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Board of Regents Approves Restructure of UW Colleges and UW-Extension

Today, the UW System Board of Regents passed a [resolution](#) approving a proposal to restructure UW Colleges and UW-Extension. The resolution allows UW System President Ray Cross to proceed with planning and implementation to join the 13 two-year campuses with four-year comprehensive and research institutions. UW-Extension divisions will be joined within UW-Madison and UW System Administration.

“With enrollment declines up to 40%, the Board needed to take action. I believe the proposal President Cross put forward is both timely and effective,” said Regent President John Robert Behling. “Ray and his leadership team have proposed a path forward to serve students and communities more effectively. Our chancellors have stepped up to the challenge, and I applaud all of our institutions for embracing reform.”

“This proposal empowers us to meet the challenges we face while upholding the UW System’s longstanding commitment to provide wide access to affordable, quality higher education for all Wisconsin residents,” said President Cross. “Restructuring the UW Colleges will help us to meet the current and future needs of our students, the State of Wisconsin, and its people, and keep Wisconsin moving forward.”

Cross cited demographics, enrollment, and access as the key reasons for putting forth the proposal. There are fewer students entering the education pipeline, while the demand for college-educated workers is growing significantly. By 2040, nearly 95% of Wisconsin’s total population growth will be age 65 and older. Conversely, those age 18-64 will only grow about 1%. Wisconsin will have fewer working-age adults, and more will need to be college-educated. A Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce study projects that nearly 62% of jobs by 2020 will demand some post-secondary education.

Demographic shifts are impacting the UW Colleges, and full-time student equivalent (FTE) enrollment has declined 32% overall in the past seven years. On several campuses, enrollment has declined by 50%. UW Colleges enacted major reforms and restructuring efforts to help manage their declining enrollments and budget reductions, but continue to face significant challenges.

The UW’s two-year campuses serve as critical access points to higher education. They provide a UW education at a lower cost, and serve as a key transfer point into a four-year institution. During the [2020FWD strategic framework](#) listening sessions, business and community leaders stressed the important economic and cultural role UW institutions play in their regions. This proposal avoids closing any UW Colleges campus, and maintains a UW presence in their communities.

“The facts will not change, regardless of how long we study them. Doing nothing is not an option. The only other choices are closing campuses, merging with the technical colleges, or integrating UW Colleges and UW-Extension into our existing structure. Closing campuses violates our core principle of providing accessible and affordable higher education, and the idea of merging with the technical colleges has been discussed for a number of years without consensus,” said Cross.

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Cross will now move forward with convening a [steering committee](#) to oversee the implementation project. The committee will be comprised of representatives from UW System Administration, UW Colleges and UW-Extension, and each of the other UW institutions being joined with a two-year campus. There will also be regional restructuring teams chosen by the chancellor of the four-year or research institution. Shared governance groups will be integral to this process, and the steering committee will seek input from the faculty, staff and student representatives each governance group nominates to participate in the process.

More information can be found online at <https://www.wisconsin.edu/uw-restructure>.

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