



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Op-ed

UW System is a solution to workforce needs

By Tommy Thompson, President, University of Wisconsin System

Employers across Wisconsin have one thing on their mind as we emerge from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic: Employees. They can't get enough.

Yet, from Superior to Kenosha, Platteville to Green Bay, Barron County to Rock County, and everywhere in between, the solution is right in front of us: the University of Wisconsin.

Each year, Wisconsin's 13 public universities produce 37,000 talented graduates with specialized knowledge, critical thinking skills, and technical know-how. Five years after graduation, more than 90 percent of them remain in Wisconsin, where they deliver for employers, contribute to their communities, and improve their lives.

We've been achieving this remarkable graduate production in the face of lagging revenues. As politicians endlessly debate workforce solutions, it bears repeating that the UW System draws talent to the state, keeps it here, and develops it to make our state greater for all Wisconsinites. Besides its people, there is no greater asset in Wisconsin than the UW System.

Listening to community and business leaders as I have toured the state, you learn one thing quick – they benefit greatly from their partnerships with local universities. For example, here's what Laurie A. Radke, President and CEO of the Greater Green Bay Chamber, says about her local university:

"UW-Green Bay is a community partner that is integral to the growth and success of our region. With its hundreds of academic program offerings, the university continues to meet the ever-expanding needs of our community and its vibrant growth. UW-Green Bay supports entrepreneurialism and innovation: while university leaders work alongside industry, nonprofit, and private business to support growth, inspire creativity, and provide cultural experiences and opportunities for the entire region."

Engineers, biologists, data scientists, hotel managers, nurse practitioners, teachers, foresters, economists, artists, entrepreneurs – you name it – across Wisconsin, you'll find hundreds of thousands of them who've been educated by the UW System.

We have initiatives ready to go and expand with more investment, including:

- Prison Education Initiative – We can reduce recidivism and provide incarcerated individuals with the education and training they need to enter the workforce upon release.
- Internships – Each of our 13 public universities has an extensive internship program that provides valuable training for young people while meeting employer needs. In fact, some employers are identifying students as early as their first year for internships.
- Health Care – Our partnerships with regional health care providers are strong, as we offer a talent pipeline. But we need to expand access, especially in our rural communities, and the UW System is set

to expand its programming and add recruits. I heard this firsthand at UW-Eau Claire from Mayo Clinic Health System leaders.

Now is the time for investment. We are ready to serve Wisconsin. It is our charge. Let's take advantage of what we offer.

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The University of Wisconsin System serves approximately 165,000 students. Awarding nearly 37,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. Nearly 90 percent of in-state UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System institutions also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.

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