

# Blueprint for the University of Wisconsin System Beyond COVID-19

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May 2020

## Executive Summary

After the restructuring of 2017, the University of Wisconsin System is made up of 13 universities across 26 campuses. Each university attracts thousands of people every year, providing a major economic impact on their communities. We are one of the state's largest employers while serving approximately 170,000 students. Two of our universities, UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, are classified as Research I (R1), the highest rating for research universities by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The other 11 of our universities are classified as comprehensive institutions and are important pillars in their communities. They are major employers, connect deeply with the identity of each region, and support businesses and other organizations serving the region.

To address the significant costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Wisconsin System must play a more direct role in operations at the campus level to more rapidly achieve systemwide efficiencies. In the last several years, the UW System has made progress on the following:

- Changing academic programs at each university based on projected enrollment
- Aligning former UW Colleges campuses with UW universities through the recent restructuring effort
- Centralizing services that support campus operations through UW-Shared Services
- Offering collaborative online degrees through UW Extended Campus

Facing looming financial challenges, the UW System must quickly coordinate ongoing efforts in these areas to ensure the survival of its universities and mission. These efforts will need to be combined with other measures to ensure the UW System can continue to exist and provide world-class education, research, and outreach.



**The University of Wisconsin System must refine the missions of its comprehensive universities to provide greater institutional distinctiveness and identity.**

**Rationale:** Beginning with the premise that each of our comprehensive universities cannot continue to be “all things to all people” and be financially sustainable, each university must focus its resources on distinctive programs and collaborate with the System’s universities to serve the

state's needs across other programs. This will make them stronger, not weaker. In fact, the very futures of these universities depend on it. It is not a should-do; it is a must-do. It is not for "someday"—it is for now. These critically important universities are at risk because of the following:

- a. *Declining state investment:* The University of Wisconsin System's portion of the state budget has shrunk by six percent since the 2007-08 budget. Not only are prospects for significant budget increases from the state dim in the foreseeable future, but also, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the state is now seeking a five percent lapse for UW System for Fiscal Year 2020.
- b. *Tuition cashflow:* The comprehensive universities within the UW System – the comprehensives and what were formerly the two-year campuses – are most dependent on tuition and have experienced the most financial stress because of extended tuition freezes.
- c. *Demographics:* Demographic projections for the next two decades indicate fewer Wisconsin high school graduates overall and even fewer deciding to stay in rural or smaller communities.
- d. *Workforce:* Additional reductions in faculty and staff at some of the comprehensive universities will make it very difficult to continue providing the quality educational experience everyone expects from all of the University of Wisconsin institutions. Funding projections for the next decade suggest the critical mass of faculty and support staff needed to offer a quality educational experience in all programs will continue to be a pressing issue. Thus, our institutions will need to review the resources to be reallocated in support of a more distinctive identity and mission.

Over the last couple of years, UW System Administration has been working collaboratively with each comprehensive university to develop an understanding of projected enrollments and revenue estimates through 2026. The process used predictive tools to help each campus understand its probable future state and to incrementally make changes in their academic program offerings or array. The incremental process was designed to progressively create more university distinctiveness using traditional academic program analysis and evaluation models over time. Typically, these traditional academic program evaluation processes require broad engagement of university stakeholders and community members.

Unfortunately, the coronavirus crisis and the resulting economic impact require that we aggressively expedite this process. This work will need to be done this academic year and ready to implement in the fall of 2021. Taking more time will only create greater challenges for the comprehensive universities. The accelerated process must allow for assessing each academic degree program and each administrative program/service offered at each university, while providing an analysis of program quality, demand, potential, cost, and ultimately, alignment with the mission of the university.

Implementing the outcomes of this process will involve reallocating university and system resources, discontinuing some university programs, increased program collaboration between universities, and increasing investment in other programs. The need to focus comprehensive

university missions and link limited resources to the revised or updated university mission will create greater distinctiveness and identity for each university.

A comprehensive planning and prioritizing process that is mission-centric should yield:

- Identification of which, and in what ways, academic and administrative programs/services contribute to student success, faculty excellence, and institutional distinctiveness
- Strategic reallocation of resources and financial stability
- Identification of opportunities for generating new resources to strengthen and/or expand existing programs or to develop new programs

**Recommendation:** The UW System must implement a process for prioritizing and evaluating academic and administrative programs/services across comprehensive universities using modified traditional tools. Given the need to accomplish this significant change rather quickly while balancing the interests of the state with the interests of each university, UW System Administration must play a larger role than planned under the previous incremental strategy. The UW System must switch from the convener/collaborator/coordinator of this effort to the director and manager and must provide clear guidelines and mandates so that the comprehensive universities engage in this accelerated process of prioritization and evaluation of all of their programs. Ultimately, each university will need to submit to the Board of Regents a revised or updated mission statement.

**Responsibility:** Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs Anny Morrobel-Sosa, who has already been working with the Provosts at the comprehensive universities to accelerate the process of analyzing and evaluating programs.

Traditional models for evaluating and prioritizing university programs (see Massy<sup>1</sup>, Dickeson<sup>2</sup>, and Comstock and Booker<sup>3</sup> models) should guide the process; however, they should be adapted to expedite the process of identifying the desired programs and offerings that will form the core of the revised or updated university mission statement.

**Timeline:** Evaluating and prioritizing programs should be completed prior to January 15, 2021. Revised or updated university mission statements should be submitted to the Board in March 2021 with implementation to begin in the fall of 2021. This is an aggressive timeline, but this is critically important to the future of the comprehensive universities and to the state of Wisconsin.

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<sup>1</sup> Massy, W.F. Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education, p. 6. Figure contents quoted from source. Bolton MA: Anker Publishing, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Dickeson, Robert. Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance. Revised & Updated. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Comstock, J. and Booker, K. "Self-Study Leveraging: The QPC Model for Comprehensive Academic Program Review," p. 1. A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement, Volume 1, Chapter 4, 2009.

**»»» The University of Wisconsin System must consolidate and streamline common administrative operational functions.**

**Rationale:** Too many variations exist in the way UW System institutions provide fundamental operational functions such as purchasing, human resources, IT, and basic business services. These variations are not only inefficient and costly but also risky because process variations increase the risk of errors. Many of these functions can now be performed off-site in one or more locations dispersed around the state. The need to have all aspects of each function performed individually on each campus is no longer necessary. Having expertise in specific functional areas rather than relying on one individual with responsibility for several functional areas will improve quality while also being more efficient.

Each comprehensive university is currently replicating, in a nonstandard fashion, the IT infrastructure needed to support many administrative functions and academic programs. This has resulted in overinvesting in IT systems, proliferating similar software solutions, and duplicating efforts to provide administrative functions. It creates complexities that do not support the missions of the comprehensives and increases the costs of new systems and services. These IT structures, developed over time, do not reflect the current environment and UW System's ability to provide much of this infrastructure and software as a service, managed in a consolidated organization.

When the UW System restructured and aligned each of the UW Colleges campuses to be part of a four-year university, UW System Administration methodically began developing the "shared services" unit now known as UW-Shared Services to serve all UW universities except UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee. The process began by identifying functional processes that could be standardized and consolidated under a systemwide unit. The work has progressed, methodically engaging stakeholders while developing the optimal steps in each functional area. Because of the coronavirus crisis, UW System Administration must assume responsibility for expediting, directing, and managing what remains of this work. Fortunately, UW-Shared Services has almost completed identifying administrative operational and transactional functions to consolidate.

**Recommendation:** To expedite this process, UW System Administration must mandate that those already identified functional areas immediately begin the process of transitioning to UW-Shared Services. IT services must be rapidly assessed and consolidated to realize both initial savings, reduce future costs, and support services at scale across the comprehensive universities. Further, rather than engage all stakeholders in the optimal design and desired actions in each operation, as is currently being done, UW-Shared Services must immediately adopt a standardized process and implement it with the understanding that the optimal process design may happen at a later day. Standardization and a shift in oversight responsibility must occur quickly.

**Responsibility:** Vice President for Administration Robert Cramer, who has overseen centralization through UW-Shared Services.

**Timeline:** Complete the design and transition of identified functions to UW-Shared Services by June 2021. Complete the transition of IT functions by January 2022.



## **The University of Wisconsin System must create a unified strategic online education delivery model.**

**Rationale:** Individual courses or full academic degree programs are typically delivered to two different student populations: 1) nontraditional or working adult students, who usually seek professional online academic programs and 2) traditional students, in usually on-campus environments taking face-to-face courses, who seek individual online courses to supplement and advance their progress and time to degree.

While UW Extended Campus has focused on serving the working or nontraditional student through intentionally designed and delivered online modality, the arrival of COVID-19 has required the sudden conversion of typical face-to-face courses to online or alternate delivery modes. The current experience has highlighted the necessity to improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of all online or alternate delivery modes of our courses and academic degree programs.

“Nontraditional” working adults are the fastest growing and largest segment of the population seeking higher education—within Wisconsin and across the nation. The UW System is not a significant “player” in serving these students, despite the high-quality education our universities provide. In Wisconsin, the U.S. Census Bureau has estimated that 815,000 adults have some college attainment but no degree. The entire UW System captures only about 5 to 8 percent of the market share in the upper Midwest. This is largely because the UW System does not have a unified approach to online education, nor has it invested in mass marketing efforts like large out-of-state competitors. Instead, each university within the System develops and offers its own online courses and programs, creating duplication, limiting marketing capability, and confusing potential students. Working adult students are savvy shoppers who recognize brand quality, but they prioritize cost, convenience, and ease of use when they select where to enroll.

The University of Wisconsin System can and must be a dominant player in delivering online education, for the sake of our universities, future students, and the Wisconsin businesses and communities that rely on UW-educated talent. This is a critically important part of the future of higher education and of workforce development. Other national institutions have invested heavily in marketing their online programs while we have been hesitant. We must accelerate now, or risk being left behind, perhaps for good. With the right approach, we can and will become a leader in this field. An enormous demand exists for the excellence of a UW education if we can effectively deliver it to the market.

Our universities currently do not have the funds to provide the level of marketing needed to reach the working adult. However, UW Extended Campus already has capacities devoted to this

population in marketing, instructional design, media development, and student support. Demand-driven programming requires good market analysis and an integrated marketing system to effectively reach and serve today's working adult. Because UW Extended Campus programs are revenue neutral or revenue positive, each new program it approves must meet market demands.

In the early 2000s, the UW System established the Center for Learning Innovations to improve online program marketing, student support services, etc. It was a "fee-for-service" model in which the campuses contracted for specific services. Neither the Center for Learning Innovations nor the fee-for-service model were well-received. The model lacked the ability to rapidly scale up with demand and the marketing efforts faced numerous issues and challenges.

By creating a unified, strategic approach to delivering online education, the UW System can address shortcomings while serving a growing population of potential students.

**Recommendation:** The UW System must transition to a unified, strategic online education delivery model to better serve both nontraditional students who do not live on campus and traditional students who may live on campus and want to use this learning option.

1. *For traditional/on campus students:* Improve the quality (content, inclusive-minded pedagogy, and technology), effectiveness, and efficiency of individual courses and programs aimed at traditional students who may live on campus and who seek individual online courses to enhance their education and advance their progress/time to degree.
  - a. UW Extended Campus should expand the support it provides to campuses in instructional design and media development to assist in creating well-designed online courses and experiences for traditional/on campus students. UW Extended Campus should expand its student coaching model to assist campuses in providing direct support to students in the online environment.
  - b. These expansions should use a "train the trainer" approach to engage and build campus-based networks and capacities.
2. *For nontraditional/nonresidential students:* The UW Extended Campus collaborative degree model for nontraditional working adults should be expanded with the following additions:
  - a. UW System Administration should designate the collaborative model as the default approach to all new online degree and nondegree programs. UW System Administration would require any UW university to provide extensive justification for an online program offered only through its own university. Collaborations would continue to be opt-in; no campus would be required to participate.
  - b. UW System Administration should delegate the responsibility for determining potential or existing market demand to UW Extended Campus.
  - c. Any proposed online program offering should include a recommendation from UW Extended Campus as part of the presentation for program approval to the Board of Regents.

**Responsibility:** Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs Anny Morrobel-Sosa and Senior Associate Vice President/Executive Director for UW Extended Campus Aaron Brower.

**Timeline Recommendation 1:**

1. **Product development:** Complete four self-paced courses by the first week of June 2020. UW Extended Campus is currently developing three self-paced courses on online instruction and one self-paced course on the student coaching model of student support.
2. **Dissemination/adoption:** Product/deliverable is dependent on the number of users/adopters but should occur in June, July, and August 2020.
3. **Instructor and student support during semester:** Complete between September and December 2020.
4. **Continued growth in entire project:** Continue product development and dissemination/adoption during the 2020-21 academic year and ongoing.

**Timeline Recommendation 2:** Implement at the beginning of the new fiscal year, July 1, 2020.