

Cross: UW would need funds to address Foxconn demand for engineers

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UW System President Ray Cross today hailed the opportunity that the Foxconn development would have on the state, though he said UW would need money to turn out even more engineers than it does today.

Cross told lawmakers at today's Assembly public hearing that Foxconn would be a "magnet" for top students from around the world.

But Cross, responding to questions from Dems on whether UW needs more funding, said the system would need additional state support to hire faculty and upgrade its equipment and labs.

"We're studying that right now because we would like to say to the Legislature and to the governor: If you want us to increase our engineers by x percent, here's what it would take to do that," he said.

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UW-Milwaukee Chancellor Mark Mone, meanwhile, said the boost in funding needs to be accompanied by approval of construction projects from state lawmakers.

"I think those two pieces have to go hand in hand," he said.

But the two highlighted the major opportunities for the state economy, with Mone saying the Foxconn development would increase enrollments and employment opportunities for students — both at Foxconn and other companies in its supply chain.

UW-Parkside Deborah Ford, who highlighted her campus' strength in computer science, said Foxconn would draw in students for "exciting careers" in a field with groundbreaking technology.

"Wisconsin becomes a destination for education because it becomes a destination for exciting careers beyond today's horizon," she said.

Meanwhile, Marquette University President Michael Lovell recalled his days in Pittsburgh, close to where he grew up, and seeing the area struggle when the steel industry left town.

But Lovell, who later worked at the University of Pittsburgh, also recalled the "tipping point" for the city: when Google decided to set up shop there — followed by several other tech companies like Intel and Microsoft.

Foxconn, he said, will create a "high-tech corridor" that in 20 years will rival the likes of Silicon Valley.

"Foxconn has an even bigger potential than what I saw in Pittsburgh because the scope is so much larger," said Lovell, who was the UW-Milwaukee chancellor before taking on the Marquette job.