

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING

of the

BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

Menasha, Wisconsin

Held at UW-Fox Valley, Student Union
Thursday, May 9, 2002
10:30 a.m.

- President Smith presiding -

PRESENT: Regents Axtell, Barry, Boyle, Brandes, Burmaster, Gottschalk, Gracz,
Jones, Krutsch, Marcovich, Mohs, Olivieri, Randall, Schneiders and Smith

ABSENT: Regents DeSimone and Klauser

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QUALITY: CREDITS-TO-DEGREE, TIME-TO-DEGREE AND GRADUATION RATES

Regent President Smith noted that the quality of the undergraduate experience has been one of the Board's priority topics for the year. The presentation at this meeting demonstrates the inter-relatedness of credits-to-degree, time-to-degree and graduation rates. The information provided will form a basis for discussion of issues and potential Board action. At the root of the matter are two significant underlying issues – institutional efficiency and student access.

He observed that it is the Board's responsibility to ensure that the citizens of Wisconsin receive value for the investment they have made in the UW. The Board also must do everything possible to help students succeed in achieving their educational objectives. This means ensuring that UW institutions provide the highest quality education possible. He introduced Sharon Wilhelm, Director of the Office of Policy Analysis and Research to speak about the Occasional Research Brief titled, "Institutional Efficiency and Student Success: the Relationship Between Credits-to-Degree, Time-to-Degree and Graduation Rates".

Ms. Wilhelm began her presentation by indicating that measures such as credits-to-degree, time-to-degree, and graduation rates have all been used to gauge institutional efficiency and student access. Key findings of the research paper are: 1) Students are graduating with fewer credits and average credits-to-degree are decreasing. 2) Time-to-degree has decreased, with a larger proportion of bachelors degree recipients graduating within 4 years; 3) The proportion of new freshmen graduating in 4 years has increased.

In 1995, the Board of Regents instructed UW institutions to increase efficiency by reducing the average number of attempted credits-to-degree. Individual institutional goals varied as each sought to reduce credits-to-degree in ways consistent with their own missions and student populations, ranging from a one to six percent reduction. The system goal was to reduce credits-to-degree from 145 to 140 by 2000-01. Each institution developed multiple approaches to reducing its average credits, using strategies such as streamlining degree requirements, pro-active advising, ensuring the availability of required courses, improving the transfer process, and encouraging students to earn college credits in high school.

During the credit reduction initiative, Ms. Wilhelm continued, all UW institutions reduced their average credits-to-degree. Overall, the UW System average decreased from 145 to 137, meeting the goal of 140 by 1998-99. For last year's graduates, the average ranged from 127 at UW-Madison to 148 at UW-Platteville.

Turning to the impact of degree requirements on credits-to-degree, she indicated that 80% of UW degree programs require 120 credits to graduate, and three-fourths of UW graduates are in these programs. The program array at each institution and the distribution of graduates among degree programs provides a context for understanding institutional variance in credits-to-degree. For example, 82% of UW-Platteville's programs require 120 credits, but only half of its graduates were in those programs. Thirty percent of its graduates were in programs requiring between 131 and 140 credits, primarily engineering programs.

One-fourth of all UW graduates did not graduate with more credits than required. Almost half of UW graduates had less than 10 credits over degree requirements. Eighty percent graduated with less than 30 credits above degree requirements.

Ms. Wilhelm then addressed the subject of time-to-degree, noting that this is a measure of the number of calendar years it takes bachelors degree recipients to graduate. A student who matriculated in the fall of 1995 and graduates in spring 2000 would have a time-to-degree of five years, regardless of the number of semesters actually enrolled during that period.

The report shows that time-to-degree has been decreasing. For 1993-94 graduates, 21% graduated within 4 years. By 2001, this proportion had increased to 33%. The percentage of four-year graduates varies by institution and ranges from 47% at UW-Madison to 21% at UW-Milwaukee.

Figures from a recent national study by the American Council on Education indicate that 64% of graduates finish within five years. While 66% of UW graduates finished in five years in the early 1990s, the UW's current percentage stands at 75%. The proportion ranges from 85% at UW-Madison to 55% at UW-Milwaukee, reflecting differences in the behavior and characteristics of students they serve.

Thirteen percent of UW graduates took longer than 6 years to graduate, varying from 6% at UW-La Crosse to 31% at UW-Parkside. Students who take longer than six years to graduate typically are older when they start college, are enrolled for more part-time semesters, and drop out of college more often. On average, their time-to-degree spans about 20 semesters, even though they are enrolled for only about 13 semesters.

Turning to graduation rates, Ms. Wilhelm reported that there has been a substantial increase in graduation rates in the UW System over the past 20 years. More than 60% of 1995 new freshmen graduated within 6 years from a UW institution, an increase of 11% since the late 1970s when 49% graduated within 6 years. The UW's graduation rate is at an all-time high and continues to be above the national average. Further, the increases in graduation rates were achieved during a period when there was an increase in the proportion of Wisconsin high school graduates served by UW institutions.

Graduation rates illustrate the same shift towards 4-year graduation as seen in the time-to-degree measure. Comparison of 1989 and 1995 cohorts of new freshmen shows that 6-year graduation rates remained relatively constant, but that 4-year graduation rates increased. Noting that UW institutions are committed to further increasing their graduation rates, she indicated that each campus has established graduation targets for new freshmen through the fall of 2004.

Presenting a paper titled, "Improving Institutional Efficiency and Increasing Student Success, While Ensuring Quality", Associate Vice President Frank Goldberg began by noting that the statistics presented by Ms. Wilhelm reflect a diverse group of students with different needs and different objectives. He observed that the Board's discussion this year on how a student progresses from admitted applicant to graduate has touched on a number of aspects of quality: The quality of teaching and learning; the quality of the educational environment; and the quality of the academic infrastructure.

In discussing institutional efficiency and student success, he indicated that three questions would be addressed.

1. Credits-to-degree, time-to-degree and graduation rates have been used as indicators of whether or not institutional efficiency and student success objectives are being achieved. How good a gauge of achievement are these measures?
2. How are institutional efficiency and student success interrelated?

3. In order to achieve institutional efficiency and student success objectives, either policy levers or targets, or some combination of the two, may be used. What are the advantages and disadvantages of policy levers and intervention strategies?

Noting that quality has been the lens through which the Board has been discussing policy objectives, Mr. Goldberg stated the Board's position that quality will not be sacrificed for efficiency, and academic standards will not be compromised to increase graduation rates. Policies to increase institutional efficiency and student success must also ensure that quality will be maintained.

Referring to a chart on goals and policy options (Exhibit A), he explained that the top panel shows goals that have been articulated by the Board over the past several years, along with the measures of credits-to-degree, time-to-degree, and graduation rates. The middle panel contains a set of goals that are related to credits-to-degree, time-to-degree and graduation rates, but that have been addressed largely from an accountability standpoint. These goals include facilitating transfer, increasing the number of non-traditional students, providing access to additional traditional students, maintaining affordability and increasing opportunities for internships and study abroad. The bottom panel contains policy options that the Board might consider.

Noting that some of the goals are conflicting, Mr. Goldberg indicated that there can be trade-offs between institutional efficiency and student success goals. For example, a narrow definition of unnecessary credits could conflict with providing students opportunities for academic experiences that would enhance the quality of their education. On the other hand, providing students with choices about their education might conflict with reducing the cost of education to the student and to the state.

Mr. Goldberg then discussed the potential impact of a number of policy levers on credits-to-degree, time-to-degree, and graduation rates. An excess credits surcharge might decrease credits and time-to-degree, but it might prevent some students who need additional credits from graduating. A course repeat surcharge might decrease credits and time-to-degree, but could have an adverse impact on graduation rates. Elimination of the tuition plateau would tend to decrease credits-to-degree, but might increase time-to-degree because of absence of the financial incentive to finish quickly. The potential impact on graduation rates is harder to predict but will be made more clear by the UW-Stout pilot program. Cohort tuition provides an incentive for students to finish quickly and therefore is likely to decrease credits and time-to-degree, but there is little evidence of its impact on graduation rates.

While not a realistic option because of the Board's commitment to maintain affordability, Mr. Goldberg continued, an analysis of a tuition increase option illustrates an important point about financial policies – their differential impacts on people with different levels of financial resources. While an increase in tuition would have positive impacts on all three measures for higher income students, for lower income students there could be a strong negative impact on graduation rates, unless financial aid were to increase proportionally.

Turning to the potential impact of non-financial policy levers, Mr. Goldberg indicated that a limit to the number of credits allowed for a degree could potentially have a positive impact on all three measures, but might have significant consequences for quality, particularly in certain professional fields. Lobbying specialized accrediting agencies could also have a positive impact on all three measures; however, this approach has not been successful in the past. Currently, four-year degree contracts have not had a significant impact on credits or time-to-degree or graduation rates. To be effective, these contracts would have to be modified to provide a stronger incentive for students to use them. As with increasing tuition, Mr. Goldberg noted, increasing admissions requirements is not a viable alternative because of the Board's commitment to access. However, it would have a positive impact on all three measures.

Mr. Goldberg explained that an alternative to, or complement for, the use of policy levers would be an approach that establishes targets and then tracks progress toward achieving them. When targets are used, each campus must develop policies and intervention strategies that are tailored to its mission, program array, and student population.

In December 2000, he noted, the Board endorsed retention and graduation targets, and UW institutions currently are implementing strategies to achieve those targets. Those strategies fall into the following categories: 1) Programs designed to connect students and their parents to the campus' academic environment from the time of admission; 2) Freshman year experience programs designed to assist students in making the transition to college-level academic expectations; 3) Creating an active learning environment, through such programs as service learning and internships; and 4) Proactive advising to target specific groups of students. The Education Committee plans to examine some of these strategies in detail in the coming year.

In determining what actions to take, Mr. Goldberg continued, the Board will need to consider which approach or combination of approaches to utilize. If policy levers are chosen, the Board determines the action that will apply to all students at all institutions. If targets are chosen, UW institutions determine intervention strategies as appropriate to their student populations. These approaches are not mutually exclusive and may be used in combination.

Concluding his remarks, Mr. Goldberg referred to a slide showing a traditional path to a UW degree: For every 100 high school graduates, approximately 45 apply to a UW institution, 42 are admitted and 33 arrive as new freshmen (33% service rate). Twenty-eight of these students will be retained to the sophomore year and 20 will graduate from some UW institution within six years. This number will increase to 21 when the UW achieves its target of a 64% graduation rate. On a base of 20,000 graduates a year, this means an additional 1,000 UW graduates for the Wisconsin economy.

While this is the traditional path to a degree, he pointed out that many students take other paths. In developing policies and strategies designed to improve institutional efficiency and increase success for traditional-path students, he remarked, it is important to evaluate the impact of these strategies on students who take a nontraditional path.

Regent Axtell observed that statistics for nontraditional students tend to skew the totals used in measurement. He asked if there is a way to separate traditional and nontraditional student data to obtain a more accurate view.

Replying that some of these measures can be separated, Dr. Goldberg noted, however, that according to a recent American Council on Education report, only 40% of the student population nationwide has all of the attributes of what has been considered a traditional student. What this indicates is that there is a melding of traditional and nontraditional behaviors, tending to complicate measurements. Students can be categorized as traditional or nontraditional by age, but that would present an incomplete picture as it does not take into account such factors as work and family responsibilities. Age-related information is available at the institutional level, but is not collected centrally.

Regent Axtell encouraged the Education Committee to consider the possibility of separating traditional and nontraditional student data in order to achieve a more accurate statistical accounting.

Thanking Mr. Goldberg and Ms. Wilhelm for their reports, Regent Krutsch noted that this data relates to matters that are relevant to judging efficient use of taxpayer dollars. She agreed that it is important to have the best possible data so that institutions can respond nimbly and appropriately for their student bodies.

She suggested that the Board use both targets and policy levers, bearing in mind the responsibility to consider not only how best to educate current students, but how to increase the total group of students the UW can educate in the future.

Regent Krutsch concurred with Mr. Goldberg's comment that there currently are not enough incentives for students to use four-year graduation contracts. With regard to an excess credit surcharge, she pointed out this actually would mean a lesser taxpayer subsidy. One benefit would be to provide an incentive for effective advising as a means for students to avoid accumulating credits to a point when a surcharge would be levied. She recalled that a surcharge of this type had been recommended in the UW System's 21st Century Study.

Mr. Goldberg added that the Board had subsequently decided to defer a decision on this matter pending results of the effort to reduce credits-to-degree.

Regent Schneiders pointed out that Minnesota had tried the opposite strategy, allowing students to take credits over 15 without extra cost, and that strategy had not worked well.

Mr. Goldberg added that universities across the country are struggling with these issues. What is being found is that no one strategy works uniformly well across the board.

Regent Boyle asked if there is any data to show if reductions in credits took place in the major or in electives and whether any judgments had been made as to the effect of these efficiencies on the quality of education.

Mr. Goldberg replied that the data available did not allow that kind of analysis and that there would be a cost to obtaining additional data. His understanding was that credit reductions were made primarily by reducing requirements for majors. There was not evidence to indicate reduction in credits-to-degree had resulted in a decrease in quality. Scores on professional certification exams, graduate records examinations and medical school admission tests have held up well, and UW graduates continue to be highly valued in the marketplace.

Regent Schneiders inquired about the impact of the quality of advising and how it affects the measures being discussed.

In response, Mr. Goldberg indicated that campuses are focusing more on proactive advising for students with particular needs, rather than trying to improve advising across the board. Intervention strategies are being developed to identify students at risk and provide them with advising before academic difficulties become evident. There are also proactive advising strategies for students who have not been able to decide on a major or career objective. Campuses had reported extensively on these types of strategies at the recent retention conference as a means of improving graduation rates.

Regent Barry observed that universities with relatively high tuition have high graduation rates within four years. He asked about the experience of out-of-state students at UW institutions.

Mr. Goldberg replied that out-of-state students have high graduation rates and shorter credits-to-degree. He noted that many of these students have higher income levels and that there is a trade off between this type of positive incentive and its impact on access for students of lower income levels.

Regent Barry pointed out that if students remain enrolled for five or six years, they will likely graduate with a larger debt than if they paid a higher tuition and finished in four years. He felt timely graduation is a rationale for a higher tuition policy.

Regent Brandes agreed that there is a correlation between high tuition and high four-year graduation rates. She thought that another factor enabling students at more expensive schools to graduate in four years is the quality of advising that focuses on finishing in that period of time. In those types of schools, for example, participation in international programs does not delay graduation; rather, students in those programs earn a semester of credits. While cost is a key factor in early graduation, she noted, investment in quality advising is just as important.

President Lyall added that students had asked for better integration of career advising with academic advising. The purpose is to help students focus earlier on an appropriate major. One question is whether there should be mandatory advising for UW students, she observed, noting that an opportunity is being missed if students do not use the advising that is available to them. She added, however, that there is some discomfort about the idea of mandatory advising and that more consideration of this and other advising questions is needed.

Regent Schneiders indicated that it would be helpful to know the graduation rates of students who have advising versus those who do not.

Regent Olivieri commended the report as one that connects well to policy judgments that the Board needs to make. He pointed out that the UW is now serving a higher proportion of high school graduates with fewer staff positions. At the same time, efforts to enhance the quality of undergraduate education have been successful.

He pointed out that the credits-to-degree target that drove many of the improvements in the last few years led to decreased time-to-degree and increased graduation rates. Noting that no viable policy lever had been identified to address the area of further improving graduation rates, he expressed concern about shifting the policy focus to improved graduation rates and away from credits-to-degree, over which the Board has more control.

In addition, Regent Olivieri questioned whether the 64% graduate rate target should be increased. He noted that three institutions were not meeting their targets for credits-to-degree and graduation rates and asked for more information on how the campuses are addressing this matter.

Using a garden as a metaphor, Chancellor Wells suggested that students be thought of as flowers that have become more diverse over the years, and as “perennials” rather than “annuals” because they will be coming back to the university for life-long learning. Much of what is measured in higher education, he commented, is grounded in thinking of students as “annuals”, who will complete their education when they receive their degrees.

Expressing caution about comparing a public access institution to a private high-cost institution, Chancellor Markee explained that, because many private colleges are liberal arts institutions, students changing majors move only between liberal arts areas, rather than from one professional area to another, and thus lose credits. In addition, he noted that UW institutions differ much from each other. For example, UW-Platteville attracts bright students who are interested in engineering, many of whom come from small high schools with limited opportunities for mathematics education. Such students need to spend time in their first years of college getting up to speed in that academic area. In addition, he noted, institutions like UW-Platteville have few scholarship dollars, so more students must have jobs to support themselves through school. Each UW institution, he added, is able to identify the particular factors that cause its credits and time-to-degree to differ from other institutions.

Regent Krutsch noted that first-generation or low-income students likely benefit most from proactive or intrusive advising. While there is a difference in the demographics of public and private institutions, she pointed out that low-income students at private institutions also are much more likely to graduate in four years than public institution students.

Another issue, she commented, relates to properly labeling and valuing professional degree programs. Referring to accounting programs that require 150 credits and provide a master’s degree at the end of the fifth year, she suggested that this model might be applied to other professional programs. Concerning credits-to-degree, Regent Krutsch felt that most reductions that could be made without additional policy levers had already been done under the recent successful initiative.

Noting his agreement that better advising is one improvement that is needed, Chancellor Miller cautioned that care should be taken to distinguishing between structural barriers and personal choice barriers. With all of its programs attainable within 120 credits, UW-Whitewater has one of the lowest structural barriers. On the other hand, two of the university's largest and most sought-after majors also are difficult to enter due to space limitations and cannot admit all fully qualified applicants. Some of these students reapply while taking other courses, even though they are advised to go into other programs. The Chancellor agreed that policy levers would be needed to make further progress on credit reduction.

Chancellor Wiley emphasized the importance of looking at individual programs. Noting that the average time-to-degree at UW-Madison is 4.33 years, he explained that, for each college, the average time is just what it should be with very few exceptions. The largest number of students are in Letters and Sciences, and they generally graduate in four years. In Engineering, most students graduate in five years. What is misleading, he said, is to average all programs together instead of looking at what is expected for each program. He thought the most important form of advising is to help students decide on career objectives, since the students who tend to take the longest to graduate are ones who change their majors several times.

Regent President Smith observed that the subject of efficiency is of critical importance and one that the Board has been addressing extensively. Noting that this report shows progress in that area, he emphasized that the Board needs to be able to articulate the UW's efficiency to the public, to constituents and to the Legislature. This is especially difficult, he noted, because efficiencies frequently are found in details which save a great deal of money when added together. Reports such as the one heard at this meeting help in articulating the important efficiencies that are being achieved.

At 11:45 a.m., the following resolution was moved by Regent Gottschalk and seconded by Regent Randall.

Resolution 8535: That, the Board of Regents recess into Closed Session for competitive and bargaining reasons, as permitted by s.19.85(1)(e), *Wis. Stats.*

The motion was adopted on a unanimous roll-call vote, with Regents Axtell, Barry, Boyle, Brandes, Burmaster, Gottschalk, Gracz, Krutsch, Marcovich, Randall, Schneiders, and Smith (12) voting in the affirmative. There were no dissenting votes and no abstentions.

The Board arose from closed session at 12:30 p.m., at which time the meeting was recessed for lunch.

The meeting was reconvened at 1:20 p.m.

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STUDY OF ADULT STUDENTS

Introducing the presentation, Regent President Smith noted that the Board made it a priority for Enrollment Management 21 that UW institutions do more to serve adult students as a means of increasing brain gain for the state.

Market Research Director Colleen Howes explained that the study was done among adult students currently enrolled in the UW. The random sample of those surveyed was composed of graduate students 30 years and older and undergraduates 25 and older. Respondents had the option of completing a survey delivered through traditional mail or completing a survey on the Web, generating a response rate of 47% of graduate students and 37% of undergraduates. This high response rate, she observed, produced a strong level of confidence in the information that was gathered.

Turning to respondents' profiles, Ms. Howes indicated that understanding their lives outside the classroom would assist in better meeting their educational needs. As to gender, respondent graduate students were 53% female and undergraduates were 56% female, which tracks with national trends that show a higher percentage of female students.

As to family responsibilities, the survey found that 60% of graduate students and 45% of undergraduates were married. 37% of graduate students and 34% of undergraduates had children under 18 years old. With regard to work responsibilities, the survey showed that 78% of respondents were employed either part or full time and that improving career options was one of the most frequent reasons mentioned by respondents for continuing their education. Of employed respondents, 29% of undergraduates and 49% of graduate students worked for employers with tuition reimbursement plans.

The survey found that a majority of respondents have access to the Internet. The most common reasons that they gave for accessing the Internet were: e-mail, accessing course information, research information for school, and research information for personal use. Taking into account their busy lifestyles, Ms. Howe indicated, Internet use can be seen as a way to keep in touch with people and gather information in an efficient manner.

Virtually all respondents indicated that they had visited their campus websites, and about 70% found those websites to be very or extremely useful. Of those who suggested ways to improve campus websites, ideas included:

- 1) Organization/navigation of links, including better links to department information and easier access to the library;
- 2) Quality of information, including timeliness of updates and more course information.

Associate Vice President Kathi Sell reported that the top five items of importance to respondents were:

- 1) Availability of desired courses/field of study
- 2) Faculty who are effective teachers
- 3) Convenient course scheduling
- 4) Job preparation
- 5) Good value for the money

Comparing these findings to national research, she pointed out that one of the top items of importance nationally is location. This did not appear on the UW survey, she surmised, because the UW's 26 institutions are spread throughout the state and so are geographically accessible.

With regard to preferred course scheduling, she indicated that for students who are employed full-time, summer is the first preference, followed by evenings after 6:00 p.m., early evenings (4:00-6:00 p.m.), eight-week timeframes, and weekends.

For students employed part-time, the first preference is morning, which indicates that most are employed in the afternoon or evening. Summer is the next preference, followed by afternoon, early evening (4:00-6:00 p.m.) and evenings after 6:00 p.m.

Noting that respondents employed both full and part-time had some preference for early evening scheduling, she interpreted that finding to mean that students would like to go to school right after work, rather than going home and having to return for later evening courses.

As to online courses, the survey showed that, for students employed full-time, 37% of undergraduates and 34% of graduate students consider these offerings extremely or very important.

Ms. Howes related that a key insight gleaned from this research is that students value quality and convenience. Therefore, UW institutions should focus on:

- 1) Convenient delivery of courses
- 2) Convenient hours for campus offices
- 3) Concern for the individual student
- 4) Quality faculty and effective teaching

As an example of how UW institutions are using this information to meet student needs, she introduced Jim Perry, Dean of the UW Fox Valley, to describe a collaborative engineering program developed in partnership with UW-Platteville to meet the needs of Fox Valley businesses.

Dean Perry reported that UW Market Research had conducted a survey of Fox Valley area employers and former students of the Milwaukee School of Engineering which recently had ended a program in the area. The survey indicated a strong need for engineering education in the valley.

This survey provided the basis for the collaborative degree in Mechanical Engineering, for which UW-Platteville faculty will move onto the UW-Fox Valley campus for periods of time and work with Fox Valley faculty to offer the program.

Interest has been indicated by about 400 students in the valley and some of the largest employers. About 89 students were expected to enroll in the fall. In the interim, UW Fox Valley has been offering potential students, many who come from a technical college backgrounds, bridge courses in such areas as calculus and physics in order to bring them up to speed for the UW-Platteville engineering program. To make it more convenient for these employed students, some courses have been moved from daytime to evening – a change that has been successful in increasing enrollments. In addition, student service staff are offering advising as to how the backgrounds of students matched requirements for the Platteville program and helping them decide what courses they need to take.

In closing, the Dean commented that the collaborative program is a remarkable success and for the first time ever will meet the needs of the Fox Valley for an undergraduate engineering program.

Concluding the presentation, Ms. Howes provided several more examples of projects undertaken by the Market Research Unit:

- 1) The Professional French Program at UW-Madison that offers a Masters Degree and Certificate to prepare students for jobs in international companies.
- 2) The online graduate program in Clinical Lab Science at UW-Madison
- 3) The Master's Degree in Management at UW-River Falls

In discussion following the presentation, Regent Axtell indicated that people in Rock County are looking into a program similar to the one in collaborative engineering and that figures are showing strong employer demand. The work done by Market Research for the Fox Valley was helping to pave the way in this effort.

Regent Krutsch commended the Fox Valley engineering initiative as being responsive to the Board's focus on economic development and to the needs of students for job preparation.

The discussion concluded and the meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Judith A. Temby, Secretary

