



Access to Higher Education in Wisconsin

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Last month, you heard a presentation and received a *Bulletin* which demonstrated the value of a UW education to our graduates and to the State.

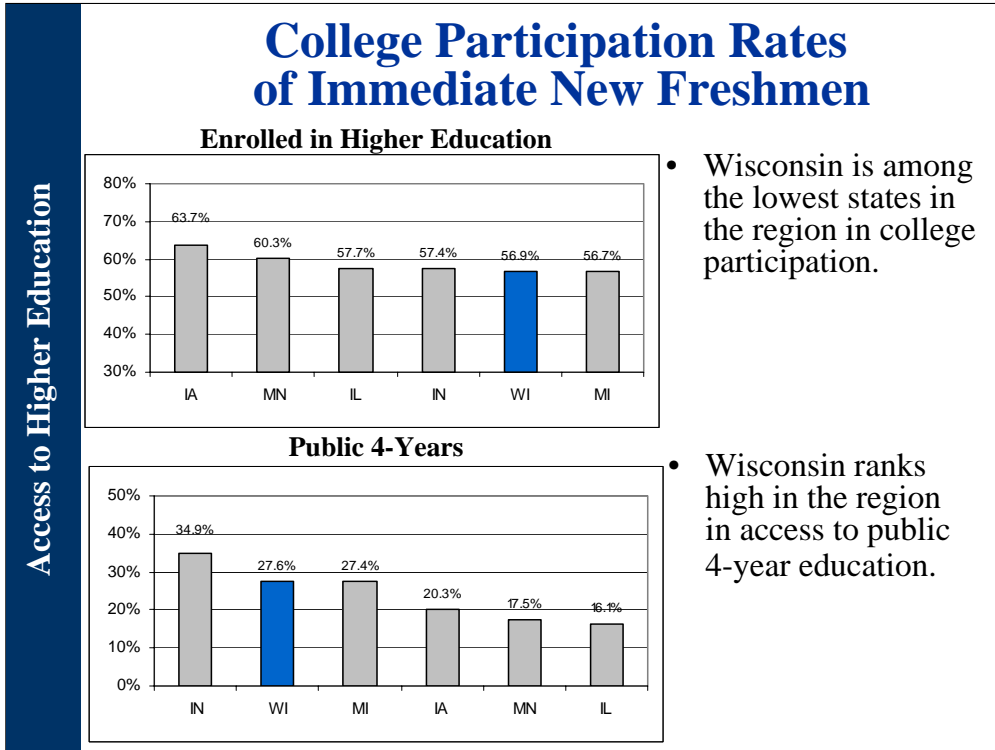
This month, we will examine access to higher education in general and to the UW System in particular. We will focus on access by family income, looking specifically at the level of access provided to the financially neediest of students.

College Participation Rates of Wisconsin Immediate New Freshmen

	1992	1996	2000
High School Graduates	53,454	57,511	63,815
Enrolled in Higher Ed.	64.4%	58.9%	56.9%
Enrolled Instate	51.8%	47.2%	46.4%
UW System	31.5%	31.9%	32.4%
Private	7.0%	5.8%	6.1%
WTCS	13.2%	9.5%	8.0%
Enrolled Out of State	12.6%	11.7%	10.6%
Not Enrolled in Higher Ed.	35.6%	41.3%	43.1%

As a first step, we examined overall access to higher education in Wisconsin during the 1990's. In addition, we also compared access to the UW System to access provided by other higher education sectors within Wisconsin. This examination revealed that during the 90's, a decreasing proportion of Wisconsin high school graduates went on to higher education. The decline is substantial, a decrease of almost 8 percentage points. In 1992, 64% of high school graduates went on to enroll in higher education. By the year 2000, this rate dropped to 57%.

Despite this overall decline, access to the UW System has remained stable. During this time of increasing numbers of high school graduates, the UW System maintained access by increasing the number of new freshmen the System served. Consistently, 32% of high school graduates go on to attend a UW institution immediately following high school graduation. All other sectors – private colleges, technical colleges, and out-of-state schools – have seen declines in their share of high school graduates.

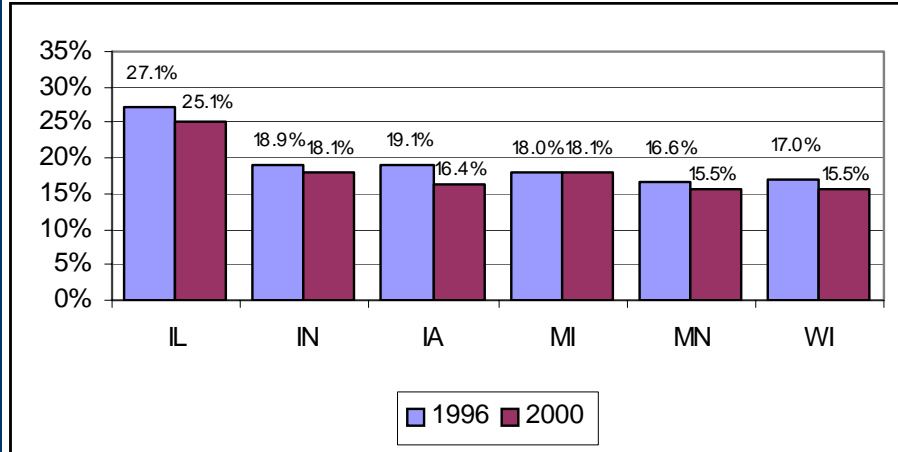


Comparing Wisconsin to its surrounding states provides some context for these access rates. We found that compared to the other states in the region, Wisconsin had one of the lowest overall participation rates in higher education for recent high school graduates.

In contrast, there is high access to public 4-year universities in Wisconsin. At 27.6% Wisconsin ranks second relative to surrounding states.

While access provided by the UW System has remained steady, it is possible that the composition of UW System enrolled population has changed due to the decline in the proportion of high school graduates going out of state and to private colleges. Specifically, has access changed for high school students from families with low incomes who potentially have financial barriers to private and out of state choices?

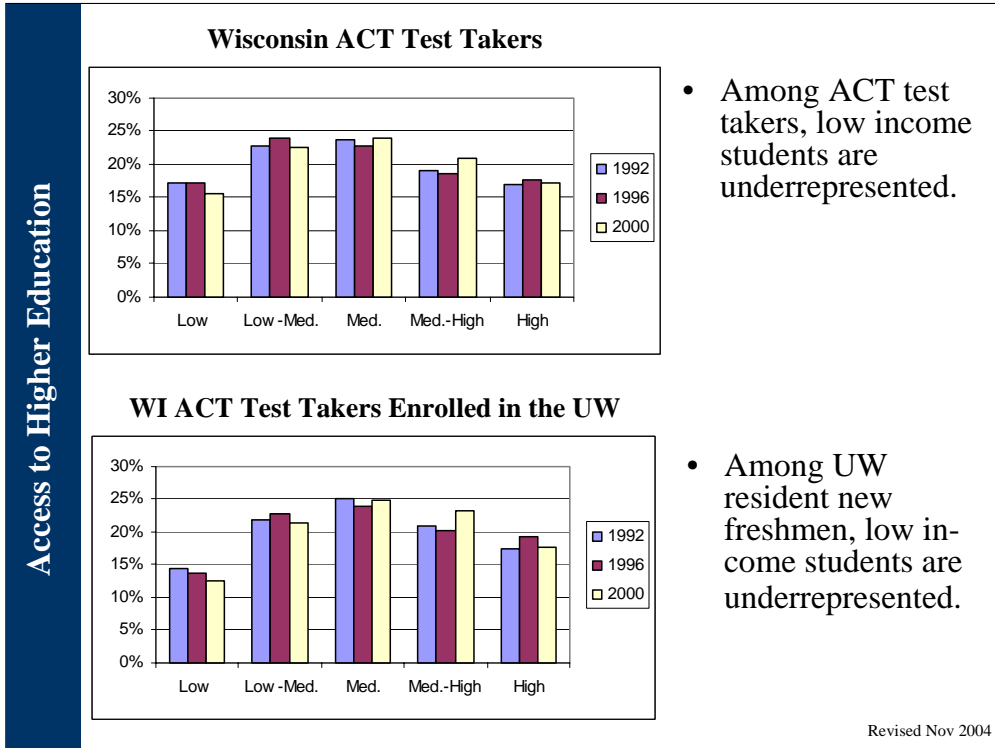
Proportion of Undergraduates Receiving Pell Grant at Public 4-Year Institutions



- Fewer Wisconsin students receive Pell Grants.

To examine how the UW System is serving the financially needy students of Wisconsin, we looked at the proportion of enrollment who are Pell grant recipients. The federal Pell grant program is the centerpiece of federal support for ensuring educational access and opportunity. Because Pell eligibility is determined by a federal methodology, the proportion of an institution's enrollment receiving a Pell grant provides a useful metric for comparing Wisconsin to its surrounding states.

In the UW System, Wisconsin Pell grant recipients make up a decreasing proportion of total undergraduates, a decline from 17% to 15.5%. In addition, compared to neighboring states, a lower proportion of UW students receive Pell grants. That is, using Pell grants as the barometer, UW students are less financially needy than students in surrounding states.

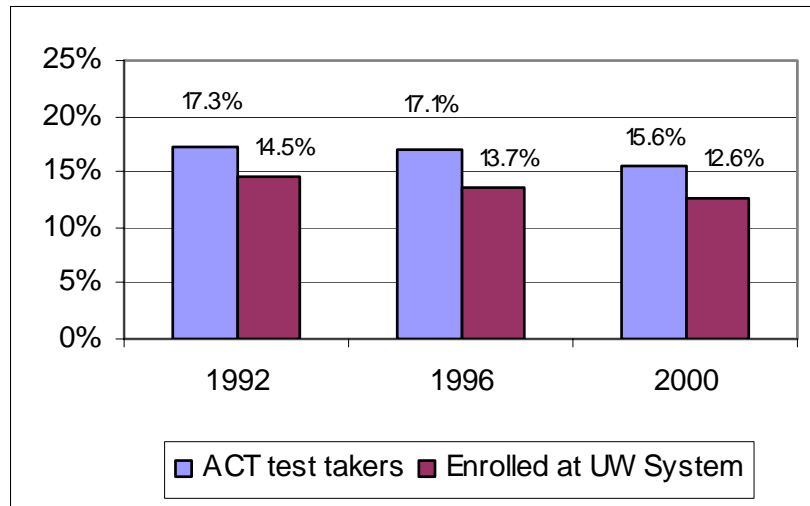


While the proportion of an institution's enrollment that qualifies for a Pell grant provides a national metric of financial need, it tells us little about Wisconsin's financially needy students who did not enroll in college. By examining the family incomes of Wisconsin's ACT test takers, we can learn about the income distributions of high school graduates who plan to go on to college. We distributed family incomes into quintiles for ACT test takers and compared that distribution to incomes of Wisconsin families as a whole. If the income of ACT test takers mirrors the income distribution of all Wisconsin families, 20% of ACT test takers would be found in each income quintile.

Over the last decade, Wisconsin ACT test takers have been underrepresented in the lowest income quintile of Wisconsin families. Fewer ACT test takers come from the low-income families, while test takers from families in the medium income quintile represents a greater proportion, 24%, than seen in the overall Wisconsin population.

Not only do fewer lower income students take the ACT, fewer enroll in UW institutions. Access for low income students is less than for students with higher income levels. However, access is relatively high among students in the medium income quintile. Almost a fourth of enrolled students come from medium income quintile.

Wisconsin's Lowest Family Income Quintile



- Access for low income students declined slightly.

Revised Nov 2004

Proportion of ACT test takers in the lowest income quintile declined, indicating there were fewer low-income students planning on going to college. In 1992, approximately 17% of Wisconsin ACT test takers were in the lowest income quintile, that number declined to 16% by the year 2000.

This decline was matched by a similar decline in the percent that enrolled. The proportion of UW resident New Freshmen in the lowest income quintile of Wisconsin families has declined slightly, from 14.5% to 12.6%. In addition, there has been a consistent gap, approximately 3 percentage points, between ACT test takers and enrollment from the lowest family income quintile. But lower access among low income students is not just a result of fewer low income students taking the ACT.

Wisconsin's Lowest Family Income Quintile (2000)

Wisconsin Families	20.0%
WI ACT Test Takers	15.6%
Applied at UW	12.9%
Admitted at UW	12.7%
Enrolled at UW	12.6%

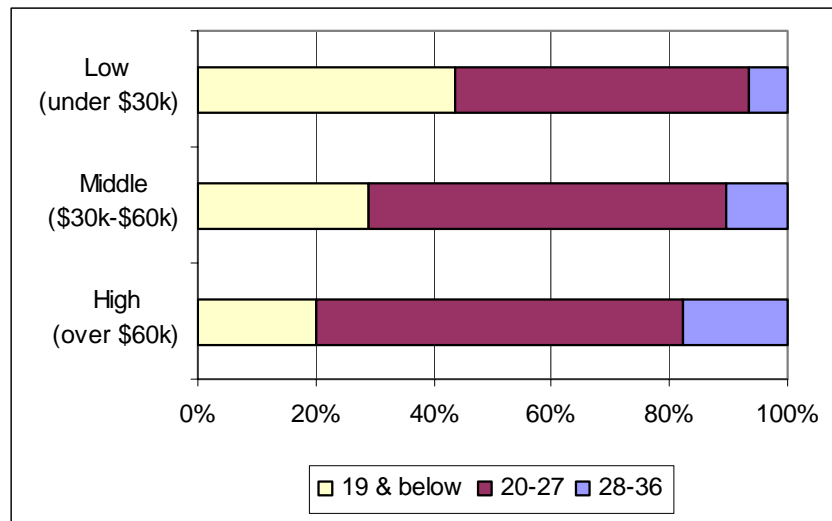
- Fewer low income high school graduates take the ACT test.

Revised Nov 2004

The proportion of resident New Freshmen in the lowest income quintile is less than the 20% that would have been expected if UW System enrollments mirrored the families in Wisconsin. UW System enrolls a smaller proportion of low income students in part because fewer of them take the ACT. But even after they take the ACT, these students have lower rates of application to UW institutions. In 2000, 15.6% of Wisconsin ACT test takers were from the lowest income quintile. Yet, only 12.9% of those who applied to a UW institution were in the lowest income quintile.

Important to note though is that once they apply, low income test takers are admitted and they enroll in similar proportions.

ACT Score by Income



- Low income students have lower ACT scores.

Revised Nov 2004

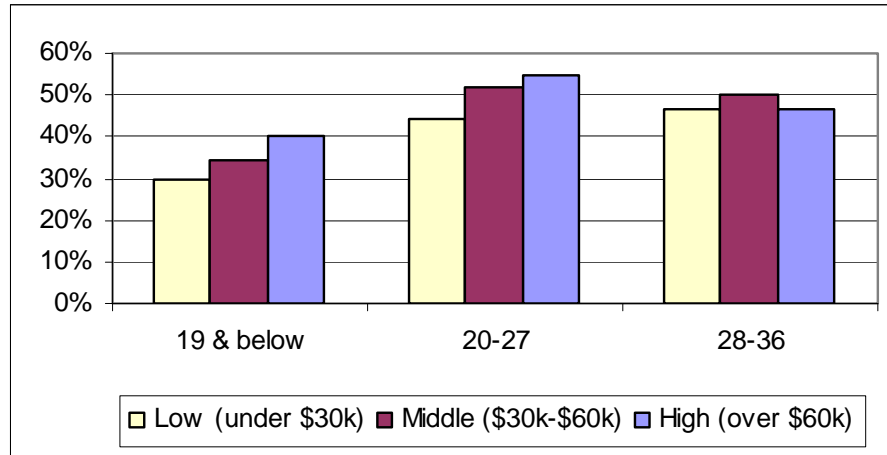
Several factors contribute to lower application rates among students from lower income families. One is academic preparation.

On average, Wisconsin high school students from families with lower incomes do not perform as well on the ACT examination as students from higher income families. Among all Wisconsin high school graduates who took the ACT examination in the year 2000, 44% of low income students scored 19 or lower on the ACT examination. Fewer students, less than 30% of students from middle income families scored 19 or lower, and still fewer students, 20%, from families with high incomes scored 19 or lower.

In contrast, relatively few low income students have high ACT scores. That is, only 7% of low income students scored 28-36, while 11% of the middle income students and 18% of the high income students scored in that high ACT score range.

Although low income students have lower average ACT scores, their scores do not completely account for their lower rates of application and access to the UW System.

Access Rates by Income and ACT Score Range



- Regardless of ACT score, low income students have lower access.

Revised Nov 2004

Low income ACT test takers are less likely to enroll in the UW System in the fall semester after they graduate from high school. Almost half of all Wisconsin test takers enroll in a UW institution. However, for students from families with low family incomes the access rates was 38%, compared to 47% for students from middle income families and 50% for student from high family incomes.

In conclusion, as the chart on the slide demonstrates, in each ACT score range, students from low income families have lower access rates than students from higher income families. Even if there was no difference in ACT scores between low income students and students from higher income families, low income students would have a lower access rate than students from families with higher incomes.

Implications for Policy

- The UW System plays a large role in providing access to higher education for Wisconsin citizens
- There are multiple barriers to access for students from low income families
 - Fewer take the ACT
 - On average, they perform less well
 - In all score ranges fewer enroll

The purpose of this presentation was to lay out a set of important issues that will be facing the UW Board of Regents in the coming months and years. No action is needed, at this time, and further careful study is required. However, the purpose of starting the discussion now is that there are significant implications from the analysis for the current budget debate.

The presentation and its accompanying *Bulletin*, focuses on one aspect of access, i.e., access for immediate new freshmen. There are however, other aspects of access, e.g., access for non-traditional students that was not addressed by this analysis.

UW institutions play a significant role in providing access to higher education for Wisconsin high school graduates. Since the beginning of enrollment management, UW institutions have continued to provide a high level of access to immediate new freshmen. One result is that systemwide, we are significantly above our fall 2003 enrollment target and have already achieved all of the growth planned for EM-21, which runs through 2006.

The issue of access and its relationship to quality are important concerns, particularly in light of budget reductions.

The presentation also makes the point that access to the UW is not equal across the income distribution. A somewhat smaller proportion of students come from families in the lowest income quintile than their representation in the population.

There are multiple reasons for the lower representation of students from the bottom quintile. The slide identifies three factors that are important in understanding why low income students are less likely to enroll:

- A smaller proportion of low income students take the ACT examination – this says something about how realistic an option higher education is in the eyes of low income students.
- Low income students do not perform as well on the ACT examination as students from higher income groups – this highlights the importance of the partnership between the UW System and the K-12 system that has been formed in the PK-16 council.
- Low income students admitted to UW institutions are less likely to enroll than higher income students. This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the proposed increases in WHEG are made permanent.