



News Release

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UW System aims to provide More Graduates for Wisconsin ***Steady growth to result in 80,000 more UW degrees issued over next 15 years***

MADISON, Wis. – The University of Wisconsin System is working to boost the number of college graduates over the next 15 years, aiming for a future where half of all Wisconsin adults have a college degree. The new goals are part of *UW System's Growth Agenda for Wisconsin* – a long-range plan to move the state beyond the current recession toward a more competitive economic position.

On Thursday in Fond du Lac, UW System President Kevin P. Reilly and the Board of Regents will discuss plans for UW campuses to confer 33,700 undergraduate degrees per year by 2025, up from today's rate of about 26,000 per year – a 30% increase. Over 15 years, **the cumulative gains will result in 80,000 more graduates for Wisconsin.**

“This plan will require renewed state investment in the University but it is progress that we, as a state, can't afford not to pursue,” Reilly said. “Wisconsin will succeed in the future based on how wisely we invest in the education of our hard-working residents.”

In 2008, 26% of Wisconsin adults had a four-year college degree – two percentage points lower than the national average, and behind Minnesota's 32%. States with more educated citizens have higher incomes, and per capita income in Wisconsin trails Minnesota and most other states. If Wisconsin's per capita income was equal to Minnesota's, residents here would collectively take home \$29 billion more in annual earnings.

“If we do nothing, Wisconsin will fall further behind. If we think and act strategically, we can add 80,000 college-educated Wisconsin citizens – people who use their high-quality UW educations to obtain high-quality jobs. Together, those 80,000 people will bring home more personal income. That broadens the tax base, lowers the individual tax burden, enriches local communities, and allows more people to enjoy a high quality of life,” said Reilly.

Long-term increases in the number of UW graduates will result from a variety of targeted local efforts. Some increases will result from higher enrollments, but significant growth will come from new efforts to keep students in college and help them complete their degrees. All UW campuses are looking at ways to better serve working adults, returning students, first-generation college students, and those from populations not currently represented in large numbers on UW campuses.

“The UW must enroll more of these new students and we must find ways to help all our students graduate in larger numbers, in a timely fashion,” said Reilly.

“This is a significant goal. Achieving it will require hard work and persistence,” said Reilly. “Clearly, it would be much easier to maintain the status quo – enrolling the same slice of high school graduates with the same retention rates and the same graduation rates. In that scenario, the number of UW graduates would likely decline over time, due to shifting demographic trends and shrinking numbers of high school students. This is a case where standing still is the same as stepping backward.”

Last year, UW campuses saw a record number of graduates, including 24,515 who earned their bachelor’s degrees and 1,477 with associate degrees. The UW System currently enrolls a record-high 178,909 students.

Today, 79.3% of UW freshmen return to the same campus for their second year, and 59.3% graduate within six years, exceeding national averages on both counts. An additional 5.8% transfer to another UW System campus and complete their degrees, for a system-wide graduation rate of 65.1%. Average retention and graduation rates for low-income students and those from under-represented populations are significantly lower.

“We’re shooting for a future where half of all working-age adults in the state have some kind of college credential, whether it’s from the UW or one of our technical or private colleges,” said Reilly. “We will provide each UW campus with the flexibility to adopt innovative approaches, and they will all be focused on one result – providing more graduates for Wisconsin while preserving the high quality of a UW degree.”

“Beyond bigger numbers, we remain committed to high quality. It is not enough to simply issue more degrees. The people who hold those UW degrees must have the ability to think beyond their particular discipline. They must be creative problem-solvers, clear communicators, effective leaders, and engaged citizens,” said Reilly.

The *Growth Agenda for Wisconsin* is a multifaceted approach to economic vitality, with the success of each part contingent upon the whole. In addition to creating more graduates, plans call for UW System to create new Wisconsin jobs through expanded research and development. To pursue these goals, the UW needs an academic workforce comprised of talented people who earn competitive market salaries. All of these strategies rely on renewed state investment in higher education, other public and private support, and the freedom to adopt more efficient business practices that allow the UW to make the best use of scarce dollars.

For more information, see www.wisconsin.edu.

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