

WISCONSIN NEEDS BOTH TECH CERTIFICATES AND FOUR-YEAR DEGREES

By Cathy Sandeen

Good Jobs are Back: College Graduates are First in Line, a recent report by the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce, should give us food for thought here in Wisconsin.

“Good jobs” are defined as those that pay more than \$53,000 (26 percent above the median), most of which are full-time and include health insurance and employer-sponsored retirement plans. According to the report, good job opportunities have been growing. Management, health care, science, technology, engineering and mathematics-intensive positions all are on the rise. Middle-wage and lower-wage jobs are recovering more slowly than the good jobs. College graduates with four-year degrees have been overwhelmingly hired into good jobs.

We see a welcome shift toward “good jobs” here in Wisconsin, too. Even in the manufacturing sector, where we might assume less demand for employees with bachelor’s degrees, the workforce is shifting toward a higher level of education as manufacturers shift to greater automation, lean processes and quality improvement efforts.

Another recent study, this one by Jonathan Rothwell of the Brookings Institution, found “the average bachelor’s degree holder contributes \$278,000 more to local economies than the average high school graduate through direct spending over the course of his or her lifetime; an associate degree holder contributes \$81,000 more than a high school graduate.” In terms of consumer spending alone, more educated citizens make greater contributions to the economy. Higher education is an investment with broad benefits.

Wisconsin’s outstanding technical college system builds a career-ready workforce prepared for many essential jobs. We hear our need for welders stressed time and again.

But we need both. We need multiple pathways to certificates, credentials *and* four-year degrees to fuel our economy.

The University of Wisconsin Colleges are Wisconsin’s best-kept secret and are one our state’s best assets. Our 13 campuses and UW Colleges Online provide an accessible way for students to complete the first two years of a bachelor’s degree close to home in an environment focused on their academic success.

Bruce Albrecht, vice president for global innovation and technology at ITW Welding companies – which includes Appleton-based Miller Electric Manufacturing – is among the Wisconsin business leaders looking to UW Colleges as a partner in workforce development. “Miller Electric develops innovative welding solutions for the metal working industry and places a high value on UW Colleges engineering programs,” he says. “We help employees continue their education in engineering at UW Colleges and UW Platteville, and take interns from the campuses. We consider them a great local investment.”

With average tuition and fees of \$5,100 per year, the UW Colleges also are the state’s most affordable higher education option. Students can transfer smoothly to one of the UW four-year campuses or can complete a bachelor’s degree at many UW Colleges campuses through a collaborative degree program or our Bachelor of Applied Arts and Science degree program.

Similar opportunities are available to students who have earned an associate degree or have completed courses elsewhere, including at a technical college. They, too, can complete a bachelor’s degree on a UW Colleges campus with flexible classroom-based and online programs that fit their busy lives.

The UW Flexible Option offers another pathway for individuals to resume their education and complete a bachelor’s degree. Students in this innovative program use skills and knowledge they already have to work through a series of assessments rather than attending individual classes.

Some 800,000 Wisconsinites with some college but no bachelor’s degree can benefit from UW Colleges and UW Flexible Option programs. We offer pathways to good jobs for people at any point in their lives and careers.

Recent reports give us reason for optimism, signaling that good jobs and fulfilling careers await today’s students. They also provide a wake up call, underscoring the need to upgrade the post-secondary attainment level in our state and recognize the essential and affordable asset we have in the UW Colleges and UW Flexible Option. **BV**



Cathy Sandeen is Chancellor of UW Colleges and UW-Extension

WMC

positively pro-business

“We are a home-grown Wisconsin family business with an old and rich tradition of working with our noses to the grind stone. We work hard to ensure future prosperity, happiness and freedom for ourselves and our families. We know how to manufacture and conduct business, but we are not experts in the political dealings that come out of Madison and do not strive to be.

Our business relies on WMC to communicate and advise us on where the limits of government power are being transgressed and how the government is making it harder for us to do our jobs. In turn, we can make informed business decisions and to encourage the company’s team members to educate themselves regarding these issues and take a stand.

WMC has an old and rich tradition of working hard to add value to our membership, and more importantly, to our great state.”

J.R. Menard, Executive Vice President & Treasurer
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