

Proposal for Baccalaureate Expansion in Wisconsin
Presented to the Committee on Baccalaureate Expansion

A Conceptual Outline

Changing the Demand for
Higher Education by
Providing Information to
Change Opinions and Perceptions

Developed and Submitted by

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Goal – This proposal seeks to develop a comprehensive plan for the dissemination of information to state residents on the value of completing undergraduate studies. It also seeks to provide a simplified means of access for basic information concerning alternative programs of studies, admissions standards and requirements, financial aid, and other general information.

Outcome – As a result of this effort, state residents will have received information that explains the value and the importance of completing studies through the Baccalaureate level. Wisconsinites will know how to access to key information that will help them to assess and explore their educational options. Through all of this, state residents will learn why improving Wisconsin's educational attainment levels will improve the state's per capita earnings, help to stabilize the state's economic condition, and better position the state for global competition.

How This Works – The state's public and private colleges and universities will agree to pool resources on some sort of a formula-based method to provide "start-up" funds to help further advance this initiative. Working through the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, a relatively modest portion of existing funds (from all applicable sources, public and private) that are presently used for marketing

efforts (on a system or campus-by-campus basis) will be pooled together to provide funding to be used in a more comprehensive effort.

These funds from the educational institutions and partners will be joined by funds solicited and received from a number of key stakeholder groups and sectors of the Wisconsin economy. Large Wisconsin employers, for example, that spend considerable time and effort in the recruitment and development of college-educated talent in the state, will be asked to help support this effort to expand the pool of available candidates. Other statewide interest groups and organizations (whether trade associations, professional associations or other entities) will similarly be asked to provide contributing funding to help develop the information strategy and campaign associated with the effort. The central message here is that the public purpose – the common purpose – is so much greater than the sum total of the individual purposes that are presented fragmented and disjointed.

In-kind contributions and other professional support will also be solicited from other key partners such as an advertising or public relations firm to help in developing the messages to be used through this effort and from state radio, television and print-media based organizations for help in disseminating the information to the public through no-cost or low-cost means.

State government will also help disseminate information by including information in various publications and along with other information or communication efforts that routinely take place for other purposes. For example, this effort could utilize a professionally-developed website that would be linked with existing state-level web pages. The educational partners and other participants in this effort would also provide links to that same site. The state could include information to the public on the value of higher education along with the brochures and publications that are published for other purposes (income tax forms, license applications, other official notices and communications, etc.). Information could be developed and packaged to be in the form of public service advertisement or notices that are specifically intended to inform, raise awareness, and create interest.

Evidence of Success – This informational campaign is not promoting or encouraging attendance at any particular college or university. It is intended to state the personal benefit that can accrue to the individual for completing Baccalaureate-level studies. It outlines what we know about improvements to an individual's earning capacity, improved or expanded career opportunities for individuals with higher levels of educational attainment. It also states why and how improvements in the earning capacity of individuals at large, by its very nature, will help to improve the state's overall economic basis.

Known Challenges – This proposal should not be limited by resources. The reallocation of relatively small portions of existing funds from a number of sources – combined with the solicitation of new funds to advance a new public purpose – should provide sufficient resources to develop the information and awareness pieces that will help to advance this

effort. The key challenge is one here of vision: Can all of the participating partners and stakeholders agree on the advantages of having a shared and common purpose to help promote a comprehensive message for all Wisconsinites?

Impact on Diversity – The framework of this proposal is broad enough to include the development of specific, targeted communication efforts that are intended to change opinions by changing perceptions. The message can be drafted to reach different key demographic groups through different alternative means. Part of the focus of this effort is to raise the general level of public understanding about how an individual’s decision to make an investment in their own stock of human resources, through pursuit of an undergraduate degree, also serves and advances an important state-level public policy goal.

Identification of Key Partners – Key partners include, as mentioned above, all of the state’s educational institutions. Given the expansion in the number of educational offerings by educational institutions and entities that are not a part of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (that is, non-members or other Internet-based, or proprietary institutions) this effort should expressly seek to encourage participation and involvement by those entities in the funding (or endorsement) of this proposal.

Cost-Benefit Analysis/Projection – A not-insignificant part of the challenge of increasing the number of Wisconsinites completing the Baccalaureate relates to efforts to have individuals feel a need, or have an interest in completing those studies. This effort to improve general awareness is most efficiently done on an integrated and comprehensive basis, rather than the present alternative of having each institution (or each system) working independently on developing a message (or messages) that seek to build this same threshold level of public interest in education. We have to provide information on the value and the importance of improving educational attainment levels in order to create the interest for individuals to explore this as a realistic possibility.

By re-deploying a portion of existing advertising or marketing dollars – by combining those dollars with new contributions and other forms of compounding in-kind contribution – this effort has the potential of helping to boost interest in pursuing studies at all of the state’s existing educational institutions, whether public or private.

An economic argument could be made – most certainly – that would argue for the specific allocation of new state tax dollars (GPR) for this effort. While new funding is merely a remote possibility in today’s restrained and constrained fiscal environment, the rationale for such a state-level investment in this effort would be that dollars spent in building awareness-interest would lead to an increase in the number of residents pursuing the completion of these programs (as a wise and prudent individual investment decision, in light of the rate of return to the individual on investments in more education) and that these individuals would have higher future earnings than they would without the efforts. The investment of present state tax GPR can be expected to provide a future economic

return to the state in terms of higher earnings, and thereby improved and more predictable state revenues from those improved earnings.

Developing and Implementing the Proposal – The further development of this proposal could be assigned to an ad hoc working group comprised of key participants from the major stakeholders. It would be important for this effort to reach out beyond the traditional base of the educational community to include front-line and active participation and leadership from representatives of the state’s business community and perhaps also potential media sponsors.

Summary - Goals and Outcomes of the Proposal – The impetus of this proposal is to develop simple messages that will help change public perception. We are trying to create an interest in obtaining more information about the personal benefits of completing undergraduate studies. In this manner, this proposal works on increasing the “Demand” side of the existing supply and demand curve. It also seeks to reshape public opinion – and the opinion of key decision makers such as state legislators, community leaders, and business CEO’s – on the many reasons why expanded access to educational opportunity is in everyone’s best interest.

Contact Person - This proposal was developed by Tom Grogan acting on his own right and without the endorsement of any other individual or organization.

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