

# Jay Rothman: New Universities of Wisconsin identity is one of several changes underway

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 11, 2023

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Earlier this week I announced a new name and identity for our constellation of 13 public universities – the Universities of Wisconsin.

The goal is to shift the emphasis from our System to our Universities, which create opportunities for students and improve communities all across the state. It's an exciting change that I'm confident the people of Wisconsin will embrace with pride.

But the new identity is not the only change we have been making at the Universities of Wisconsin. We're embarking on change across all of our universities, consistent with our strategic plan, to ensure Wisconsin wins the War for Talent.

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We set an ambitious goal to increase the number of graduates our universities produce each year from 37,000 to 41,000. To do that we need to enroll and retain more students at a time when there are fewer high school graduates coupled with a lower percentage of them enrolling in college.

That's why we're launching a direct admissions program that will admit students capable of succeeding at our universities — before they even apply. We hope to encourage some students to think about obtaining a four-year degree who might otherwise have passed on this opportunity. We're also seeing promise in dual enrollment programs, so students can earn college credit while in high school.

I've also asked our universities to address their structural deficits. While this process is resulting in difficult decisions today, it will ensure the universities remain vibrant for decades to come.

At the same time, university leaders are assessing their branch campuses. We know that the status quo isn't working and that we need creative solutions to address declining enrollment and underutilized facilities.

We're also addressing change in our approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I have stated my support for the principle of DEI based upon my experience in the private sector overseeing an international law firm. We need to prepare our students for an increasingly multicultural workforce and help all of our students succeed. We also acknowledge that our diversity and inclusion efforts must address, in addition to the needs of historically underrepresented groups, the needs of military veterans, people with disabilities, and first-generation students, while ensuring we protect diversity of thought.

Finally, we continue to promote free speech and civil dialogue on our campuses. Our universities must be places where all students, no matter their background or world view, can express opinions and beliefs. It is this exchange of ideas that creates knowledge so critical to our future here in Wisconsin. I have taken on this work personally, meeting privately with student leaders across our campuses to discuss the importance of civil dialogue.

So, yes, we have a new name and identity – the Universities of Wisconsin. But a closer look reveals much more change at our 13 public universities, all in service to improving lives and communities, being strong financial stewards, and helping Wisconsin win the War for Talent.

*–Rothman is president, Universities of Wisconsin.*