

UW System: Expands opportunities for adult learners

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MADISON, Wis.—The University of Wisconsin System is expanding opportunities for adult learners. At today's UW System Board of Regents meeting at UW-Whitewater, the regents heard about the education options that are available, or will soon be available, to nontraditional adult learners across the UW System.

"Throughout Wisconsin and the nation, people of all ages are seeking a quality education that will help them thrive in the workplace and become more well-rounded individuals," President Ray Cross said. "The UW System is consistently working to expand access to nontraditional students, including adult learners."

About 815,000 Wisconsin residents 25 and older have earned some college credit but do not have a degree, according to U.S. Census data. The UW System is focusing on strategies to attract and serve these students who are professionally oriented.

One way the System is expanding access to adult learners is by building pathways to ensure that knowledge, skills, and abilities gained outside of formal higher education can be applied toward programs leading to credentials of value - work poised for expansion under a Lumina grant. The UW System is also serving returning adults looking for opportunities in innovative online formats through the newly formed UW Extended Campus.

Lumina's All Learning Counts initiative

The University of Wisconsin System has been awarded a \$450,000 grant from Lumina to build clearer pathways to degrees and other credentials for adults, especially for people of color. Lumina's All Learning Counts initiative will support the

work of UW institutions to ensure that knowledge, skills, and abilities gained outside of formal higher education—through work, military, and other experiences—can be recognized and applied toward programs leading to credentials of value.

The University of Wisconsin All Learning Counts Partnership will support the UW System strategic priority to help Wisconsinites reach their academic goals by expanding opportunities to complete a degree through adult-learning programs. Project activities will increase and improve the transparency of prior learning assessment pathways that can reduce cost and time to degree for students who are awarded credit for prior learning (CPL). Credit for prior learning can be an effective strategy to retain and support completion of adult learners, and particularly students of color.

The UW System received one of nine grants awarded nationwide from a pool of 78 applicants. The University of Wisconsin partnership includes UW-Green Bay, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Oshkosh, UW-Platteville, UW-Whitewater, and the UW System Office of Academic Programs and Educational Innovation and UW Extended Campus. Combined, the five UW universities include 15 campuses that have a physical presence in seven of the 10 Wisconsin Workforce Development regions that cover 36 Wisconsin counties. The five universities enroll more than 8,000 adult students over the age of 25. In 2017-18, 833 adult students at the main campus locations received CPL. The goal is to more than double that number and reach students at both the main campus and other campus locations.

The five UW universities will develop prior learning assessment associate degree to bachelor's degree program pathways in selected fields. In addition, UW-Milwaukee's School of Continuing Education will review and map learning outcomes in noncredit certificate programs to those in for-credit courses and will contact certificate holders about the potential for earning course credit. UW-Oshkosh will increase awareness about CPL opportunities by sharing information with employers in its region. Adult students enrolled at UW-Green Bay will work with a student success coach to assess for CPL in ways that are most relevant for the student.

UW Extended Campus

As part of the 2017 UW System restructure, UW System President Ray Cross

created UW Extended Campus, a separate programming and administrative unit dedicated to strategically grow and coordinate online and adult/professional education on behalf of all UW System campuses.

UW Extended Campus (UWEX) builds on the work and resources of the former UW-Extension Division of Continuing Education, Outreach, and E-Learning (CEOEL). CEOEL had been focused for more than a decade on developing the resources to create educational opportunities and success for adult, professional, and other nontraditional students.

UWEX uses a collaborative online program model in cooperation with all UW System campuses. UWEX currently runs 24 such degree programs in both traditional semester-based formats and in the competency-based UW Flexible Option format. Most programs award bachelor's and master's degrees, but UWEX's portfolio also includes the UW Flex AAS, the new collaborative associate degree, and a handful of certificate programs.

All 13 UW System universities are partnering on at least one of the UWEX programs, with three universities partnering on 10 or more. UWEX's goal is to double online enrollments by adding two new programs in response to market needs per year through 2025. Enrollment in UWEX-managed programs has already grown 54 percent over the past five years to more than 4,800 students.

In addition to the roughly \$13 million distributed last year to UW universities from these collaborative online degrees, UWEX also annually distributes approximately \$8.3 million to oversee, coordinate, and support campus-based local and regional continuing and professional development, most of which is noncredit. This \$8.3 million in state funding produced nearly \$48 million last year in revenues for the universities.

For more information on UWEX, visit <https://ce.uwex.edu/>