
**Chancellor David Wilson's
2008 UW Colleges Convocation Address
Aug. 28, 2008**

“Detours and Speed Bumps on the Road Ahead”

Thank you, Dean Blankenship, for your kind words of introduction, and for hosting the 2008 UW Colleges Convocation.

I extend a warm welcome to our faculty, staff, students, administrators and guests and to the UW Colleges and UW Extension Board of Visitors who are here today. I also thank the faculty, staff and students at UW Fond du Lac for their efforts in preparing this venue for our Convocation.

My remarks this year are titled, **“Detours and Speed Bumps on the Road to Our Destination”** because the pathway to the future will include rebuilding, modernization, and prudence.

We gather this morning at the beginning of another exciting academic year—a year that, in many ways, can be a defining one for the UW Colleges.

I anticipate several noteworthy achievements and issues that will occupy center stage this year, as we continue our efforts to crystallize the role of the UW Colleges in relationship to our four-year and research campuses, and our relationship to the Wisconsin Technical College System.

First, I want to congratulate everyone here this morning who played a role in enabling us to recruit another record enrollment this year. As we leave here at the end of the day and head back to our campuses, I anticipate a headcount enrollment of over 13,000 students. With two straight years of frozen tuition, I hope potential students are discovering what a tremendous bargain the UW Colleges are.

I am also anticipating the approval of the associate degree with emphases. This would enable our students to spend the full two years on our campuses and specialize in an academic area like business, for example, and then transfer to one of our four-year campuses and be on track to get their four-year degree in this area. Likewise, for those students who wish to work after earning such a degree, they might be much more employable.

- I want us to continue pursuing more baccalaureate degree completion opportunities on our campuses. Although we are currently offering more than 50 baccalaureate degree completion programs now, a great deal of unmet need still exists, particularly in areas such as business, nursing, engineering, and information technology.
- As we move into the new academic year, I urge our campus deans to initiate more collaboration with our four-year campuses to deliver more graduate degrees on our campuses. Our campuses can become great university centers in our service areas, where residents desiring not only baccalaureate degrees, but graduate degrees as well, can come and complete them.
- During this academic year, I anticipate presenting a proposal to UW System Administration and, I hope, to the Board of Regents, recommending that the UW Colleges offer its own baccalaureate degree in Applied Arts and Sciences, the BAAS degree. This proposal is being developed by Interim Provost Greg Lampe and we are hopeful that it will go to the Board at the December meeting.
- I also anticipate rich discussion this year between me, UW System and the UW Board of Regents that will lead to a clearer differentiation between the role and mission of the UW Colleges and that of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges. We now have five out of 16 technical colleges with the authority to offer the associate degree in liberal arts: Nicolet, Madison Area Technical College, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Chippewa Valley, and Western. Western is the last proposal the Board will approve.
- I will also promote greater collaboration between the technical colleges and the UW Colleges—offering to take our associate degree to their campuses, if the need justifies it.
- Finally, I am encouraging the opening of more locations away from our main campuses where we can offer courses leading to an associate degree and possibly a bachelor's degree.

So, as you can see, I am anticipating an exciting year where the UW Colleges will take giant steps in the areas of access, mission, and service to their regions. Embracing the activities I just talked about will enable us to position ourselves quite effectively to play a more strategic role in aiding the UW System in producing more baccalaureate degree holders in the state of Wisconsin over the next decade.

I know the majority of you have been hearing me talk a lot the past two years about the UW Colleges and UW-Extension being the maximum access institutions within the UW System. Given where we are today, the questions going forward are: how can we maintain---and indeed enhance---the role we play in offering unparalleled access to higher education for thousands of Wisconsinites? What can we do to make the UW Colleges and UW-Extension “indispensable” within the higher education

landscape in the state of Wisconsin? How do we garner more resources to enable us to offer more competitive salaries, and to carry out our renewed vision with the level of excellence for which we have become so well-known?

Before I shed some light on each of these questions, I want to first say a word or two about what I think we in the UW Colleges do better than any other higher education institution in the state of Wisconsin. Let me start by invoking the name of a movie that was made about 20 years ago.

“Stand and Deliver” is a low-budget movie based on a true story about a mathematics teacher in a Hispanic neighborhood school in East Los Angeles. His name was Jaime Escalante. Escalante was convinced that his students had hordes of unrealized potential, so he adopted unconventional teaching methods to try and turn gang members and students with little or no hope into some of the country's top algebra and calculus students—a truly daunting task that was met with a tremendous amount of skepticism and doubt by his peers.

Escalante left a secure job as an engineer in the private sector where his salary was more than three times what he made as a high school teacher in Los Angeles. But he was passionate in his commitment to show the world that when you believe in the potential of the human spirit and you believe that every person has the capacity to excel academically—if you, as a teacher, are daring, if you, as a teacher, have high expectations of your students, if you are willing to challenge prevailing culture and ideology, and if you embrace innovative teaching techniques, you can produce brilliant, beautiful minds. Escalante was so successful that these 11th and 12th grade high school students, who were doing math on a 5th grade level when he started working with them, were working their way through extremely complex algorithms in a few short months. These students went on to take the advanced placement SAT test, and scored in the top 1 percent nationwide. Educational Testing Service in Princeton was stunned!

They thought that somehow these students had cheated; that someone must have shared the test with them. So ETS demanded that the students take the test again—this time, however, there had to be an official from the Princeton-based organization in the room monitoring the exam. When the scores came back the second time, the East Los Angeles students, again, scored among the highest students in the nation on this exam.

The story of the UW Colleges has much in common with the low-budget movie, “Stand and Deliver.” First, unfortunately, we are the low-budget institution within the UW System. And this is not something that we should celebrate; however, it is simply an acknowledgment of fact.

It's amazing that our institution has been able to accomplish so much over the last 40 years or so with so few resources. We are the places where students who desire few frills -- like marching bands and football teams -- come to start their college-going experience.

Second, like Stand & Deliver, we are the place where some students, who may be late bloomers, who awaken one morning in the 11th or 12 grade and realize that they have not applied themselves as they should have in high school, come to get the start they need to eventually become a college graduate.

We are the place where many high-performing students, who are not ready just yet to go to a big campus like Madison or Milwaukee, come to ease the transition.

And we are the place where adult students, many of whom have full-time jobs and families, come to get their start toward a bachelor's degree because they realize that many of the jobs they hold don't offer the promise of the better life they want for themselves and their families.

All of these students come to us because of convenience, they come to us because of affordability, they come to us because they want to study in small classes, and they come to us because they know top-notch professors will work closely with them to prepare them well for success when they leave. They know that our professors, much like Jaime Escalante, use creative and innovative teaching techniques in those small classes and care that their students reach their goals.

I think students also get to our campuses and find a staff committed to offering top-shelf support services in a caring manner to create an environment on our campuses scented with the strong aroma of success.

When I visit our campuses, I rarely leave without hearing many students rave about the quality of their experiences. I hear from successful alumni who tell me that they got the best start for their career success on one of our campuses. Simply put, we in the UW Colleges have one of the best stories in the state.

Our students are challenged by instructors who bring impressive credentials and preparation to our teaching mission. Our academic staff embraces some of the most effective strategies within the UW System to guide students to accomplish their dreams. We are in the business of cultivating minds to think critically and deeply about past, present and future ideas.

The UW Colleges is the current leader in student transfer success. You have heard this before, but it bears repeating and repeating and repeating until it sinks into the heads of every regent, every legislator, every county board member, and every foundation board member in our state.

Data show that our students are more likely to stay in college and graduate with a four-year degree than any other students transferring into a UW System institution. Whether students come from other UW schools, technical schools, or private schools, our students perform better at the UW comprehensives than any other transfer students. They have a 76 percent graduation rate.

The bottom line is that we are built on a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences and are better than anyone else in preparing students to achieve at high levels.

So, this morning, I am calling on all of you in this audience to join with me to help tell our story around this state and around the nation. Both UW-Extension and the UW Colleges are this state's BEST KEPT SECRETS in higher education and our goal is to lose this dubious distinction.

Our stories need to be told, and I implore you to become goodwill ambassadors for our work.

At this point, I'd like to introduce two extraordinary people who have experienced the excellent teaching and guidance that occur every day on our campuses.

First, I am pleased to introduce Katie Jo Pockat who received her associate degree from UW-Marinette this past spring and is transferring to UW-Stevens Point this fall to complete her bachelor's degree in soil and waste resources. Katie won a \$2,000 UW System Liberal Arts Essay Scholarship this year for her essay entitled, "To My Dear Little Brother: Everything You Must Know about Your Liberal Education."

While she was a full-time student at UW-Marinette, Katie also volunteered as an ambassador for the campus, was a member of the student senate where she served as a treasurer for a year and a half, and played basketball and volleyball.

I attended UW-Marinette's graduation this past year, and heard a portion of Katie's essay. I came away enormously impressed with the depth of her thinking about how a liberal arts education has prepared her for the world beyond. Let me now introduce Katie. Katie, would you please come up here and let us recognize your achievement? Would you mind reading some of your essay for us?

([Click here to read Katie's address.](#))

Thank you, Katie.

The second person, Brad Hansen, is a former student. Brad attended UW-Fox Valley before graduating from UW-Oshkosh a number of years ago. Currently, he is president and chief operating officer of Heartland Business Systems and Avastone Technologies in Little Chute, Wisconsin.

Brad is a member of the Conference Coordinating and Planning Team for this fall's Wingspread conference entitled, "The Civic Mission of the Public University: New Strategies for Wisconsin." The conference is supported by the Johnson Foundation and sponsored in collaboration with the UW Colleges and UW-Extension.

Brad also serves as a member of our UW Colleges/UW-Extension Board of Visitors. Brad, would you please share with us a few words about your experience at UW-Fox Valley?

([Click here to read Brad's address.](#))

Thank you, Brad.

Let's give them both a round of applause.

We've just heard from two refined and cultured voices that spoke eloquently to the value of a liberal arts education.

This is an education that has imbued them with many of the Essential Learning Outcomes promulgated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Liberal Education and America's Promise, or LEAP initiative--outcomes such as possessing a knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; critical and creative thinking, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning.

Katie and Brad are shining examples of how you, as a faculty and academic staff, are transforming minds and putting individuals on a smooth path to the realization of their dreams and goals.

Katie wrote in her essay that her liberal arts education at UW-Marquette gave her the opportunity to grow, to discover new ways of learning, and it provided her with all the tools she needed to better understand and function in the world around her. Both of these individuals personify the work you do and the work done by those who came before you.

I applaud both Katie and Brad for coming today and sharing their stories – and for their success.

Although it is good to recognize what we have done and are doing well, we also must look at how we can improve. What are some of the things we need to do to maintain our legacy and not lose ground statewide and nationally? These are some of the questions we face and must address.

To maintain our uniqueness and nationwide reputation, we must be able to move forward with much more agility. In February 2007, when I gave remarks about our shared vision for the UW Colleges and UW Extension, this is what I said about our need to be much quicker in responding to the shifting needs in the state of Wisconsin:

“We have already examined some of the models at private, entrepreneurial universities in this state and there is no reason why we can't be just as agile and nimble as those institutions. And our goal in this area is a simple one.

Our goal is to reduce the time it takes busy adults and place-bound students to complete a course or get an associate degree. Instead of a traditional 15-week semester approach, the UW Colleges will tweak our structures, if we are successful in getting state support this year, to offer 6-week courses, 8-week courses, hybrid courses, or even courses based on the principle of mastery learning, where you enroll when you want to, and finish when you meet the standard. We will also explore mobile campuses—taking instruction to parts of the state that right now are not being well-served. We will seek to partner with more counties to use local schools, community centers, union halls, even churches if need be, to bring a college degree within reach of the citizens in our state who desire it. I see enormous growth opportunities ahead for the UW Colleges.”

That is what I said little over a year ago. So today, I am pleased to report that numerous campuses offered accelerated courses and last year we offered a total of 18 courses, with a total enrollment of 375.

Also, we will be seeking to grow our enrollments by moving forward with the Northern Wisconsin Initiative, which we are now calling UW-Northwoods.

As I speak with you this morning, we are putting the final touches on a proposal being requested of us by a state legislative leader to form a consortium, which the UW Colleges will lead, to bring more baccalaureate degree opportunities to pockets in northern Wisconsin. Should we get state funding for this effort, it would be our goal to start offering classes in this part of the state by fall 2009.

In order to maintain our enrollments, we will need to be more fluid in ferreting out pockets of need, and moving quickly to respond to those needs. This is especially true in light of the data being presented on Wisconsin’s high school graduates.

In eight years, the number of high school graduates in the state of Wisconsin will decrease significantly. This spring, there were about 71,000 high school graduates in Wisconsin. But by 2016, however, there will be fewer than 63,000, a startling 10 percent reduction. This precipitous drop in high school graduates is alarming. During 2001 – 2006, 69% of school districts had a decline in enrollment.

Other projections indicate that Hispanics will see a substantial increase in population, while other populations will decline. The change of race and ethnicity under age 18 will likely introduce new challenges and opportunities for us.

When I look at the places in the state where these decreases are slated to occur, several of them are in the market areas served by many of our campuses. Ladies and gentlemen, as I look at these numbers, I must say that “This is a reality check for us.” Based on school enrollment changes, the high school graduation rate is projected to decrease considerably in Barron, Richland, and Marinette counties, to name a few.

If our goal in Wisconsin is to produce the number of baccalaureate degree holders to catch up to the state of Minnesota, we will need to bring many more individuals into the pipeline than we do now.

Roughly only a quarter of Wisconsin residents hold bachelor's degrees, which is slightly below the national average and noticeably below that of neighboring states, particularly Minnesota where 33 percent of residents hold bachelor's degrees.

Just 10 years ago we were about equal with Minnesota in the number of bachelor's degrees. Now, because of the increased level of education, the average Minnesotan earns about \$4,000 more a year than the average Wisconsin resident.

We cannot allow this trend to continue in Wisconsin. If we as a state are going to be like Minnesota with 33 percent of residents with bachelor's degrees, we are going to have to develop a niche in the UW System that provides access to underserved populations and will grow the numbers of Wisconsin residents with bachelor's degrees.

In addition, if the UW Colleges is given authority to offer the Bachelor's of Applied Arts & Sciences degree, a unique interdisciplinary baccalaureate degree in applied arts and sciences, it will be one more way we can provide an opportunity for students around the state to improve their quality of life, stimulate job growth, and strengthen local communities.

During the next few years, I envision each campus becoming more and more the focal point for its surrounding community. While we don't have community colleges in Wisconsin, I see each of our campuses embracing the notion that you are the community's college for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

Campus outreach must really identify and find ways to help area needs. We can do this better because of the connection between the UW Colleges and UW Extension. I call on the faculty and staff of the UW Colleges to get to know and draw on the incredible resources and programs of your UW-Extension County office.

Faculty members, I see you being more engaged in your communities. Take your expertise and serve on local boards and commissions, matching your expertise with local needs.

I've spoken with you about what we do well and how we can improve going forward, but in order to get where we need to go while preserving our glorious past, many challenges or bumps in the road lie ahead. What are those? What will occupy my time and energy during the coming months and years?

First, change is never easy. The UW Colleges has one of the best traditions of quality, access, and service in the nation. And there's always a tendency to simply replicate what we've done in the past. Traditional institutional approaches to learning

are hard to let go, but we can't stand still. If we do, others will pass us. For that reason, we cannot let the way we have traditionally done things stand in the way of what we must do going forward.

I'd be the first to admit that there's a lot of fuzziness surrounding the two-year system in Wisconsin. A great deal of confusion clouds the role of various institutions in the state, and much of it is settling on the two-year UW Colleges versus the two-year technical colleges. We are seeing more and more examples of a fusion of these missions.

This is a challenge for us. We have to clear the confusion and make sure the UW Colleges will be the colleges of our communities and that our mission will be respected, celebrated, and highly regarded in this state, because we provide access and excellence and the types of programs that produce successful students as you have heard today.

We have keen and thoughtful minds to reach unparalleled success. Oh, what beautiful minds we have honed on our campuses and that's getting at the heart of what we do.

How will we build and continue to diversify our financial base in the face of funding challenges?

Funding is always a challenge. Our next step is to work within the UW System to convince leadership of a different way of funding the Colleges, because there may be a new way we should look at funding, not necessarily based on FTE, but the value we add to students' learning experience.

I'm sure some of you are familiar with the national college rankings of *U.S. News & World Report*. Colleges and universities are usually ranked on about ten dimensions, such as selectivity, alumni giving, graduation rates and the like. Well one category in that national ranking is something called "value added." This is where they look at predictive graduation rates using student achievement characteristics.

Certain institutions graduate more students who entered with low GPAs or low ACT scores at a higher rate than other institutions. Students who graduate from that population, at greater rates than their quantitative measures would indicate, show the value that the institution has added to the learning process because normally, those students would have failed.

It is my intent to begin a conversation with UW System administration about looking at the value added dimension of the UW Colleges to begin to make the case for greater base funding to the Colleges because of the tremendous job we do taking many students who might come to us not fully prepared for college, but by the time they leave,

they are so well prepared that they have some of the highest graduation rates in the System.

I know this is somewhat complex for me to fully explain in the context of these Convocation remarks, but the bottom line is that the UW Colleges, once again, do an outstanding job preparing all students for baccalaureate degrees.

We are doing a lot right in the Colleges. We admit 99 percent of students who apply to us. My next step is to call upon and make sustained arguments to UW System on the need to fund the Colleges differently than it funds institutions that do not add as much value as we do.

Now, how will we build and retain our human assets?

There's no getting around the fact that salaries are also a big challenge for us. Our faculty is paid about 20 percent behind our peer group median.

As we seek a more expanded role, it could mean we may be asking you to do more than in the past – a huge thing to ask of faculty not currently compensated as adequately as your counterparts at peer institutions.

At the June Board of Regents meeting, Kevin Reilly announced plans to start a Board of Regents-level dialogue to delve deeper into the issue of remaining competitive with regard to offering benefits for leadership, faculty and staff comparable to an agreed-upon set of peer institutions. He anticipates a report, including recommendations, by early 2009, so the findings can be included in the development of UW System's next pay plan.

I am also putting together a faculty group to advise me on the merits of the UW Colleges offering differential salaries to tenure and tenure-track faculty by discipline. This group will be a faculty-only task force, which I will appoint in the next few weeks.

These are some of the challenges and opportunities we will address as we begin the new academic year and continue to transform our institutions into the maximum access institutions in the UW System.

Finally, I want to thank you for your commitment and passion to our mission of access and affordability, and your commitment to continue to advance the Wisconsin Idea by bringing the resources of the university to the people of the state, and to the communities that provide and support our campuses.

The coming year will be an exciting one on many fronts, and I look forward to working closely with all of you to advance our many opportunities.

I wish you all the very best as you begin this new academic year!

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