

NORTHERN WISCONSIN HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVE REPORT

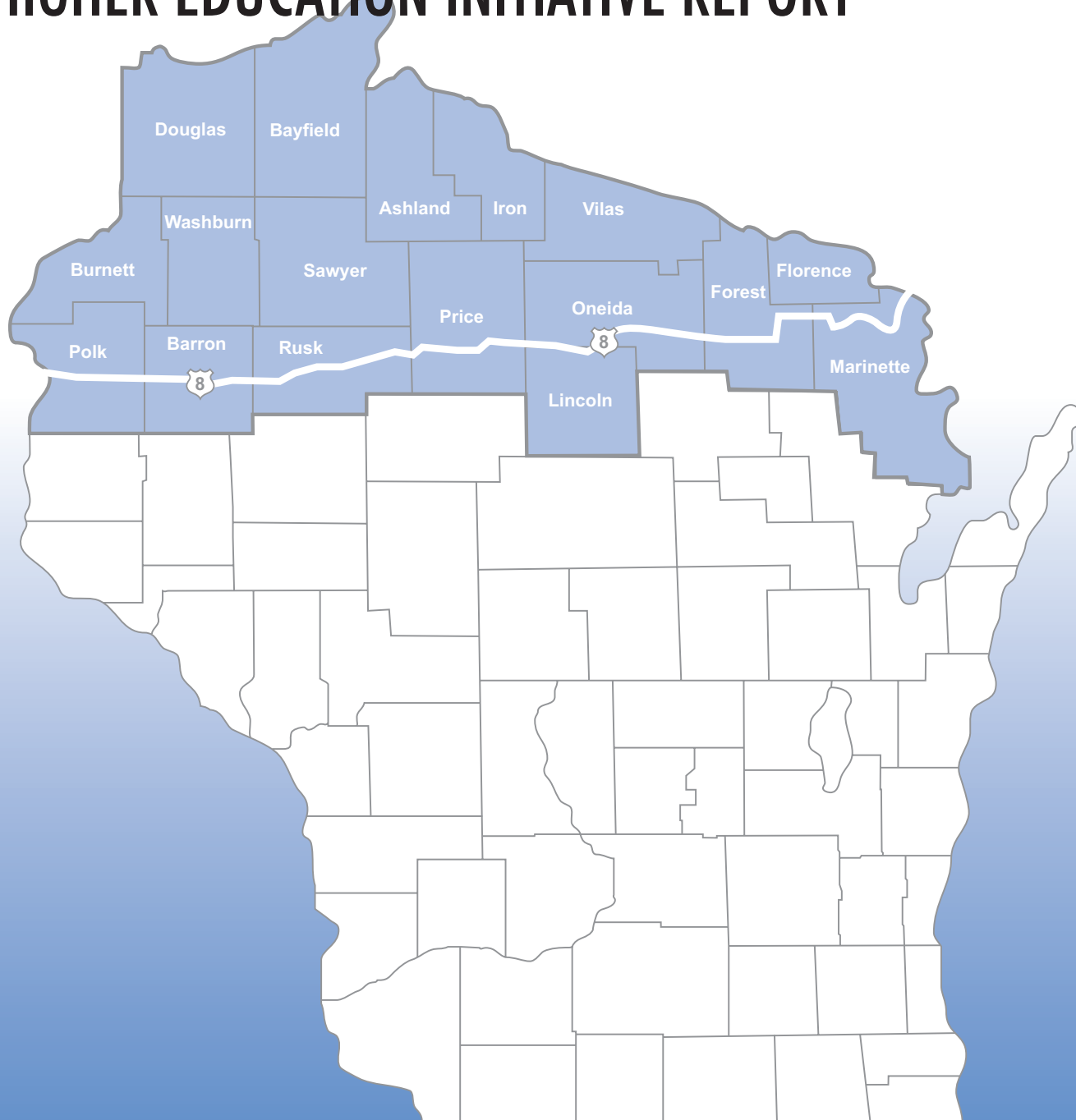


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Executive Summary

The Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Initiative (NOW) was charged to explore whether there is a need in northern Wisconsin for more access to higher education and make recommendations to Chancellor David Wilson regarding the appropriate response of the UW Colleges and UW-Extension if a need were shown to exist. NOW members included individuals from higher education, government, K-12, and business.

To assess need, the NOW group commissioned three studies: a demographic profile of 17 counties north of or adjacent to Highway 8, a telephone survey of 600 residents regarding interest in higher education opportunities, and eight community discussions across the northern counties to evaluate current higher education opportunities and to gauge business, government and community leaders' interest in additional opportunities.

Based on the wealth of information provided by the three studies, which showed that there is an immense but dispersed need for higher education in northern Wisconsin, the group developed eight recommendations and suggested next steps in their implementation. The recommendations are as follows:

1. Additional higher education opportunities are needed in northern Wisconsin and specific implementation plans should be developed for the provision of those additional opportunities.
2. Different delivery methods and approaches should be developed and utilized given the geographic dispersion of the population. Smaller groups, each of which has some critical mass, should be targeted. UW Colleges online courses, courses delivered via instructional television, and hybrid courses will play a critical role. Data also showed that some face-to-face contact is desired by residents.
3. Higher education opportunities for the various regions of the north should primarily be determined by needs of the future job market.
4. Priority should be placed on efforts to respond to the educational interests of those who already have some post-secondary education credits. These individuals tend to be in the 32-44 year old age group.
5. Priority should also be placed on building interest among high school students regarding higher education. This can be accomplished, in part, by encouraging and delivering Advanced Placement courses where needed and providing Youth Options opportunities.

6. A business model for higher education delivery in the northern counties needs to be developed. We must examine what assets we already have in the broader educational, economic and geographic structure.
7. A sound marketing budget is needed to reach the dispersed population. The information about and perception of what is currently available are poor.
8. The needs as identified provide a unique opportunity for particular components of Wisconsin higher education to work together: UW Colleges, technical colleges, tribal colleges, four-year universities and UW-Extension. For this to happen, incentives should be developed and resources allocated.

The working group also recommended that implementation of the above recommendations be done on the basis of sub-regions of the northern counties. Not all community sites would be developed to the same extent at the same time due to likely resource limitations. However, work would begin in each sub-region for the planning of additional higher education opportunities. The sub-regions would be centered in each of the following six locations: Amery in Polk County, Ashland in Ashland County, Ladysmith in Rusk County, Eagle River in Vilas County, Merrill in Lincoln County, and Crandon in Forest County or Florence in Florence County.

Three implementation steps were also recommended. The first was to increase the higher education presence in each region which would include the following: complete information on the educational opportunities already available in each area and clear direction on ways to access those opportunities; the presence of advisors to help residents enter higher education; and interaction with high school districts to determine ways to increase the offerings of college level, AP (Advanced Placement), or CAPP (Cooperative Academic Partnership Program) courses and to increase the interest in the pursuit of higher education goals among students.

At the same time that the work above was being done, step two would involve the formation of a group in each region to make recommendations on program needs, physical location for face-to-face course delivery, availability and access to technology for distance delivery, advising, and other regionally based issues. These groups might best include at least one individual from each of government, business, the UW Colleges, UW-Extension, K-12 district, the Wisconsin Technical College System and higher education institutions in the area.

The third step would be full development of the appropriate higher education opportunities in each region based on need, local support, availability of personnel, and availability of funding.

Charge

The purpose of the Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Initiative is to bring together individuals from higher education and residents from northern communities to investigate possibilities and make recommendations to Chancellor David Wilson regarding higher education needs and proposed responses to those needs.

The charge to the group follows:

- Explore whether there is a need in northern Wisconsin for more access to higher education.
- Make recommendations regarding the appropriate response of the UW Colleges and UW-Extension if a need was shown to exist.

Introduction

The Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Initiative seeks to bring together individuals from higher education and residents from northern communities to investigate possibilities and make recommendations to Chancellor David Wilson regarding higher education needs and proposed responses to those needs.

The impetus for the initiative came from a number of sources. Both state government and UW System leadership has noted the importance of higher education to the state. Governor Doyle has written that, “Making sure that the doors of higher education remain open to all is a basic Wisconsin value, and we’ve made it a priority in this state” (Governor Doyle Column: Making Sure Higher Education Remains Affordable, Tuesday, October 03, 2006). The role of the university and higher education in the economic prosperity of the state has also been discussed widely by the governor, the legislature and the press.

The UW System has championed the role of the UW institutions in improving the conditions in Wisconsin. President Reilly stated in his address to the Board of Regents on February 9, 2005, that “...we are anxious to join with our state government partners in an agenda that will provide a substantial return on that investment - a better economy, more tax revenues, increased volunteerism, less crime, clean air and water, high-paying jobs, and a quality of life second to none. And a public university system that remains the envy of this nation!”

Residents of the state and individuals in higher education have echoed the governor and university president. In fact a key motivator in establishing the Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Initiative was the feedback Chancellor Wilson received from his focus groups and listening sessions across the state soon after he came to Wisconsin. In many parts of northern Wisconsin, citizens and community leaders indicated pressing need for more higher education opportunities.

The report of those external focus groups stated that participants felt that “the university needs to work to educate all of the state’s population. Access to higher education should not be hindered by geography, race, age or income.” (External Focus Groups Summary Report, Dec. 2006) The connection between increased higher education opportunity and attainment with improved economic development in the state was stressed. A key theme in the external focus groups was that “...higher education is viewed as a path to individual and statewide prosperity” (External Focus Groups Summary Report, Dec. 2006).

In focus groups within the UW Colleges and UW-Extension, individuals expressed concern that all the resources of the UW System are not fully spread throughout the state.

Respondents wanted to make sure “that Wisconsin residents have some way of earning UW credits in every county in the state” and that we work on “increasing access among minority communities and other underserved populations such as place-bound adults.” One focus group attendee stated, “The state is screaming for more access to education; so people don’t have to drive long distances or quit their jobs to go back to school” (Internal Focus Groups Summary Report, Dec. 2006).

In addition, the employees of the two institutions recognized the necessity to forge stronger links between educational opportunities and economic development. Focus group participants strongly believed that “all Wisconsin people, wherever they live and whatever communities they are part of, should have access to the resources of the UW System and, in particular, the opportunity to work towards a degree” (Internal Focus Groups Summary Report, Dec. 2006).

Chancellor Wilson stated in a speech in February 2007, based on the results of the focus groups, state, and UW System initiatives, that “UW-Extension and UW Colleges will be the institutions that provide maximum access to the courses, undergraduate degrees, knowledge, and resources of the UW for Wisconsin’s citizens” (“Maximum Access: Building on Excellence” Speech, Chancellor David Wilson, February 7, 2007). He went on to say that, “Across the UW Colleges and UW-Extension, we will remove every barrier that exists to bring a college education within reach to tens of thousands of potential students, including adults, who have said to us that they desire to attain college degrees” (“Maximum Access: Building on Excellence” Speech, Chancellor David Wilson, February 7, 2007). The Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Initiative implements that vision for the northern counties of Wisconsin.

This report will provide the results of three research studies conducted in the northern Wisconsin counties, will provide overall recommendations based on those results and will suggest next steps for implementation of the recommendations.

Process

A small group of individuals, including the co-chairs of the initiative, met for a planning meeting in March, 2007. At that meeting the proposed membership of the NOW group was discussed and the need for community, business, education and government representation was emphasized. Individuals were suggested as members and invitations to these individuals were sent after that meeting. Additional members have been added throughout the life of the group.

The full group met in June, August, October and December of 2007. Minutes were recorded for each meeting.

Between these meetings, various studies were commissioned and carried out to help define the need and interest in additional higher education opportunities. The Applied Population Laboratory at UW-Madison created a demographic profile of 17 counties north of or adjacent to Highway 8. A telephone survey of 600 residents was conducted by Gene Kroupa & Associates to gauge resident interest in higher education opportunities. Finally, eight World Café forums, essentially community discussions, were conducted by UW-Extension personnel across the northern counties to evaluate current higher education opportunities and to gauge interest in additional opportunities among business, government and community leaders.

Summary of Study Results

Demographic Analysis

The demographic analysis focused on seventeen counties in northern Wisconsin: Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Lincoln, Marinette, Oneida, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Vilas, and Washburn. Quoted below is the Executive Summary from the report of the Applied Population Laboratory.

- “Currently, there are two institutions in the Northern Region that grant Bachelor’s degrees—University of Wisconsin at Superior and Northland College in Ashland. Other higher educational institutions in the Northern Region include: Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College in Hayward, Nicolet Area Technical College in Rhinelander, Philadelphia Biblical University-Wisconsin Wilderness in Cable, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College, UW-Barron County in Rice Lake, and UW- Marinette in Marinette.
- According to the Wisconsin Department of Administration population estimates, 412,496 people lived in the northern tier of Wisconsin on July 1, 2007. The Region accounts for about 7% of the total State of Wisconsin population.
- The Northern Region is a sparsely populated area of Wisconsin, with most of the population concentrated in Barron, Polk, Marinette, and Douglas Counties.
- The population of the Northern Region is growing due to net in-migration. At the same time, however, the Region is aging, and it has experienced more deaths than births in recent years. The population is projected to continue to grow over the next several years, except for in Iron and Price Counties where the population is projected to decline slightly.
- Socioeconomically, circumstances tend to be better in the western part of the Northern Region than in the eastern part.
- Overall, in 2004 median household income in the Northern Region was estimated at \$39,703. An estimated 11% of the total population was in poverty.
- Manufacturing employs more people in the Northern Region than any other economic sector. It is followed by: retail trade, health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and educational services. The fastest growing industries include: professional, scientific and technical services; real estate and rental and leasing; and finance and insurance.
- Total employment in the first quarter of the year fell by 0.5% in the Northern Region between 2002 and 2006. Iron County experienced the most significant decline in employment (- 16%); while Ashland, Polk, Price, and Sawyer Counties experienced significant employment growth.

- Educational attainment in the Northern Region lags behind the State of Wisconsin total. At Census 2000, 76% of the population age 18-44 in the Northern Region had not completed any higher education degree, compared to only 70% for the State of Wisconsin as a whole. Looking specifically at Bachelor's degrees, only 14% of Northern Region residents age 18-44 had completed a Bachelor's degree, compared to 21% for the State.
- With the exception of Polk County, the number of 18-44 year olds without a higher education degree is projected to decline over the next several years, as the population ages.
- Current enrollment of young adults in college or graduate school in the Northern Region tends to be concentrated in counties with University of Wisconsin System campuses. Enrollment of older adults in higher education is more widespread across Northern Wisconsin.
- Public school enrollment in grades K-12 in the Northern Region declined by 9.3% between Fall 2001 and Fall 2006. Such decline is expected to continue over the next several years. The decline is less severe in the western part of the Northern Region, particularly in Polk County.
- About 37% of high school seniors in the Northern Region planned to pursue a 4-year college degree after high school graduation in 2005. An additional 21% planned to attend a vocational or technical college.
- School districts with the largest number of 12th grade students planning to pursue a Bachelor's degree included: Superior in Douglas County (n=147), Rhinelander in Oneida County (n=118), Rice Lake in Barron County (n=111), Merrill in Lincoln County (n=106), Marinette in Marinette County (n=90), Hayward in Sawyer County (n=85), Ashland in Ashland County (n=85), Amery (n=75) and Osceola (n=73) in Polk County, Tomahawk in Lincoln County (n=65), Maple in Douglas County (n=62), Spooner in Hayward County (n=62), and Northland Pines in Vilas County (n=60).
- Students in the Rhinelander School District were most likely to be taking courses for college credit (AP or CAPP) while in high school in 2005” (Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Initiative Demographic Profile: Report prepared by the Applied Population Laboratory at UW-Madison, October, 2007).

Telephone Survey

Gene Kroupa & Associates, LLC (GKA) conducted telephone interviews with northern county residents who do not already have a bachelor's degree and are not currently enrolled at a four-year university or college, two-year college, or technical college. The interviews occurred between October 23 and November 11, 2007 with 600 randomly selected residents ages 18-44 living in 15 counties north of Highway 8 (Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Oneida, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Vilas, and Washburn). Please note that this sample does not include two counties that are included in the Applied Population Laboratory data: Lincoln and Marinette. The sample was distributed randomly across this 15-county region and was stratified by age cohorts (18-24, 25-34, and 35-44) to reflect Census numbers.

Gene Kroupa and Associates came to the following conclusions based on their interpretation of the results.

The results "...identify a niche of residents who are interested in continuing their education and would consider all options, including a two-year college, to start work toward a bachelor's degree. Among those with less education, the likelihood of pursuing getting an associate degree is higher than the likelihood of pursuing getting a bachelor's degree, while a sizeable proportion of those with some college or an associate degree would consider returning to school to earn a bachelor's degree. Although an equal proportion would consider a UWC program and a technical program to start or continue work on a bachelor's degree, residents placed more value in attaining an associate degree from a technical college if they decided not to continue work on their bachelor's degree. They were more likely to name a technical college as their first choice institution for starting or finishing an associate degree. A thorough review of the results section where differences by demographics and other key variables are reported is suggested.

1. Respondents were split on whether earning credits at a college or university is a low (34%), medium (33%), or high (33%) priority. Those with some college/associate degree are more likely than those with a high school education or less to consider it a high priority (38% vs. 26%), which reflects the notion that those with more education tend to place more value on education. Reasons for considering it a high priority are related to ability to get a better/more fulfilling job/career change and increased earning power, which suggests that programs offered must be able to provide these tangible rewards and coincide with what the job market says it wants. Additionally, another top reason for considering

earning credits at a college or university is related to increasing their general knowledge or education.

2. One-third (34%) have earned credits toward an unfinished two-year or four-year college degree, mainly those with some college/associate degree. A sizeable proportion (47%) were unsure how many credits they had earned, while the mean number of credits is 28.1 and the median is 20.0 among those who could recall. The top reason cited for stopping taking courses is family and other obligations (36%). Providing support services and offering convenient locations and flexible programs might be key incentives for those with family obligations to continue their education.
3. About 36% of those with an opinion said their goal would be to earn a four-year bachelor's degree if they were to attend a college or university, 34% would earn a two-year associate degree, and 30% would just earn credits by taking a few courses. Clearly, there are distinct niche markets related to educational attainment. Those with a high school education or less were most likely to say their goal would be to earn an associate degree (48%), while those who already have some college/associate degree were most likely to say their goal would be to earn a bachelor's degree (46%). Additionally, about one-half of those whose goal would be to earn an associate degree if they were to attend a college or university said they would be SOMEWHAT (31%) or VERY (18%) LIKELY to actually pursue getting a two-year associate degree. Nearly four in 10 of those whose goal would be to earn a four-year bachelor's degree would be SOMEWHAT (23%) or VERY (15%) LIKELY to actually pursue getting a four-year bachelor's degree.
4. Overall, 31% would be most interested in a two-year degree that could be used to transfer to a four-year college, and 15% prefer a two-year degree in general education, liberal arts, and humanities; however, more than one-half (54%) would be most interested in a two-year degree concentrating on a specific major or technical area of study if they were to enroll in a two-year college program. Two-thirds (67%) of those whose goal would be to earn an associate degree if they were to attend a college or university prefer this type of two-year degree, as do 56% of those whose goals would be to earn credits by taking a few courses. Even those whose goal would be to earn a bachelor's degree placed as much value on a two-year degree in a specific major or technical area of study (45%) as a two-year degree that could be used to transfer to a four-year college (49%). Only one-fifth of those whose goal would be to earn an associate degree or a few credits

would be most interested in a two-year degree that could transfer to a four-year college. Respondents would be most interested in studying business (23%) and health professions/clinical sciences (23%). In short, they are most interested in programs that deliver hard skills that make them employable in areas with high job demand.

5. While 38% would prefer face-to-face instruction, 30% prefer a blend of classroom and Internet instruction, and 19% prefer online instruction using the Internet. Additionally, respondents were most likely to indicate that online courses they could access anytime (80%) and a combination of going to classes and online (72%) would work. In addition to providing traditional classroom-based options, UWC would need to consider offering online and blended education opportunities to make attaining a degree convenient, particularly for non-traditional, adult students.
6. Most (81%) respondents are likely to attend part-time if they were to start or finish a college degree, most likely because they have work, family, and other obligations. More than one-half would be willing to drive only less than 20 minutes (23%) or 20 minutes but less than 40 minutes (34%) to attend classes. Another 28% would drive 40 minutes but less than one hour, while only 14% would drive one hour or longer. This reinforces the fact that UWC must provide convenient and flexible options for non-traditional students.
7. The most helpful items for affecting the likelihood of enrolling in a two-year degree program include getting credit for work and life experiences, receiving classroom instruction within a reasonable driving distance of home or work, ability to have previous credits transfer, and amount of financial aid or scholarships available. Other factors related to getting credits, transferring credits, and program flexibility would be helpful. Steps that UWC could take to help remove barriers related to cost and access to higher education might increase the likelihood of residents enrolling in a UWC program, as would providing credit for past experiences.
8. Four in 10 consider returning to school to earn college credits in the next five years to be SOMEWHAT (27%) or VERY (14%) LIKELY, while three in 10 consider pursuing getting a two-year associate degree to be SOMEWHAT (20%) or VERY (10%) LIKELY. About one-fifth are SOMEWHAT (12%) or VERY (7%) LIKELY to pursue getting a four-year bachelor's degree. Those with a high school education or less are

somewhat more likely to than those with some college/associate degree to pursue getting a two-year associate degree and less likely to pursue getting a four-year bachelor's degree. In other words, 37% of those with a high school education or less are SOMEWHAT or VERY LIKELY to pursue getting a two-year associate degree, while only 14% of them are SOMEWHAT or VERY LIKELY to pursue getting a four-year bachelor's degree. In contrast, those with some college/associate degree are equally as likely to pursue getting a two-year associate degree (25%) as a four-year bachelor's degree (23%).

9. In terms of top-of-mind awareness, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (50%) has a considerable lead over all other two-year colleges and technical colleges, none of which were mentioned by more than one-fifth of those who named an institution. Awareness of UWC campuses is lower possibly because they do not have as much presence in this region. About 16% named UW-Barron County, while 18% named Nicolet Area Technical College. Similarly, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (41%) leads for first-choice institution if residents decided to start or finish a two-year degree, followed by Nicolet Area Technical College (17%) and UW-Barron County (9%). Residents are most likely to choose an institution they are familiar with and that is located nearby. Overall, 73% named a Wisconsin technical college as their first choice, while only 14% named a UWC two-year college, possibly because technical colleges have more of a presence in this area.
10. Eight in 10 would consider earning college credits from a UW professor or instructor away from a UW campus if the classes were offered at a site within easy driving distance from home. Those with some college/associate degree, those ages 35-44, and females are somewhat more likely than their counterparts to consider it.
11. In terms of starting or finishing work on a bachelor's degree, 56% would consider earning college credits through a UWC two-year program, 51% would consider earning college credits through a technical college program, and 57% would consider earning college credits from a UW professor away from a UW campus to complete a bachelor's degree if the classes were available within driving distance from home. Not surprisingly, those whose goal would be to earn a bachelor's degree and those who are likely to pursue getting a bachelor's degree are even more likely to consider these routes.

12. However, a clear preference for one method or route of starting or finishing a bachelor's degree does not emerge. Instead, three segments or types of prospects are identified: one that would at least consider all routes, one that would not consider any, and one that would consider some routes. This first group expressed a greater likelihood of returning to school to earn college credits, an associate degree, or a bachelor's degree than did other segments. Their goal is most likely to be to earn a bachelor's degree if they were to attend a college or university, but they did not indicate a strong preference for type of degree or route for obtaining this degree. Instead, they reflect an openness to at least consider continuing their education and various routes to achieve this goal. Those who are open to all routes are somewhat more likely to be ages 35-44, female, and have a tuition reimbursement program through their employer. The following graphic profiles the three segments based on demographics and key characteristics related to earning a degree" (The Northern Wisconsin Higher Education Survey Final Report by Gene Kroupa & Associates).

World Café Community Discussions

The World Café process was chosen to gather community input because previous experience with it by UW-Extension demonstrated that it offered great opportunities for listening and sharing. Participants were invited to share their thoughts and to be open to others. Seven World Cafes were held from October 22 through November 28, 2007. The locations drew residents from Polk/Burnett Counties, Sawyer/Washburn Counties, Oneida County, Ashland/Bayfield/Iron Counties, Forest County, Price County, and Rusk County. Individuals from surrounding areas could attend any of the sessions and news releases were sent to local papers to inform residents of the opportunity. A session was also held in Florence County using the appreciative inquiry method.

Four rounds of table conversations were held at each World Café. For each round, participants sat at a different table with different people. During each of the four rounds, a particular question was addressed. Those questions were the following:

- What are the current options for higher education in the area?
- What would you like to see for higher education opportunities (your ideal)?
- What are the barriers to higher education opportunities in this area?
- What potential impact will higher educational opportunities have on this area?

Each question furthered the overall discussion and was meant to build on the ideas expressed during the previous discussions. At the end of the four rounds, the top five themes that emerged from each round were shared verbally although all the themes and points were used in the report.

The key findings are as follows:

- Most local leaders believe that the variety, availability and quality of current higher education opportunities are insufficient for the region.
- Options need to be flexible and should respond to demands of the economy.
- Community leaders were also interested in cultural opportunities, liberal arts, critical thinking and the development of soft skills.
- Greater coordination and articulation among existing institutions is needed.
- The area needs more adult student advising and counseling.
- There are existing facilities that could be used.
- Satellite facilities or adult learning centers could be developed.
- A jointly run educational facility to provide access could be established.
- There are barriers to higher education including finances, transportation and time constraints.

- Higher education should collaborate more closely with communities and businesses (Adapted from the Results of the Community Input Sessions by John Preissing and Gail Huycke).

Recommendations

Based on the results of the three studies, it is clear that there is an immense but dispersed need for higher education in northern Wisconsin. As one group member indicated, “If we consider what northern Wisconsin will look like in 2020 if we do nothing, it is clear that doing nothing is not an option.” Another member pointed out that the “value” of each person in northern Wisconsin to the civic and economic development of the area is high given the population density. Thus Wisconsin cannot afford to lose anyone in the northern counties who would like a higher education.

Recommendations:

The group members arrived at the following recommendations followed by suggested steps for implementation.

1. Additional higher education opportunities are needed in northern Wisconsin and specific implementation plans should be developed for the provision of those additional opportunities.
2. Different delivery methods and approaches should be developed and utilized given the geographic dispersion of the population. Smaller groups, each of which has some critical mass, should be targeted. UW Colleges online courses, courses delivered via instructional television, and hybrid courses will play a critical role. Data also showed that some face-to-face contact is desired by residents.
3. Higher education opportunities for the various regions of the north should primarily be determined by needs of the future job market.
4. Priority should be placed on efforts to respond to the educational interests of those who already have some post-secondary education credits. These individuals tend to be in the 32-44 year old age group.
5. Priority should also be placed on building interest among high school students regarding higher education. This can be accomplished, in part, by encouraging and delivering Advanced Placement courses where needed and providing Youth Options opportunities.
6. A business model for higher education delivery in the northern counties needs to be developed. We must examine what assets we already have in the broader educational, economic and geographic structure.

7. A sound marketing budget is needed to reach the dispersed population. The information about and perception of what is currently available are poor.
8. The needs as identified provide a unique opportunity for particular components of Wisconsin higher education to work together: UW Colleges, technical colleges, tribal colleges, four-year universities and UW-Extension. For this to happen, incentives should be developed and resources allocated.

Next Steps for Implementation

A great deal of information was collected to support the recommendations of this report. One important conclusion from this data is that higher education needs differ across the dispersed population of the northern counties. Future job placement opportunities and economic and workforce development needs must be taken into account as implementation proceeds.

Successful implementation will depend on resources. These include the human resources to deliver the needed programming, physical facilities in the cases of face-to-face delivery of courses, funds for student support services and marketing, and, most importantly, the support of the communities.

Given that this initiative is aimed at meeting education needs in the north, higher education institutions must work closely with local government, K-12 school districts, businesses and the local populations.

Recommendation. With these points in mind and based on the data collected in the three studies, the working group suggests that implementation of the recommendations in this report be done on the basis of sub-regions of the northern counties. Not all community sites would be developed to the same extent at the same time due to likely resource limitations. However, work would begin in each sub-region for the planning of additional higher education opportunities.

The sub-regions and community sites suggested, not in priority order, follow.

- Amery in Polk County

This site would serve Polk, Burnett, Barron and Washburn counties along with the UW Colleges site in Rice Lake in Barron County. There is evidence in the data of educational need and opportunity in the area, particularly Polk County.

Polk County is an area with higher population density than much of the north and has experienced significant employment growth. Although there is a

continued expected enrollment decline in K-12 in the northern counties, the decline is expected to be less in the western regions, particularly Polk County.

The community evaluation report by the APL (Applied Population Laboratory) indicates that Amery is in a more densely populated area and is projected to experience population growth. In addition, employment opportunities have been increasing in the area especially in administrative and support services, plastics and rubber products manufacturing, and nursing and residential care facilities.

There appears to be a substantial demand for higher education among the K-12 student population with 53% of high school seniors planning to pursue a bachelor's degree (compared to 37% across the northern region).

- **Ashland in Ashland County**

This site would serve Ashland, Bayfield and Iron Counties. The population of Ashland and Bayfield Counties is expected to grow in the next several years; in Iron County it is expected to decrease slightly. Iron County has experienced the most significant decline in employment, while Ashland has experienced significant employment growth. Bayfield County has had a slight decline. Northland College, which grants baccalaureate degrees, is a private institution in Ashland and could serve as a partner in the enterprise.

Ashland is an area with average population density, but it is expected to grow in the next several years. Although poverty is relatively high, employment opportunities have been increasing. It is growing most rapidly in the areas of wood product manufacturing; professional, scientific and technical services; and building construction.

There is also a possible opportunity for work with high schools. There is a low to moderate demand for higher education with only 20% of high school seniors planning to pursue a bachelor's degree. Relatively few students are taking AP or CAPP courses which suggests that work could be done to encourage university participation and to help with university preparation.

- **Ladysmith in Rusk County**

This site would serve Rusk, Sawyer and Price Counties. There is a branch of North Central Technical College in Phillips in Price County which could be a

partner in the area. Price and Sawyer Counties have experienced significant employment growth while Rusk has experienced a moderate decline.

Ladysmith is in a less densely populated region of the north but is expected to experience slight population growth. While wood product manufacturing has employed the largest number of people in Rusk County, the fastest growing sectors include gasoline stations, credit intermediation and related activities, and nursing and residential care facilities.

Approximately 42% of high school seniors in the Ladysmith area plan to pursue a bachelor's degree and students in grades 6-12 took 58 AP or CAPP courses.

Ladysmith also has experience hosting a higher educational institution in that Mount Senario College was located there.

- Eagle River in Vilas County

This site has already been discussed by the community itself as wanting additional higher education opportunities. It would serve Vilas and Oneida Counties. There is clearly already service in these areas from Nicolet Area Technical College in Rhinelander, which is also a liberal arts transfer institution. The possibility exists, here, for collaboration between Nicolet and the UW Colleges.

Vilas County is experiencing substantial population growth although Eagle River is in an area of average population density for the northern counties. The most rapidly growing employment opportunities are in merchant wholesalers, nondurable goods, administrative and support services, and accommodation. Oneida is also experiencing population growth and is growing in employment in machinery manufacturing, non-store retailers, and building construction.

Among the K-12 population in Vilas County, there appears to be a substantial demand for higher education. Forty-six percent of high school seniors are planning to get a bachelor's degree and are taking AP and CAPP courses to prepare themselves to do so.

- Merrill in Lincoln County

While Lincoln County is already served by UW-Marathon County and Northcentral Technical College, there is opportunity at this location. Merrill is in one of the most densely populated areas of the north and is projected to experience population growth. Although poverty is relatively low in Lincoln County, employment opportunities have been declining. The fastest growing opportunities are in nursing and residential care, ambulatory health care services and food manufacturing.

In addition, the Merrill School District shows that there is substantial preparation for higher education in K-12 students. However, only 27% of

high school seniors plan to pursue a bachelor's degree. There is opportunity to encourage higher education aspirations further by helping students create a bridge from their AP/CAPP experiences into college entrance.

- Crandon in Forest County or Florence in Florence County
UW-Marquette already serves Forest, Florence and Marinette Counties to some degree as does Nicolet Area Technical College. There is opportunity to reach further into Forest and Florence, especially, however. Marinette County has one of the most concentrated populations in the north and is to experience some population growth. Forest and Florence Counties are relatively low in population density and are not projected to have significant population growth. Forest County has two tribes in the Crandon area, the Sokaogon Mole Lake Community of Chippewa and the Forest County Potawatomi, which contribute to diversity in the area and a young and growing population.

Employment opportunities have been growing in Forest as well, with the most growth in credit intermediation, truck transportation, and food services and drinking places. In Florence County, employment opportunities have been declining and only one sector, food services and drinking places, shows a growth rate of less than one percent.

Data on the percentage of high school students planning to pursue a bachelor's was not available for Crandon but there does appear to be good demand for higher education with 53% of high school seniors intending to pursue a bachelor's degree. There is an opportunity to help students make the transition to higher education since relatively few students took AP or CAPP courses.

Implementation Step One: Based on the availability of resources, each sub-region would have an increase in higher education presence. This presence would include the following:

- Complete information on the educational opportunities already available in each area and clear direction on ways to access those opportunities. This could be done in a number of ways including education fairs, visits by adult student advisors, printed materials placed in public locations such as libraries and newspaper articles, to name a few.
- Presence of advisors to help residents enter higher education. Visits could be made by advisors regularly to each site with public announcement of these visits. Meetings might be held in the county courthouse, a public school, or

an UW-Extension office. These meetings could include discussion of financial aid and possible tuition reimbursement from employers.

- Interaction with high schools to determine ways to increase the offerings of college level, AP or CAPP courses and to increase the interest in the pursuit of higher education goals.
- Partnership with local employers to help them make employees aware of the existing and new educational opportunities.

Implementation Step Two: At the same time that the work above was being done, a group in each region would be formed to make recommendations on program needs, physical location for face-to-face course delivery, availability and access to technology for distance delivery, advising, and other regionally based issues. These groups might best include at least one individual from government, business, UW Colleges, UW-Extension, K-12, Wisconsin Technical College System and other higher education institutions in the area.

These regional groups would be provided with the information collected for this report and would also need to meld higher education issues with economic development in the region and involve local legislators in the initiative.

At least one representative from the UW Colleges and at least one representative from UW-Extension should be responsible for the oversight, formation and start-up of these groups. These representatives would also serve as the liaisons among the groups and the UW Colleges and UW-Extension administration.

Implementation Step Three: Based on the information provided by each region, full development of the appropriate higher education opportunities would begin based on need, local support, availability of personnel, and availability of funding.

Conclusion

The NOW Initiative work group has fulfilled its charge of determining whether there is a need in northern Wisconsin for more access to higher education and recommending the appropriate response of the UW Colleges and UW-Extension to that need. Much progress has been made but there is much that yet needs to be done.

The northern counties cannot be considered a homogenous area, as the data has shown and the residents know, and a “one-size-fits-all” solution is not appropriate. Successful solutions will only occur through the clear partnership among and agreed upon goals of higher education institutions and local communities.

The economic future of these areas depends not only upon keeping the industries and work force that already exist, but also upon establishing a knowledge economy sector with well-paying jobs and possibility for advancement. In order to attract such businesses, there needs to be an educated workforce available with excellent communication abilities, the ability to work in teams, and analytical and quantitative skills. We cannot wait for these industries to come to the northern counties before we establish the needed workforce.