

WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM (WTCS) 2021-23 BUDGET REQUEST

Amend Wis. Stat. 36.31 to Expand Equity, Access & Opportunity

We respectfully request the amendment of Wisconsin law (Wis. Stat. 36.31) to readily allow all WTCS colleges to offer Associate of Arts/Associate of Science degrees. Currently only 6¹ of the 16 WTCS colleges are able to offer these degrees; the remaining 10 must go through a cumbersome approval process that includes approval from four different boards (the College Board of Trustees, the WTCS Board of Trustees, the UWS Board of Regents and the Higher Learning Commission). As the largest higher education system in the state², the WTCS is well poised to expand opportunities for learners while serving a distinct and unmet need.

Create affordable and accessible pathways to higher education.

The statewide expansion of Associate of Arts/Associate of Science (AA/AS) transfer programs ensures affordable, accessible pathways to bachelor's degrees regardless of geography. Students throughout the state of Wisconsin should have equitable access to the AA/AS transfer programs available to their peers in Madison and Milwaukee. By creating seamless, reliable transfer into UW institutions, we have the ability to lessen administrative overhead, reduce student debt and expand statewide baccalaureate attainment.

Expand opportunities for free choice in the market.

As consumers, students should have equal access in choosing the higher education experience that best meets their needs. Students desiring the UW experience will continue to select a UW college. Students desiring a technical college experience (and price tag) for college transfer should not be denied that option by a state statute.

Broaden the pipeline to equitable educational opportunities.

Wisconsin needs flexible, multi-path options for students seeking to transfer from the WTCS to the UW System and other universities. Older students, first generation students and low income students are often better served at a technical college that provides comprehensive student support services. This amendment removes barriers to degree completion for qualified students, as it has been noted that students who begin at a technical college are more likely to progress along their educational pathway due to the accessibility of lower tuition and flexibility of course offerings.

Improve access for rural and underserved populations.

WTCS has over 50 campuses statewide with the infrastructure to support learners in the most rural and underserved areas. By ensuring equitable access to people in rural communities, we

¹ The six colleges include Chippewa Valley, Madison College, Milwaukee Area, Nicolet, Western and Wisconsin Indianhead.

² 173,239 postsecondary students were served by WTCS colleges in Fall 2019; the University of Wisconsin (UW) universities/colleges served 167,688 postsecondary students in Fall 2019

can broaden the reach and accessibility to higher education for learners who are traditionally underserved.

Provide financial support.

Under the current statute, technical college students who are not in an Associate of Arts/Associate of Science pathway, yet are taking general education courses with the intent to transfer into a bachelor degree granting university, are penalized because of their ineligibility for federal financial aid. Without access to federal financial aid, committed students are less likely to complete and more likely to accumulate debt.

Support statewide workforce development.

As the need for highly skilled workers grows in the state, Wisconsin's Technical Colleges are well poised to close the degree gap by providing expanded AA/AS opportunities for groups that are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Wisconsin's employers continually demand a better educated, more nimble workforce that can adapt to changing demands. This change supports a pipeline of lifelong learners who will live and work in the state of Wisconsin.³

Community and technical colleges have long been recognized across the country as symbiotic, rather than threatening, to four-year universities. Expanding access to AA/AS degrees will not compromise our focus on career/occupational and technical education. However, as higher education continues to evolve, it is increasingly vital that Wisconsin's technical colleges keep up with current market (student and workforce) demands. Amending Wisconsin Statute 36.31 is the catalyst for change needed to provide Wisconsin residents with inclusive, equitable access to college transfer opportunities. While there is no monetary investment required, amending Wis. Stat. 36.31 has the ability to reap benefits far into the future for our students, our businesses and our state.

Additional Notes:

- Expand upon the statewide narrative with localized examples that highlight barriers to accessibility and equity. Specific and personal examples that expound upon the issue of underrepresentation are particularly impactful. Examples might include:
 - Two siblings are taking the exact same general studies course, but the student taking the course at the two-year UW gets financial aid while the student taking the course at the WTCS college is ineligible for financial aid.
 - Examples of border state students opting to enroll at an Illinois or Minnesota community college instead of a WTCS college in order to be eligible for financial aid.

³ 93% of WTCS program graduates work within Wisconsin after graduation (7,924 of 8,491 graduates) in 2018-19.