee

The restructuring Steering Committee helped oversee the planning and implementation of the project. It was comprised of representatives from UW System Administration, UW Colleges and UW-Extension, and each of the other UW institutions, and chaired by Robert Cramer, UW System Vice President for Administration. Shared governance groups informed the committee and were integral to this process. They included faculty, staff, and student representatives from each governance group who attended meetings as part of the planning and implementation process." The committee was also informed by the Chancellors' advisory group.

Regional Teams

When the Steering Committee was formed, project leadership recognized the importance of delineating responsibility for operationalizing the transition to the institutions. Therefore, they created regional restructuring teams chosen by the chancellor of the four-year or research institutions. These teams were to include shared governance representation from the affected institutions and be comprised of representatives from both the receiving institutions and their newly associated branch colleges.

Functional Teams

The functional teams were organized based on the workstream or business area and comprised of representatives from the various UW institutions. These teams coordinated the response of the institutions to topical challenges in preparation for the transition of services on July 1, 2018. They began meeting at different points in 2018, depending on the deadlines and scope of their work as well as the teams' workloads.

Project Completion

Following the transition year (ending June 30, 2019), the Restructuring Project aimed to close out the operations of UW Colleges and UW-Extension by June 30, 2020, along with completing all the project's 519 milestones. During this time, UW-Milwaukee and UW-Green Bay chose to reclassify their branch campuses as additional locations for financial reasons.

Of the 519 milestones, 121 were specifically directed at the closeout requirements, such as moving physical assets, the ends of contracts and workstreams, and the completion of IT transitions. Both the UW System Administrative Policies and Procedures and statutory citations related to the UW System were updated to be consistent with the organizational change. The assessment of student learning at the branch campuses was also fully integrated with the assessment processes at the receiving institutions.

The closeout phase brought some unanticipated challenges, such as how to recalculate the student loan default rates at the comprehensive institutions now that they included branch campuses and how to manage the visa requirements of international students. Ultimately, the total student loan default rates for receiving institutions would now reflect data from students at the branch and four-year campuses, resulting in a higher overall default rate for the receiving institutions than before the Restructuring Project. Visas were to be offered by the receiving institutions on behalf of the branch campuses, so they could continue hosting international students.

Lastly, around three months prior to closeout, the COVID-19 outbreak halted or limited most institutional operations in the UW System. Wisconsin was under a stay-at-home order beginning on March 25, 2020. Due to this, resources were diverted from the Restructuring Project to COVID-19 crisis management, and the April 1 milestone deadlines were pushed back. The PMO continued quarterly check-ins with institutions at this time to ensure no hard deadlines were missed. Although no major closeout-related issues arose from this outbreak, it will undoubtedly affect the enrollment numbers and financial viability of the institutions.

At the end of April 2020, the UW System was advised to reduce its spending by 5% in accordance with other state spending reductions. As of May 2020, System enrollment numbers were slightly decreasing from the outbreak, but the full magnitude of this effect is still unknown. Since there is a “disproportionate impact of the pandemic on low-income and underrepresented students,” COVID-19 could threaten the viability of the UW branch campuses and their students, given they largely serve low-income and underrepresented students. Unfortunately, these negative financial impacts are inevitable, and evaluating longer-term restructuring outcomes without the effects of the pandemic is not possible.

Project Outcomes

The Restructuring Project accomplished a massive organizational change to the UW System over the course of approximately two years, achieving 519 milestones, without disrupting institutional services. UW Colleges were joined as branch campuses with receiving institutions, and UW-Extension services were divided between UW System Administration and UW-Madison (with some exceptions). Nearly 12,000 student records were transferred and over 14,000 students were enrolled at UW Colleges when they transitioned to branch campuses.

Throughout this process, 1,009 employees were reassigned, and 216 employees were given two-year job commitments. Layoffs, while unfortunate, were minimal in number; most positions eliminated were leadership roles within UW Colleges or UW-Extension that did not have equivalent positions within the new System structure. This project maximized the retention of employees through the transition of their positions to different entities within the UW System.

Enrollment

Before restructuring, enrollment was falling in the UW System, especially at branch campuses. The 2019 fall preliminary enrollment numbers of the System overall indicated a decrease of 2.6% from 2018, and enrollment at all branch campuses was decreasing. The fiscal year 2019-2020 was the first year the System functioned as a restructured organization, and the results have been positive.

As of May 1, 2020, the completed applications for the fall of 2020 increased by 3 percent for four-year campuses and 15 percent for branch campuses, reaching a total increase of 3 percent in the UW System. For admitted applications in 2020, four-year campuses had a 1 percent increase and branch campuses had a 16 percent increase, achieving a total increase of 2 percent for the System. The 16 percent increase for branch campuses is especially notable since the enrollment at branch campuses was the main driving force behind the Restructuring Project. Unfortunately, the final enrollment numbers for the fall of 2020 may not purely reflect the work of the Restructuring Project because of the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access, Affordability, and Opportunity

By joining UW Colleges as branch campuses, these higher education entry points remained geographically accessible and financially affordable to students. Tuition levels at branch campuses were maintained. To allow for the seamless transfer of credits within the System, transfer policies and pathways were updated, UW institutions integrated their program catalogs, and a new Student Information System was created to reflect the organizational change.

Through restructuring, UW System institutions built stronger relationships with each other and Wisconsin communities, increasing opportunities available to students. Branch campuses now have access to additional resources and expertise that were not previously available including upper-level courses, instructors, and other comprehensive university experiences.

For example, students at UW-Rock County can access amenities on UW-Whitewater's campus with their campus ID cards and they have the option to stay in UW-Whitewater's dorms. A transfer bus also connects the two campuses, so branch campus students can engage with the comprehensive university experience. Some comprehensive institutions have even begun offering bachelor-level programs at their branch campus locations, further improving accessibility and affordability.

In addition to students at branch campuses having more access to courses at the comprehensive universities, UW institutions have also been developing new programs including, but not limited to:

- UW-Milwaukee is developing a Freshwater Institute in collaboration with other UW campuses
- UW-Platteville is adding associate degrees in Food and Agriculture and Business Administration
- UW-Stout is creating a new hospitality program with UW-Baraboo, which is a branch campus of UW-Platteville