UW System Mission

The mission of the University of Wisconsin System is to develop human resources, to discover and disseminate knowledge, to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses, and to serve and stimulate society by developing in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities, scientific, professional and technological expertise, and a sense of purpose. Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training, and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the UW System is the search for truth.

UW System Vision

Moving Wisconsin and the World Forward

The University of Wisconsin System will utilize its outstanding network of two-year colleges, four-year universities, and statewide extension to increase the participation of the people of Wisconsin in higher educational experiences that lead to personal success and collective impact on the most critical challenges within Wisconsin and the world.
“We began this strategic planning process in the fall of 2015, led by a committee including chancellors, provosts, business officers, staff and both President Cross and me. Since then we have engaged with more than 5,000 citizens at over 20 events around the state and through surveys. We received input from leaders in the education community, business community, health care communities, legislature, and from each of our UW institutions. The result of this effort is UW System 2020FWD, a Vision for the Future. This framework will inform every aspect of the UW System and each of our institutions and help guide the UW and the state towards a future we can all be proud of.”

Regina Millner
President, Board of Regents

“Wisconsin has serious challenges that could impact our economy and our future. UW System 2020FWD is an ambitious and comprehensive strategic framework that will position the UW System and our institutions to help overcome those challenges. By focusing on how we educate students throughout the entire educational pipeline, how we make our students more innovative and ready to work in a global environment, how we engage with business and local communities and the state around us, we can help build a strong vision for Wisconsin’s future.

This plan includes ideas that we can implement now and ones whose resolution is far into the future. UW System 2020FWD starts with the Class of 2020 and what we can do in four years. But it extends beyond – beyond our borders and beyond ideas not yet invented by UW.”

Ray Cross
President, University of Wisconsin System

Current State---Trends, Challenges, and Call to Action
What the UW System Can Do for the State of Wisconsin

Changing demographics are creating significant obstacles to economic growth in Wisconsin and these trends are likely to continue into the future. The UW System and our institutions, faculty, staff, students can be the driving force to overcome these challenges.

Call to Action
Since its inception, Wisconsin has been known as a state of firsts. We are the first to solve crises and have always found ways to move forward. Today, we are at an economic, educational, and demographic crossroads. The UW System has an imperative and an exceptional opportunity to lead.

Challenge: The population growth rate is declining in Wisconsin. Our population is aging and statewide we are seeing a decline in the number of high school graduates. Our median income has decreased by nearly 10% since 2000 and we trail our neighbors significantly in the number of college graduates living in our state.

Solution: We need a strong pipeline that connects students to our educational system from PK-12 through the UW System and continues to support and engage them throughout their career.

Challenge: Wisconsin's economy needs more citizens who are innovative and entrepreneurial and also reflective of a more ethnically diverse population. Wisconsin is currently last in the nation at producing start-up companies.

Solution: Our universities must produce an experience that creates culturally fluent graduates who can compete on a global level and help generate the ideas, jobs, and careers of the future.

Challenge: Our businesses, non-profit leaders, and local and state governments need talent in their workforces and creative solutions to help address the challenges they face every day. An estimated 10,000 to 14,000 talented UW graduates leave the state every year.

Solution: We need to reinvest in the Wisconsin Idea by building stronger connections between stakeholders and the UW System to address the state’s challenges together. We need to mobilize our community and business leaders to help promote the value of investing in and supporting the UW System.

Challenge: UW System is educating more students with the lowest State support in its history.

Solution: UW System and each of its institutions must demonstrate accountability, efficiency, and operational excellence in how resources are allocated, both in and out of the classroom.
Focus on the Education Pipeline

Increasing the enrollment and success of individuals in all educational experiences throughout their lifetime.

Wisconsin Destination – We want to increase the number of Wisconsinites who are prepared for, choose to access, and succeed in higher education. UW System will dedicate resources to developing UW System attainment goals to make sure more citizens reach the ultimate destination of a college degree. UW System will also explore the challenges and opportunities of performance-based funding.

The UW Path—Preparation for college begins in early childhood and UW System has a role to play all along the educational path. UW System will promote and expand early childhood development programs in communities throughout the state. UW System will also support the expansion of summer programs for middle and high school students, particularly for those from under-represented groups. UW System will also work with K-12 to increase the availability of college courses within high school and reduce the need for remedial classes in college.

We will increase the support system for college students to improve success, reduce dropout rates, and cut the time to degree. UW System will enhance advising to facilitate proactive academic and career advising by encouraging the use of predictive analytical tools, evidence-based interventions, and increased professional development for faculty and staff regarding student success. UW System will also promote the creation of additional and more robust articulation agreements to provide easier transfer between institutions.

UW System wants to support and expand life-long learning opportunities for all Wisconsin adults to make higher education more accessible and achievable at their own speed in their chosen environment. This could include on-campus, at home, in the workplace, community venues, and any other location where there is a desire for learning. UW System will also work directly with employers to understand their needs in order to predict which programs and skills are needed most in the workplace.

360 Advising – New trends in advising have led to improved student success and reduced time to degree. UW System will expand the use of predictive analytics and intrusive advising to provide support in real time to students at risk. We will also strive to increase students’ access to career counseling and financial planning.

Seamless Transfer – We want to take the Transfer Information Systems (TIS) to the next level. UW System will increase the number of articulation agreements and expand the number of higher education entities participating in the TIS program. The transfer process should be seamless, smooth, and easily navigable for all students at any step of their educational journey.

UW Flexible Options – UW System will expand opportunities for adult students to complete a degree through its competency-based online Flexible Option program.

Moving FWD

What System will do:

College Options – Students who complete college coursework while still in high school are more prepared when they arrive on campus and typically complete their degree in a shorter amount of time, which makes college more affordable. UW System will expand the current course options program and provide additional opportunities through College Options. UW System will also dedicate resources to preparing high school teachers and connecting them to the university to increase the number of students taking college courses in high school. We also need to find effective ways deliver these courses in small high schools and in rural areas.

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What will institutions do:

- Increase partnerships with PK-12
- Increase overall enrollment of Wisconsin high school graduates and adults at the University
- Close the opportunity gap for underrepresented minorities
- Improve student retention, success, and completion
- Minimize financial barriers to college for Wisconsin students and families
- Expand connections with businesses to develop programs that meet changing workforce needs
Focus on the University Experience

Growing a more creative and engaging educational experience so all learners can compete and succeed in a global environment.

Dynamic Learning – Teaching and learning is at the heart of the university experience. UW System will provide the educational support so every student has an exceptional educational experience.

Bridging Boundaries – We heard from business and community leaders that to effectively address today’s global challenges, UW System must promote and encourage cultural fluency. The challenges we collectively face cross many different disciplines, cultures, affiliations and geographic locations. To be effective, we must learn how to cross boundaries that once may have separated us. Cultural fluency will encourage greater understanding of differing perspectives and provide the skills to communicate within and across varying contexts. We will enable Wisconsin graduates, and those who educate them, to thrive in a world of differences.

UW Innovate – UW System will invest resources to encourage and reward research, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit. We are uniquely positioned as an engine of innovation and creative problem solving. From public health to the creative arts, harnessing this powerful community of learners, educators, researchers, and scholars leads to cutting-edge solutions for Wisconsin and the world.

Grow Wisconsin – UW System will increase access to new and existing sources of federal and state research support. We must turn ground-breaking ideas into centers of economic activity. We will promote the transfer of new knowledge into the economy of Wisconsin and the world. We will find new strategies to better translate research and scholarship into economic opportunity.

Moving FWD

What System will do:

U – UW System will provide additional resources for professional development and technology, as well as support for high impact experiences. Students learn in a variety of ways and our promise is that every student will be exposed to at least two high impact learning practices within their “University Experience.” These include but are not limited to internships, undergraduate research, service learning, capstone projects, collaborative learning, and learning communities.

FLUENT – In order to set expectations and deliver needed skills, we will develop a premier curriculum for System-wide cultural fluency education and conduct training programs for all students, faculty, and staff. This will provide a foundation of civility, respect, and dignity for all people who take part in university experiences. While this does not mean every idea is accepted, it is vital to the academic enterprise that all voices be heard and understood. UW System will put into practice the FLUENT model and support creation of learning communities and opportunities for dialogue that help students, faculty, and staff talk across boundaries. Resources will be made available for existing programs as well as starting new learning communities that deepen cultural fluency.

CRE-8 – Coming up with tomorrow’s profound ideas and innovations requires out-of-the-box thinking. To help launch our students, faculty and staff into a new stratosphere, UW System will provide professional development opportunities for creativity and innovation internally and in the broader community.

Idea$ – A fountain of ideas and innovations flow from UW System institutions. However, converting world-class ideas into tomorrow’s technologies, services, products, and organizations can be a challenge. Students can benefit from expertise in academic technology transfer, Intellectual Property (IP) protection, contract management, and technology commercialization. UW System will connect students to WARF, WiSys, and other organizations in order to translate research into economic opportunity.

What institutions do:

- Promote culture committed to research and innovation
- Increase research and scholarship activity at each institution in the system
- Foster an inclusive, welcoming community that embraces diversity of people and thought and encourages people to speak across values
- Make cultural fluency a part of all performance evaluation processes
- Provide facilities and equipment to support research and teaching and learning
- Prepare students for life, career, and the responsibilities of citizenship
Focus on Community & Business Mobilization
Further expanding the Wisconsin Idea to address the state’s greatest needs and to help Wisconsin’s communities and businesses become more successful.

Meeting the State’s Needs – A central role of UW System is to clearly identify and articulate the issues affecting people and organizations. Whether it is availability of health care professionals in rural areas or affordability of childcare, UW System strives to respond to issues that Wisconsinites care about most. Once challenges are identified, the University of Wisconsin has a rich tradition of pursuing solutions. Whether bio-energy or advanced materials, Wisconsin is at the forefront of what makes a difference. These solutions almost always involve partnering with business and government.

Advocating/Sharing Our Value – At UW System, we’ve been quietly making a difference for many years. However, it is vital that UW System engage and communicate the value of the university to the people, businesses, and communities of Wisconsin, the nation, and the world. In our global community, the challenges are so complex that we must reach out to other researchers, scholars, companies, communities and organizations to share what we have discovered. Our interconnected world means that we must act differently to position UW System as a partner, collaborator and inspiration for greatness.

What System will do:
“UniverCity” Year – What if the full breadth of the university’s efforts were focused like a laser on a city’s most important priorities? Enter the UniverCity Year—a program where classes and faculty from across campuses are coordinated to partner with a designated community on specific projects for an academic year. System will adopt and scale-up the UniverCity Year model to all four-year campuses and UW-Extension. Through this work, based on evidence grounded in the everyday experience and aspirations of residents and leaders, we will have positive impact on the places and lives of people throughout Wisconsin and the world.

Wisconsin Vitality – To achieve a healthier population across the state, the UW System will initiate a partnership with hospitals, clinics, and providers to promote health and wellness education. Education will include “upstream” preventative behaviors such as diet, physical activity, and mental/ emotional and environmental health. And we won’t stop there. Because evidence indicates that we have a serious shortage of health care professionals in rural and underserved areas in Wisconsin, getting health care professionals in the right places to serve all residents will be a major part of the Wisconsin Vitality initiative.

Career Connect – UW System will create and manage a streamlined website to link University expertise to community needs. The site will also serve as a one-stop shop for employers to connect with students looking for internships, out-of-the classroom experiences, and jobs.

Wisconsin Idea Summits – UW System will hold a series of listening and engagement sessions with community and business across the state to identify the most pressing challenges in the state. These summits will help engage leaders in communities, business, government and non-profit organizations to galvanize interest and build support for tackling the top challenges in our state. UW System will convene the sessions and ensure a platform exists for constructive, civil discourse.

What will institutions do:
- Provide expertise and support for business and community growth and development
- Expand collaborations with communities, local governments, and nonprofits around the state
- Improve the quality of life for the people of Wisconsin and their communities
- Improve wellness and health of all Wisconsin citizens
Focus on Operational Excellence

UW System will vigorously pursue transparent and efficient operational practices.

Administrative Excellence—The UW System has been at the forefront of accountability and transparency reporting to ensure that we can demonstrate to our stakeholders—especially Wisconsin taxpayers—our commitment to use resources responsibly. As new mechanisms to consolidate, streamline and change emerge, we must continue to aggressively pursue opportunities to save so that UW System is the model for other state agencies and among comparable higher education systems across the nation.

To demonstrate administrative excellence, we will focus on ways to harness the collective power of UW System to drive down costs while still providing excellent services, especially in areas where services are statewide, such as in information technology, human resources, financial services and procurement.

Academic Excellence—Academic efficiency and effectiveness are just as important as administrative excellence. Students need to move through the “UW pipeline” as quickly as possible, so their experience is robust but costs are contained. Academic offerings must change with the needs of the workforce, so UW System is not only keeping pace with the jobs of today, but setting the pace for the jobs of tomorrow. Students must continue to work with world-class faculty and staff.

Commitment to Reform and Operational Excellence (CORE) – UW System will continue to create operational efficiencies through the standardization, consolidation, and streamlining of non-instructional operations.

Dashboard – The UW System will benchmark and assess progress by leveraging the accountability dashboard, our interactive website, so that stakeholders—internal and external—can see our progress in an easy, one-stop platform.

On-Time Degrees - UW System will develop policies and adopt practices that reduce time to degree. In addition to managing academic course and program offerings, enrollment and requirements, we will regularly review and communicate standards and practices supporting the collaborative management of electives and course and program enrollment. The goal will always be to achieve optimal efficiency while balancing academic effectiveness.

Rewarding Academic Excellence – UW System will request resources to increase compensation for our world-class faculty and staff who financially remain behind their peers.

What will institutions do:

- Attract and retain the most talented, diverse, and world-class faculty and staff.
- Maximize use of resources to reduce all non-instructional costs
- Redirect operational savings from non-instructional costs to academic programs
- Produce more degree holders without sacrificing quality
- Participate in analyzing and reviewing of non-instructional processes that could be standardized, consolidated, or streamlined
Implementation Process
The following implementation process will be used as part of the roll-out of the strategic framework:

Responsibility for Implementation
High level initiatives contained in the “Moving Forward” sections of each goal will be implemented by developing an operational/action plan overseen by UW System Administration. A separate operational plan will be developed in the fall of 2016. Implementation will be tracked, budgeted, monitored, and reported on by a designated strategic framework manager.

Implementation of institutional charges contained in each goal will be the responsibility of UW System institution chancellors. Progress towards charge items will be tracked, monitored, and reported by each Institution in a formal annual review (see specifics below).

Infrastructure for Ensuring Implementation and Accountability
The following elements will be part of the operational infrastructure for ensuring implementation of the strategic framework:

Progress reports: Actions taken and progress made will be reported both by UW System in a summary and dashboard report demonstrating numerical or qualitative evidence at Executive Committee and Cabinet meetings.

Creation of communication plan: UW System shall be responsible for creating and distributing a formal communication plan to ensure that the strategic framework is shared widely with relevant stakeholders.

Annual review and reporting: UW System and institutions will provide a thorough annual review of progress made towards framework initiatives and charges. This information will be formally included in UW System President and Chancellors’ annual performance evaluations by the Board of Regents and released to the public through an annual System report card.

More Information:
Engaging the People of Wisconsin: Process of Strategic Planning

As part of developing this new strategic framework for the University of Wisconsin System, the UW System held 13 listening sessions across the state beginning the in fall of 2015. These sessions were designed to hear the ideas of Wisconsinites and determine how to be even more responsive to their needs. Eight of the sessions were open to the public and discussed the broad issues important to Wisconsin. Five sessions were held on specific topics with leaders in their fields.

Each UW System institution also gathered input from internal stakeholders at each campus through listening sessions and surveys.

Following the listening sessions, the UW System held two online surveys to gather input from a broader section of the population and to corroborate the findings from the listening sessions.

In February 2016, UW System engaged with six different stakeholder groups comprised of faculty, industry, community, and legislative leaders from throughout the state. In the end, nearly 5,000 citizens were engaged in the process.

Links to the reports, findings and articles about the strategic framework can be found at https://www.wisconsin.edu/strategic-planning/