



UW and Business are Powerful Partners for Growth

The Governor's budget proposal for the University of Wisconsin System has sparked a debate on the role and mission of this world-class institution to our state. As policy makers discuss the implications of the current two-year budget on the UW System, the decisions made in the coming months will have a lasting effect on our universities and colleges for years to come. It is important that the discussion focus on how we can ensure that the UW System is nimble and responsive to an ever changing world as we work to maintain value and affordability.

A recent study found that 62% of all jobs in Wisconsin will require some postsecondary training by 2020. Currently, Wisconsin has a 39% postsecondary attainment rate among our working-age population. This not only presents a workforce development challenge in meeting the needs of our employers, but also impacts the prosperity of our families. As seen in our neighboring state of Minnesota, increased levels of postsecondary attainment can be directly linked to their higher per capita income, which is around \$5000 higher than in Wisconsin.

Clearly, our state's potential for economic and income growth is dependent upon our ability to develop our workforce in an increasingly technical and innovative economy. Our state's citizens and employers will be depending on the UW System, as well as the Wisconsin Technical College System, to meet those needs. Campuses are thinking outside of the box to meet this challenge through initiatives such as the Flex Option, whereby individuals can get credit for what they know, and UW-River Falls' Hudson Center, which provides mid-career and adult learners a convenient off-campus location to complete or seek additional advanced degrees. In order to ensure our future economic success, it is critical that the UW System reflect the needs of our students and goals of our state.

In many cases, our campuses are already answering this call and working with local businesses and industries to offer solutions to training a quality workforce. Several examples from campuses around the state help demonstrate the valuable private-public partnerships that foster growth and benefit Wisconsin's students and employers. In La Crosse, Trane has joined with UW-La Crosse to establish an internship program to meet the company's recruiting needs. The Manufacturing Outreach Center at UW-Stout works with manufacturers to help encourage growth and improve profitability. UW-Whitewater's Incubation Program provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to successfully launch their start-ups with the support and resources of the University community.

Additionally, UW campuses are performing the kind of ground breaking research that aids innovative new industries and creates solutions to everyday problems to improve our quality of life. UW-Milwaukee is the only postsecondary institution in the nation with a center on freshwater science, which is an important issue to our agricultural and tourism industries, as well as a growing issue worldwide given the scarcity of freshwater. At Oshkosh, the university is working to improve energy independence by unlocking the energy potential of livestock material and biodigesters. Finding ways to efficiently use our resources and deriving value from waste materials is a topic of study at UW-Stevens Point.

These local and statewide initiatives show that bringing the needs and know-how of the private sector together with the University's expertise and resources are powerful drivers of Wisconsin's economy and communities. By meeting the workforce needs of our state, UW campuses provide a vital service in encouraging economic development and job growth. We know that a stable and qualified workforce is a top consideration of businesses as they seek places to expand or move their operations. Without a pipeline of talented graduates, businesses will choose to create jobs elsewhere.

While we more frequently hear of the challenges and missteps of the UW System, the initiatives described above show the value added that UW campuses provide to our state. Even as there have been disappointments relating to past administrative practices, the UW System under the current leadership has been working collaboratively with state leaders to rebuild relationships and address concerns. I believe that our state will not have a better opportunity than now to entrust the leadership of the UW System, the Board of Regents, and chancellors with greater ability to manage their operations. Providing greater flexibilities as we hold the University accountable will provide them with the ability to be nimble and responsive to our changing economy and encourage new initiatives and policies that improve student outcomes. Let's use this opportunity to build on the UW System's successes and position it to continue to be a world renowned institution.