



August 18, 2022

Remarks to UW System Board of Regents by UW-Green Bay Chancellor Michael Alexander

“This Is How We Rise”

Opening Slide that reads: This Is How We Rise

Thank you, Regent President Walsh. Good afternoon. We are honored to have the Board of Regents at UW-Green Bay for the first time since 2016. Since that meeting six years ago, a lot has happened at UW-Green Bay in the midst of a rapidly changing environment in higher education. As we thought about what to present today, we considered the trajectory that UW-Green Bay is on and how it can benefit the UW System and higher education in Wisconsin during these tumultuous times. At UW-Green Bay, we celebrate how our students rise. And when they rise, we rise. This may sound like a marketing slogan, but to us it is much more than that. It is our ethos, a rallying cry, a way of existing, and a fierce belief that we can use our mission to embody the Wisconsin Idea of bringing education to all who desire it in our region and in turn deliver benefits back to the region we support. We take our role as a regional comprehensive very seriously and are proud to serve a 16-county footprint that includes locations in Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Green Bay, and Marinette. Let me be clear from the start, we are proudly **not** aspiring to be a world class university. Instead, we do our very best to be completely relevant and ingrained into the fabric and success of the people, economy, and quality of life in Northeastern Wisconsin.

Since arriving here, I have been fascinated by the relatively short history of UW-Green Bay. It is important to have the context of our history in order to understand who we are becoming, our struggles, our opportunities, and the reason perhaps that we think a little differently.

Slide of photo of Newsweek cover

Founded as the initial Eco-U, UW-Green Bay began with a bold idea that was featured in Newsweek and Harper's magazines. It was unique in how it delivered education. In many ways UW-Green Bay was ahead of its time. The initial plans for the university started with the belief that the environment and sustainability would be the primary issues of our time. Alternative energy sources, including a nuclear power station, were on the initial map. Although, I am not sure the nuclear power station would get through the capital planning process today. A central library with underground spokes that led to disciplines was intended to support teaching in a way that honored interdisciplinary thinking well before that term was in vogue. In fact, until 2018 every student at UW-Green Bay was required to have an interdisciplinary major or minor in order to graduate.

Slide of Ed Weidner in the field

The city of Green Bay competed with Appleton and other smaller communities to get the state to locate this new university here, but chose not to place it in downtown Green Bay. Instead, it was placed northeast of the city in a natural area surrounded by farms. There was clear tension about how the university would fit into Green Bay. So much so that according to urban legend apparently Vince Lombardi himself told UW-Green Bay's first Chancellor, Ed Weidner, that the university should not get football. He was concerned it would detract attention away from the Green Bay Packers and the city would not be able to sustain two football teams. Imagine if UW-Green Bay Football was started and actually eclipsed the Packers in popularity!

Despite the originality of its inception and its bold ideas, UW-Green Bay has struggled at times to connect with the region we serve. Some of the struggle was a result of being located on a nature preserve without a bar or restaurant within sight. Some from having sustainability and environmental study withdraw from the national consciousness for a period of time. And some could have been from the complex way we described the required interdisciplinary degrees we offered. We have always offered a great education, but students from our region and particularly from the City of Green Bay were not connecting to us. We fell upon very hard times financially. Our enrollment was rapidly declining while we were working to raise our academic profile as an institution that would compete for the best academic students in the state and beyond. We were the third smallest university in the UW System even though we are located in the third largest economic region of the state. The region we serve produces about 16% of the tax revenue for the entire state, but many people and businesses here will tell you that they feel we have historically struggled to show public higher education's value match that level of investment back to the region.

Then something really interesting began to happen around 2016. Our region came to us and said we must grow to solve the problem of sustaining and expanding the economy and quality of life in Northeastern Wisconsin. We listened, changed our mission a few years later, and frantically began aligning our resources behind what could happen if we all united behind the idea of what occurs when a regional comprehensive becomes integral to the communities it serves and devotes itself entirely to the idea of access to education. We have become obsessed with not bragging about who we exclude, but rather by finding as many ways possible to be inclusive. By doing so, we are retaining the radical spirit this university was founded upon and bucking many of the trends for regional comprehensives in this part of the country. We believe our approach is building more and more momentum and will try to show you why what is happening here benefits the UW System and the state as well as the region we serve.

Show slide of our enrollment trajectory relative to System

Let's start with enrollment. We are proud of this chart. It shows how much our enrollment has exceeded projections. A lot of hard work from a lot of people has gone into making our enrollment increase for each of the last six years with projections showing another increase for the coming year. However, to fully understand what is happening here, we need to dig deeper. In my opinion, some of this has been caused by us just "right-sizing" to serve the third most populous region in the state, but most of it has been caused by us deliberately choosing to broaden our view of who a possible student is. When you look at the chart and see how far we have exceeded where UW System predicted our enrollment to be (shown by the bottom dotted line), it is not due to UW System predicting our enrollment poorly. Rather, it is that the UW System like all metrics in higher education was primarily

considering one principal way most institutions derive enrollment. It is using a measurement that most of us in this room are comfortable with: students entering college with good grades, enough money to go away to college, from a family that has attended college in the past, and who will attend full time as students straight out of high school. Almost all metrics you hear about in higher education work this way, and for what it is worth, we are also growing in this population.

Show slide of traditional enrollment growth without unique populations

This next slide shows if we only thought of these traditional students, UW System's projections, in fact were very accurate! We are growing in traditional students, but we are choosing to not define ourselves simply by that one metric. We are interested in figuring out how we can serve the students most other universities choose not to recruit and thereby expand access to higher education.

Show slide of CCIHS, ECCP, Rising Phoenix, Gear Up, etc.

To start, the average age of a UW-Green Bay student is now around 24, which shows that we are expanding quickly to serve students older than 22. This is a population that I know System has been interested in attracting and we are proud to be serving. However, this chart shows our growth also in serving high school students with college credit of varying kinds. We are growing at a remarkable clip in populations that are not 18-22. We are thinking about College Credit in High School in unique ways. We partnered with DPI to administer the \$35 million GEAR UP grant to support students who traditionally have not attended college to receive college credit while in high school. Enrollment in GEAR UP is up over 200% from last year. We began the Rising Phoenix program through which we are working as fast as we can to meet the demand for us to provide Associate Degrees to economically disadvantaged students while they are still in high school to get them into the funnel of higher education. Last spring, we awarded Associate Degrees to high school students a month before they got their high school diploma! The left side of this chart shows our enrollment in traditional college credit in high school classes. The right side shows even faster growth in the kinds of programs that yield higher percentages of students that continue their higher education in the UW System like what is happening with GEAR UP, Rising Phoenix, and some others. Like the work done with high school students by our colleagues at UW-Oshkosh, these programs empower more students to continue their education beyond high school. These students attend UW-Green Bay and UW-Oshkosh, but I assure you they also attend every other UW school in the state.

Show slide of our locations

We are thinking differently about our locations. Why do we believe that our locations are stabilizing and growing? First, UW-Green Bay has over 1,000 transfer students, the largest of any comprehensive. We think it is because we have stopped competing with our Technical College colleagues and instead are partnering with them. We do not view our locations as places that principally offer Associates Degrees. We view them as access points to higher education for high school students and places where you can stay local and earn a locally relevant 4-year degree without having to leave Sheboygan, Manitowoc, or Marinette. We are leveraging the idea that there is economic and cultural power in a coastal university. For example, we can add to Freshwater Collaborative and will bring the 2nd National Estuarine Research Reserve to the state along with the UW-Extension location in Superior in the coming years. Importantly, we are also uniquely positioned to bring urban and rural students together at one university to create meaningful dialogue and understanding.

Show slide of GBAPS demographic change

Another reason for our growth is how we are responding to the rapid demographic shifts that are occurring in our region. This slide shows the incredible change in diversity that is occurring in our region's schools. The Green Bay Area Public School District is the third largest in the state and is now and for the foreseeable future going to have a majority-minority student body. While it is the first district in our region to have this demographic distinction, it will not be the last.

Show slide of diversity curve at UW-Green Bay

This slide shows the pace of change of diversity at UW-Green Bay since 2017. As you can see, we are now consistently growing our underrepresented populations at the same pace we are growing in other student populations. UW-Green Bay has embraced the change in demographics in our region and has gone from being one of the least diverse campuses in the System to now having the 3rd highest percentage of diversity in our student population in the System. In fact, we are now more diverse than the overall population we serve in our region, but our challenge is to catch up to the pace of change happening in the schools. To create equity in the region, our goal is to have our student population match the diversity of the schools in our region, which is considerably higher than the diversity of the overall population in the region. To continue our trajectory in serving more diverse students, we have also increased the diversity of our faculty and staff in each of the last three years to better serve the students we are now teaching. We are proud of this growth, but we also know we are on a never-ending journey to become more inclusive in everything we do. It is the only way to keep us moving in the right direction and honor our mission. As we go on this journey, imagine the impact we are now having on the inequities in educational opportunities in our state, which often ranks last in the country for the gap in educational attainment for white and non-white students.

Show slide of first-generation college students at UW-Green Bay

We have embraced the idea that education beyond high school has the ability to provide more equitable access to the economy of the wealthiest country in the world. We are competing with ferocity to get more students exposed to higher education and our efforts have been recognized through our designation as a FirstGen Forward Institution by the National Association for First Generation Student Success. Last year, 45% of our total students were the first in their family attend college. 50% of our undergraduates have this distinction. We are pushing hard to continue the trend of growth in this percentage and you can see the impact it has on our region and the spirit of UW-Green Bay. Like the case that UW-Milwaukee has made in recent Regent meetings, we know this is important work, but it also takes resources to do the work effectively and responsibly. We have an ethical responsibility to provide these resources and not just say we want to reduce the education attainment gap, but by having our actions and our budget match our words. You can hear the impact we have on first generation students from Paige Anderson, one of our students that is experiencing college for the first time in her family. Each student has their own story, but I believe her words resonate with many of our students.

Show part of video from <https://firstgen.naspa.org/blog/strengthening-the-culture-of-pride-and-support-for-first-gen-students>

Show slide of percentage of students attending UW-Green Bay from 16-county footprint

I think this next slide is also really important. It shows that about 70% of our students come from our region. We are not competing for students from other UW schools. We are simply competing to get more students to continue their education from our region. Why are they coming? There are lots of reasons, but they include needing to live at home, being unable to afford to live in a dorm, wanting access to an education that is connected to where they work locally, and being responsive to the needs of their community. We are also aware that about 70% of our graduates never leave our region after graduating. These students were not choosing between us and another UW school. They were mostly choosing us or not going to college.

Show slide of CECE population served

We are also continuing to question the idea of degrees being the sole goal of a regional comprehensive university and how that can further impact enrollment. Employers in our region are actively recruiting from area high schools for talent. Instead of competing with them, we seek to partner with them to provide educational opportunities for people already in the workforce. We are evolving more and more towards stackable credentials and how they lead to advancement and fulfillment for people throughout their lives. This slide shows just a small group of people who we connect with annually through our Division of Continuing Education and Community Engagement in non-credit credentials. We would like to make the case for tracking these programs as valid enrollment. I think we are providing a tremendous service to the people of Wisconsin even if our service does not ultimately result in a degree bearing credit. Incidentally, we are also creating substantial revenue for UW-Green Bay through this work. This type of enrollment builds trust in the UW System and its ability to meet the people of the state where they are at and help them move forward. This is the Wisconsin Idea in a regional context. In the last year, we added 37 non-credit programs to reach a total of 200 programs that served 4,427 people. None of these students are included in our enrollment, even though they and the region greatly benefit from the education we provide. This slide does not even include our registry training programs with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services or the training we provide for local government professionals, which serve tens of thousands of people each year and also brings considerable revenue to us. We have plans to continue to expand even further in the upcoming years in this area beyond the 95,000 people we reach annually right now.

To be clear, being a university dedicated to access does not just mean recruiting more students, it also means retaining them to make sure they reach their educational goals. We have completely overhauled our entire advising and scholarship systems over the last few years to help make this happen. These were painful processes to go through, but they are yielding results and helping us improve how we serve those that attend once they arrive here. It takes a team to make this happen and we certainly benefit from having an amazing Provost in Kate Burns who keeps us steadily improving forward always with the student perspective at the forefront of our decisions.

Show slide of previous website

Allow me to shift now to how we are portraying what we are doing to the public. This was our website 2 years ago. It reflected how we viewed education prior to our mission change. It was about us, but it was not created from the perspective of a student (unless you believe that an 18-year old would be inspired by the picture of this building on our campus). It was also not user-friendly, it took several clicks to get anywhere, and there was a ton of text and little call to action. When we did a study three years

ago of how we were viewed in the region, the overwhelming response for how people in our region described UW-Green Bay was simply that we were a university. They could not say anything that made us distinct. Only in essence that we existed and that they understood that the word university was part of our name.

Show current website

This is our website today. It is all about student success and the opportunities that we provide. It is intentionally not stuffy or institutional. You will not find words like “bursar” on it. Instead, you will find, “Invest in your Future: Student Billing,” which is the new name for what everyone else calls a bursar. There are less pages to navigate and it is created completely from the perspective of engaging with a potential student.

We are in the process of further transitioning to honor the many students who access us at all points in their lives. We are trying to build a university that fully recognizes the complexity of the professional and personal lives of our students. In the future, we are working to provide portals or entry points for students who don't often feel college is for them. People who are mid-career, retirees, people with some college and no degree, or people who just want to have access to one class or even a podcast that we produce. The aspiration we have is to build a bigger funnel instead of competing for the same population that every university competes for. I have no worries about the student who comes from sufficient economic means, has good grades, and a history of family attending college. That student will have to work hard, but they will be granted access to higher education by everyone. We worry about the student with unrealized potential, who also works hard, but may not come from a stable economic situation or have a family member who has ever gone to college. That student also deserves a university that competes for them. UW-Green Bay is that university. We are asking the question: what if you change the paradigm of higher education from deciding who you let in to how do we get more students to access what we have to offer? Some need UW-Green Bay to get a professional degree and become an Engineer or a Nurse because they cannot afford to go elsewhere; some need UW-Green Bay because they want to improve their standing in their job. Some want to change careers, some want a marketable skill, and some are simply curious. Some come because we have degrees in First Nations Studies and conferred our first doctoral degrees in the history of the institution to our first cohort of students with an EdD in First Nations Education. None of this means that we sacrifice the quality of the education we provide, but it does mean we will meet a student where they are at and help them to grow. We are simply trying to do our best to be relevant to our region, its people, and thereby our state by becoming more inclusive, producing students with a hunger for lifelong learning, and want to make their communities better places for the future.

To quote Regent Saffold in his farewell speech to this body in June, “Access is about being intentional.” We agree and every decision we are making is designed to become better at providing education to more people.

I will now transition to how we are also thinking differently about space in relation to access. Let me start by saying, I believe we are unique and lucky to have a campus in Green Bay with 720 acres of beautiful land.

Show slide of aerial view of campuses

This landscape is both an incredible asset allowing us to have stunning outdoor classrooms and a serene environment to learn in, but it is also a curse to maintain. We own all of the roads on our Green Bay campus and also the accompanying costs to maintain them, which cost us about \$3 million this summer. We have countless areas to manicure and countless others to maintain their natural beauty. We are lucky to have nature surrounding us, but it also keeps us physically detached from a direct connection to the City of Green Bay. Although downtown Green Bay is only a few miles away, it can feel like another planet when you are on our campus. We are trying to draw people to our physical locations at a time where education is becoming more and more comfortable with learning from home. We are trying to take shortcomings with our space and turn them into strengths.

Show photo of new outdoor rec space and cross country map next to the old clubhouse

We had a 9-hole golf course that was losing money, was rarely used, and was diverting resources away from our mission of access. In the last year, we remodeled the clubhouse into a new outdoor rec center, turned the golf course into a cross country/Nordic ski trail for the community and our athletics program, and will let the rest of the space grow into a rare oak savannah and area for pollinators. Our students will have a beautiful place to exercise outdoors. Until this course opens in a few weeks, there were no quality cross country trails for the community and high schools to use in our region. Now we will host high school meets and the Cross Country Horizon League Championship on our campus. We are also working to complement the work Ariens Co has done to build a national center for biathlon in Brillion by providing another outlet for tourists who come to this region to Nordic ski. We took a space that was costing us money and was rarely used and turned it into a space that will drive people and potential students to our campus.

Show photos of the STEM Innovation Center

We needed quality mechanical engineering labs quickly so we partnered with Brown County to build the STEM Innovation Center on our campus. We did not build it, but we leased the land to Brown County and raised \$5 million in our part of a partnership to build a space where we can collaborate with the Brown County Extension and the Einstein Project to put our students in great spaces that connect them directly with the community to solve problems and inspire more students to go into STEM fields. The STEM Center is the first step in hopefully creating an innovation park for UW-Green Bay. We are currently building out that concept and see it as a way for us to further engage with area businesses and the public to show our value to the region.

Show slide of classroom in Wood Hall before upgrade followed by slide of Davis and Schwab rooms

We are taking underused classrooms as fast as we can offline and with private philanthropy transforming them into spaces like the Willie D. Davis Financial and Investment Trading Lab where our finance students can now learn in an active way, have a reason to want to come and stay on campus, and get excited about learning.

The Charles Schwab Foundation Center for Personal Financial Planning was created by Dr. Preston Cherry, who believes that all of our students and community should have solid financial skills to navigate their lives. His work improves our retention and provides tangible value to the community we serve. These spaces align with our mission and are the kinds of spaces we think teaching will occur in as we

move into the future. We are excited to host a reception outside of these spaces later today where you can get tours and hear from our faculty and staff that now teach in these classrooms.

Show photo of the Starz Barber Shop and previous room

This used to be a room that was rarely used. Now it houses a minority owned barber shop where the community and our students come to get their hair cut and nails done. We are changing our union to be a place that was rarely used to one that is now bustling with activity and includes a new coffee shop and Esports Lounge.

The original vision from the first chancellor here was for UW-Green Bay to grow to 20,000 students. To achieve this, we need to be proactive in finding ways to change our current space to match the university we are today and are becoming in the future and not just rely on new buildings to do so.

My last overall point is that our region needs us to continue our trajectory. Here is a short clip highlighting the importance of UW-Green Bay to the future of Northeast Wisconsin.

95K phoenix slide

It is truly a remarkable time to be at UW-Green Bay and we believe there is tremendous untapped potential that remains for UW-Green Bay to realize. As our CBO and Sr. Vice Chancellor for Institutional Strategy, Sheryl Van Gruensven talked about in her speech to the Business and Finance Committee, we are financially stable and reinvesting as fast as we can to sustain and further our growth.

What is exciting about being here right now is that you can start to feel the energy behind the belief in our mission from our faculty and staff. We are having open and honest robust conversations about the challenges and opportunities that we have as an institution and the future landscape of higher education. We are motivated by the difference we feel we are making in the lives of our students and the future of our region. Even more powerful is that our community also is rallying behind the promise of our potential and the approach we are taking to realize it. Every university in the System has tremendous faculty and staff. We are proud to also boast that, but what excites us is that our people understand and are committed to who we are trying to serve, what we are trying to achieve, and why we are trying to achieve it. As I mentioned at the beginning of the presentation, we are uniting behind the idea of “This is How We Rise.”

I also want to acknowledge that we have 13 universities represented in the System and that each has a distinct and important mission. We are not better or worse. Again, like the case UW-Milwaukee has made when they hosted this meeting over the last few years, investment in our growth is also essential to our region and to a strong Wisconsin. We also have a peculiar problem in that we are trying to sustain rapid growth at a time when resources to the System are strained. As the System seeks to increase diversity and the funnel of students into the UW System, UW-Green Bay can complement the work of all of our institutions to help us reach that overall goal.

Slide of Hamilton quote and picture

Last spring, we hosted the first big event for our new Institute for Women’s Leadership, which is off to an amazing start. Our keynote speaker was Denise Hamilton and she said something that struck me like a lightning bolt: “Experts fail because they are experts in a world that no longer exists. We need people

who are really good at tomorrow.” I love how succinctly her quote defines higher education right now. We need to be proud of our past, but if we dwell on it, we will prevent the promise of our future. We need to constantly be seeking relevance. We have amazing experts, the question we keep asking is how do we get more people exposed to the great people we have working and teaching here.

Slide of Truman quote

I will conclude with one thing that keeps me up at night and also inspires me to come to work each day. It is this quote from perhaps an unlikely source being Harry Truman in 1947:

“If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the doors of some youth and scarcely at the doors of others, while at the same time formal education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinctions, but of deepening and solidifying them.”

We want to be on the right side of history by holding up the promise of higher education in our country, state, and region as something that can advance the lives of the people we serve. As Miguel Cardona, the U.S. Secretary of Education, said last week (and I promise I did not coordinate this with him), “We must embrace a new vision of college excellence...(one that values) college completion, economic mobility, and narrowing gaps to opportunity for all Americans.” Thank you for joining us in that desire. We are honored to have you all here with us and look forward to the rest of the meetings today and tomorrow. I am happy to take any questions that you may have.