

UW Colleges response to the proposed 2015-2017 budget.

The current budget proposal in Madison threatens the dream of a better life for Wisconsin taxpayers. More than 13,000 people a year – among them your friends, family, and neighbors – enroll at one of the thirteen University of Wisconsin Colleges campuses to begin working toward that dream.

The UW Colleges faculty, staff, and administration have always been proud and happy partners, dedicated to helping students of all ages get the education they need for the lives they want.

Since 1969 the Colleges have provided access to a university degree for traditional students and, more and more, returning adult students who need a degree to advance in their careers and make a better life for their families. The combination of longstanding partnerships with county and city governments statewide, our low cost, high value, teaching emphasis, and open access make it possible for thousands of students a year to attend university – many of whom might not have been able to attend college in the first place. Best of all, students who begin their journey with us do as well or better at the larger campuses than students who start there.

Many of you have a family member, neighbor, or co-worker who benefited from starting their education at a UW Colleges' campus. Even a few top state politicians owe their educational starts to the UW Colleges, including Attorney General Brad Schimel, the former Mayor of Hartford Scott Henke, Waukesha County Executive Dan Vrakas, Mayor Chris Meyer of Marshfield, Mayor Justin Nickels from Manitowoc and, in the Assembly, Rep. Romaine Quinn (UW-Barron County) and Rep. John Nygren (UW-Marinette).

The proposed budget threatens this success.

After two decades of major improvements to graduation rates in the UW System (up 45% with a 12% increase in Full-Time Enrollments), cuts in the last three biennium budgets have begun to reverse this improvement. Campuses have had to cut back on course offerings and this has led to students having to wait additional semesters to take courses needed for graduation.

The current budget proposal hits students three times:

- 1) Governor Walker's proposed cuts will impact instruction, cutting access to the classes students need to graduate in a timely manner, and

- 2) As their time to degree increases, students will have to pay more in tuition for the extra semesters required to graduate and, finally
- 3) When it takes longer to get their degree, students lose out on the income they could be earning.

After a decade of severe cuts, it is no longer a matter of being more efficient. We are as lean as we can get. Our own business-oriented efficiency consultants recognized the impact of budget reductions on service to our students. The 2013 Huron Education Assessment Report states, "The ability for UW Colleges to continue to meet budget reductions without a diminution of service to students, faculty, and staff is limited."

Continued cuts threaten even worse fallout for Wisconsin over the long term.

Cutting access to an affordable university education makes it more difficult for our state to remain competitive in the global economy. Our smartest and hardest working Wisconsin graduates become industry leaders and entrepreneurs. They are the architects of Wisconsin's economic future. Limiting their access to the education they need will add to Wisconsin's brain drain and stifle our economic growth. We will see continued loss of jobs to neighboring states like Minnesota and Iowa, states that continue to expand their state support of higher education.

If you have been a member of the UW Colleges family, whether as a student on the way to a better life or as a family member who helped out on that journey, please let the legislators in Madison hear your story. We know there are tens of thousands of you across the state and your voices carry weight at the Capitol and in the Governor's mansion.

Challenge the state legislature to put its money where its votes are – job growth – by supporting the state institution best able to spark job creation. The University of Wisconsin prepares and empowers the next generation of scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs.

Help our legislators understand what you need in order to secure the future you want. Urge them to take action against cuts which will harm students. Encourage them to prioritize the long-term benefits of UW System over short-sighted, short-term benefits to a few taxpayers.

Wisconsin residents are entitled to the education they need for the lives they want.