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BELOIT COLLEGE  
CARDINAL STRITCH UNIVERSITY  
CARROLL COLLEGE  
CARTHAGE COLLEGE  
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
EDGEWOOD COLLEGE  
LAKELAND COLLEGE  
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY  
MARIAN COLLEGE



MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY  
MILWAUKEE INSTITUTE OF ART & DESIGN  
MILWAUKEE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING  
MOUNT MARY COLLEGE  
NORTHLAND COLLEGE  
RIPON COLLEGE  
ST. NORBERT COLLEGE  
SILVER LAKE COLLEGE  
VITERBO UNIVERSITY  
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

Date: July 26, 2004

To: UW/WTCS Committee on Baccalaureate Expansion

From: Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Re: “ThinkHigherWisconsin” (Comprehensive Web Portal for Seamless Postsecondary Transition)

1. Goals and outcomes of the proposal

Wisconsin should mount a comprehensive Web portal called “ThinkHigherWisconsin” that involves students as early as middle school in looking ahead to postsecondary options, so that all students are well prepared to continue their education after high school and to enter the world of work. The portal will offer information on all types of postsecondary education and will help students and their families learn how to pay for it. More students will be prepared for college-level work and confident of their ability to afford it. Guidance counselors will embrace the portal as a useful tool for course planning for middle and high schoolers, and as the main place to go for postsecondary education information.

2. Ways in which the proposal will increase baccalaureate degree participation and expansion

Students statewide will use the portal as a planning tool throughout middle school and high school so they will take the right courses to be prepared for college. The application process for admission and financial aid will be streamlined. Sections in Spanish or Hmong could help parents who do not speak English. Currently students have to visit three separate portal sites to learn about UW System schools (UW HELP), private colleges and universities (WisconsinMentor), and Wisconsin Technical College System schools (WItechColleges.com). Removing barriers to retrieving this information will increase the number of prepared postsecondary applicants whose planning will ensure greater success in college.

3. Evidence of proposal’s success – A: North Carolina’s experience

North Carolina currently operates a portal site that is a model for this proposal. Located at [www.cfnc.org](http://www.cfnc.org), this site bills itself as “a one-stop shop for planning, applying and paying for college.” CFNC stands for College Foundation of North Carolina, a nonprofit public-private partnership. The site states it wants to help students:

- Make smart decisions as your plan for college and a career
- Compare over 100 North Carolina colleges and link easily to their websites
- Simplify the college application process by applying online
- Find the best way to pay for college with scholarships, grants, loans, and savings programs

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Since its inception three years ago, the North Carolina site has been used by all 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the state as their official planning tool for college. In addition, 160,000 students have applied using the site's online applications. It is the only site that allows high school transcripts to be sent electronically, so guidance counselors have an incentive to use it. A section in Spanish is helpful to Spanish-speaking parents, and every GEAR-UP student is required to use cfnc.org as a planning and application tool. The North Carolina site is run by the Xap Corporation, a leading developer of interactive college portals in many states. The bulk of the cost is covered by the loan guaranty agencies in the state. An extensive advertising campaign (billboards, print, radio, and television) helped raise awareness among students and parents and led to an explosive increase in usage over the past three years.

3. Evidence of proposal's success – B: How it could work in Wisconsin

WisconsinMentor ([www.wisconsinmentor.org](http://www.wisconsinmentor.org)), mounted by the Xap Corporation, currently offers information on private colleges and universities in the state, links to individual college websites, online applications, and financial aid information, including a direct link to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Users of WisconsinMentor can compare and contrast the colleges and universities by majors, location, size, affiliations, and other criteria, and can take electronic "tours" of each campus. Students create an account the first time they visit the site, and thereafter can visit it from any place with Internet access. The Student Planner allows users to create an academic resume that lists every high school course taken and compares them to the entrance requirements at colleges and universities. WisconsinMentor is sponsored by Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation.

Great Lakes has expressed interest in incorporating public and private institutions into an integrated site, similar to North Carolina's, that would offer the full panoply of postsecondary opportunities. Because WisconsinMentor is now associated in the mind of guidance counselors with private colleges and universities alone, the site should be re-named when it becomes comprehensive (perhaps "ThinkHigherWisconsin.org"). This initiative has something for everyone:

- Students would benefit by having all the information they need to prepare for college on one site—and they would grow accustomed to using the site starting in middle school, when they would use the Student Planner for course selection throughout high school. Students would have a better understanding of admissions requirements (including admissions requirements and test scores) and the availability of financial aid, so they would realize that college is possible and would be better prepared when they enrolled.
- Colleges and universities would benefit from a central forum where they can expose students to their offerings and streamlined online applications. Applications received via the system would be free to the institutions, unlike applications received many from other portal sites.

- The state of Wisconsin, like North Carolina, would likely see increases in college applications from students encouraged early to think about life after high school.

4. Challenges to proposal's success

The University of Wisconsin System declined to participate in a joint Mentor system when invited to do so by Great Lakes a couple of years ago.

5. Ways in which proposal relates to low-income, minority, and/or non-traditional students

A single, comprehensive site helping students to plan, apply, and pay for college would enhance access for all. Low-income students will benefit from expanded financial aid information. Minority and first-generation college students will benefit from early preparation for college; sections for parents, including portions in Spanish and Hmong, can help those who did not attend college themselves. Older students currently in the workforce can save time by going online to one efficient site.

6. Describe the partners and their roles in collaborating on this proposal

The three higher education sectors in Wisconsin would work together with Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation and the Xap Corporation to launch a joint site. Additional partners could be the Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board, EdVest, and the state's guidance counselors.

7 & 8. Cost-benefit analysis

It's all benefit. A willing sponsor is enthusiastic about backing this idea, and Xap has the expertise to make it happen. Costs to the state and to institutions should be minimal. North Carolina has shown the way, and will even make its ads available at a discount as templates if other states wish to use them.

9. Contact person:

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