

DATE: October 15, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges

FROM: Ben Passmore, Associate Vice President for Policy Analysis and Research

RE: Testimony for Information Only on Senate Bill 199 & Assembly Bill 166

Thank you, Chair Hutton, Vice-Chair Cabral-Guevara, and committee members, for providing the Universities of Wisconsin an opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 199 (SB 199) and Assembly Bill 166 (AB 166).

The Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) continue to be a national leader in public reporting of data. We maintain and continuously update the user-friendly and publicly available Accountability Dashboard on our website that allows anyone to view data about our universities. Metrics include one-, five-, and 10-year salary information by campus and major, as well as data points tracking student access, economic development, progress and completion, and student affordability.

We also have another publicly available dashboard of Interactive Reports delving further into some of these items, including financial aid, retention and graduation, and time and credits to degree. Student success has always been our top priority, and the Universities of Wisconsin will continue to ensure accurate data and outcomes transparency for prospective students.

SB 199/AB 166 would require institutions of higher education to report cost and student outcomes to the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) so that these data points can be shared with high school juniors and seniors. Assembly Amendment 1 expands this to sophomores as well. Most of the data points that this legislation would require us to collect are already being collected and publicly reported by each of the 13 universities on both the state and the federal level, as noted regarding our publicly available dashboards.

In addition to our publicly available data, the U.S. Department of Education (USDoe) maintains college scorecards that display information such as the average annual cost to attend and median earnings for graduates. Prospective applicants can also look at key data points for different areas of study at an individual university. Data includes median earnings, median debt, number of graduates, and the largest fields of study at each institution. According to the USDoe, many elements of this data are available only for students who receive federal financial aid. Data is reported at the individual level to the

National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS), which is used to distribute federal aid, and

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then is aggregated at the institutional level. For earnings data, students who are enrolled in graduate school, for example, are not counted because data is restricted to individuals who are not enrolled in any program. Additionally, data for institutions with fewer than 30 students in the denominator are not published.

The Universities of Wisconsin appreciate the intent of SB 199/AB 166 to further increase transparency for high school juniors and seniors interested in attending one of our universities because it aligns with our longstanding goals and standards of ensuring accurate and uniform data collection and reporting. Much of the data required by SB 199/AB 166 is already collected and reported by the Universities of Wisconsin.

In terms of the specific metrics required under SB 199/AB 166, we do have some concerns regarding the salary reporting. SB 199/AB 166 requires universities to report the average salary of their graduates at intervals of six months and, every fifth year, five years after graduation, both aggregated and broken down by major. Every fifth year, higher education institutions would also need to report data on the percentage of graduates who are employed in the field of their major five years after graduation, the average salary of graduates employed in the field of their major, and the average salary of graduates not employed in the field of their major.

The Universities of Wisconsin are working in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau to report salary information publicly as part of the Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) data at the one-, five-, and 10- year intervals. Instead of individual major, this data is reported based on instructional programs as defined by the U.S. Census. The U.S. Census Bureau can directly pull this data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Currently, this federal government partnership is the best avenue we have to report accurate salary data and is what we have reported on our Accountability Dashboard. Additionally, a 1-year postgrad outlook is a better indicator of success for our graduates than a 6-month outlook. It would be difficult for us to meet the intervals and major specifications required by SB 199/AB 166 since our most accurate data comes from this federal partnership. It would be hard to collect different salary data in a uniform and accurate way because we would have to rely on either outside vendors that would incur additional costs for us, self-reporting methods which have accuracy concerns, or upon other government partnerships that have their own flaws and challenges.

Regarding the data on individuals employed in the field of their major versus a different occupation, it is incredibly difficult to determine this, especially for those who go on to pursue a graduate degree. As an example, a lawyer may graduate with an English degree but then go on to pursue a law degree. They wouldn't necessarily be employed in their undergraduate field of study, but they would be employed in their graduate field of study. Additionally, major-specific data can run into privacy concerns because to publicly report data, the denominator must have at least 30 unique individuals, otherwise, reporting this data conflicts with privacy laws. Finally, there are accountability concerns around a statutory requirement to collect this data, which is difficult to collect accurately and uniformly.

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This information is largely collected through alumni surveys which only have less than a 10% response rate.

SB 199/AB 166 also requires graduation rates by major. That can also be difficult since the majority of first-year students have not yet declared their major in their first semester when graduation rate calculations begin. Time-to-degree might be a more accurate representation of this information because that calculation takes a group of graduates and measures the time it took them from beginning to end. Following this, many students switch majors, and it is unclear how that would affect the collection of graduation rates by major.

The Universities of Wisconsin want to provide accurate data as prospective students consider the best path for their future. Therefore, we want to make the committee aware of the existing information available to students, families, and the public that meets the intent of the legislation as well as the challenges we would face in providing accurate and useful data in exactly the form prescribed in the legislation.

Thank you again for providing the Universities of Wisconsin the opportunity to comment on this legislation.