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2-year colleges could grant 4-year degrees

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Adults who have some college credits but never finished four-year degrees could earn their diplomas at one of the state's 13 two-year colleges, including here in Marshfield, under a proposal being developed by University of Wisconsin System officials.



A class at the University of Wisconsin-Marshfield/Wood County meets outdoors on a spring day. A new proposal would allow students to gain four-year degrees from the college. *Marshfield News-Herald file photo*

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The proposal is part of a growing focus on boosting per-capita income in a job market where recruiters increasingly demand bachelor's degrees.

David Wilson, chancellor of the UW Colleges and UW Extension, expects to submit the proposal at the March meeting of the Board of Regents. Under the plan, the two-year colleges would expand their mission by granting their own four-year degree to a targeted group of adult students.

The colleges, including the University of Wisconsin-Marshfield/Wood County, currently grant only associate degrees and certificates.

Wisconsin lags behind several neighboring states in the number of residents 25 years and older with baccalaureate degrees. About 25 percent of residents here have the degrees, about 4 percentage points lower than in Illinois and 5 points lower than in Minnesota, according to 2006 data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The program would be a great opportunity for working adults in Marathon County, said UW Marathon County student Anna Fochs.

"It's more convenient than having to drive down to (Stevens) Point or wherever to take classes," she said.

Fochs, 22, takes general education courses at UWMC and is enrolled in a collaborative degree program in American studies through UW-Stevens Point. She also works full time as an office associate at State Farm Insurance in Wausau.

Any plan to allow UW Colleges to grant bachelor's degrees would require approval from the regents, and perhaps from state legislators and college accrediting bodies.