

UW Oshkosh: Community Catalyst in a Challenging Economy

by Chancellor Richard H. Wells - Tuesday, January 10, 2012

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/16337/uw-oshkosh-community-catalyst-in-a-challenging-economy/>

A 66-year-old Fox Valley employer was deeply in the red. Sales were sluggish. The company's future was bleak.

A call for help came into our [University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Business Success Center](#) (BSC), a unique consulting firm that connects local businesses with University resources, such as faculty experts, student interns, research facilities, a data survey center and more. The BSC staff and student interns acted swiftly, collaborated with the endangered company, assessed its situation and needs, provided its management with a detailed business assessment and package of strategic suggestions to improve margins and financials and delivered a business and marketing plan for future direction.

The result? A Fox Valley company of a couple dozen employees not too long ago on the brink of failure is rejuvenated. It is in the black for the first time in three years and is looking to increase its labor force.

No doubt, this success story would have heartened former University of Wisconsin Board of Regents president M.C. Mead, who, in his 1906 report to then-Governor James O. Davidson, stressed the value of his institution as an "instrument of the state." Said Mead: "At the present time a very large fraction of the work of the University is done not for the students who are here, but for the two and one-half million of people of the state."

In more contemporary terms, UW Oshkosh's faculty, staff, students and alumni are economic and community catalysts. This dynamic University community helps regional enterprises overcome economic obstacles and thrive.

BSC's staff and students directly assisted 78 companies in our region in 2010. However, it is only one of dozens of entrepreneurial and innovative economic development programs and initiatives UW Oshkosh has launched, directly deploying faculty and staff knowledge and expertise and enhancing student learning in the name of regional economic development. And we must not forget that all these efforts work in concert with one of our fundamental missions: To annually generate a dynamic, career-ready workforce essential to our economic recovery and long term prosperity.

We are annually infusing our economy with new waves of career-ready graduates. In addition to the 600 UW Oshkosh-educated artists, communicators, social scientists and creative entrepreneurs finding new niches in this diverse economy, nearly three-fourths of all our 2010-11 degrees awarded – about 1,500 -- were specific professional, career-ready or science, technology, engineering and math-based (STEM) baccalaureate degrees. We are infusing our state with creativity, talent, skill and energy the workforce demands.

This is the Wisconsin Idea in action – the notion that the state's fleet of distinct universities serve residents' knowledge needs and help confront the economic and social problems challenging the state. At

UW Oshkosh, we take this role as an economic and community catalyst very seriously and believe it is one Wisconsin collectively cannot afford to underfund and undercut.

Impact on workforce development

UW Oshkosh graduates preparation is strongly aligned with the Growth Agenda goals and workforce needs of Wisconsin. Most are earning baccalaureate degrees that are immediately and specifically workforce-ready. Many are prepared to enter graduate school and further enhance their expertise and career-readiness.

Preliminary fall 2011 enrollment data showed a total UW Oshkosh enrollment of 13,500 students – at record levels for the state’s third-largest institution. That total is comprised of about 12,300 undergraduate and 1,200 graduate students, with Wisconsin residents accounting for 97 percent of that total.

Equally impressive is the fact that nearly 72 percent of UW Oshkosh graduates in the last academic year earned specific professional, career-ready or STEM degrees. All UW Oshkosh graduates are career-ready economic contributors. However, in 2010-11, more than 62 percent of undergraduate degrees (about 1,300) were specific baccalaureate degrees in high-demand, “hit-the-ground-running” fields including, but not limited to, accounting, business administration, supply-chain management, environmental studies, social work, fire and emergency resource management, nursing and teaching. Another 10 percent (200 degrees) were STEM degrees in the College of Letters and Science -- degrees propelling a new wave of chemists, biologists, computer scientists, medical technicians and other experts into the workforce to improve Wisconsin’s 21st Century quality of life and competitiveness in the global marketplace. Just as valuable are the creative talents and contributions of our approximately 600 other artist, writer, communications and social scientists graduates, not to mention those students who will continue graduate study in fields such as law, medicine, engineering, the humanities and the social sciences. In total, these more than 2,100 graduates will be improving the economy and serving as community leaders.

In just five years, we boosted the number of STEM baccalaureate degrees conferred from 143 in 2005-06 to 201 in 2010-11, a more than 40 percent increase. Meanwhile, health-related degrees, such as nursing, also increased from 243 to 273, a more than 12 percent increase. In 2010, we created our Doctoral of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree, the first-ever doctorate offered at UW Oshkosh. No sooner did a report last year call for the preparation of more doctoral level health professionals in Wisconsin when our DNP program earned a five-year accreditation – the highest possible – from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

Graduates who have entered the workforce tell us that their preparation is strongly aligned with employers’ and, more broadly, the state economy’s needs. A 2010 survey of young alumni ages 25 to 39 conducted by the American Council on Education found 88 percent of UW Oshkosh degree-holders remain in Wisconsin after earning their diplomas. The survey also found that 80 percent believe they “were effectively prepared with the knowledge and skills they needed.”

Impact on the local, regional and state economies

The economic impact UW Oshkosh, one of the state's fastest-growing universities, has on the economy is startling. A 2009 study found the institution's impact was approximately one-half-billion dollars a year. Since that examination, and despite the economic slowdown, we believe that total now far exceeds \$500 million a year, and it is in part due to our growing enrollment at 13,500 students and our 80,000 alumni.

The 2009 study also found UW Oshkosh annually yields, directly and indirectly, 9,000 jobs. By the most recent tally, the University also generates an additional \$37.5 million in tax revenue for Wisconsin.

These monumental numbers and their interconnection come into clear focus when you consider the impact UW Oshkosh has had on Kayde Kempen's family alone.

The 21-year-old Chilton alumna graduated in December with honors and a journalism degree. Through an array of internship opportunities and high-impact, hands-on experiences at UW Oshkosh, she is pursuing a career as a Wisconsin community journalist or marketing professional.

UW Oshkosh's impact on her family's prosperity was undeniable. Her father, Jim, 48, has served as a skilled worker for the regional construction company helping UW Oshkosh accommodate growing enrollment by building the [new \\$34 million, 340-bed residence hall, Horizon Village](#). Kempen's sister, Kristy, 24, is a 2009 UW Oshkosh graduate with a geography degree who works as a full-time academic associate in the geography department of our newly-opened, [state-of-the-art \\$48-million academic center, Sage Hall](#). Her aunt and an uncle, also regional construction company workers, had a hand in building both Horizon and Sage, not to mention two other recent campus projects. Additionally, her brother, Kody, transferred to UW Oshkosh from UW Fond du Lac in early 2012. Like so many other [transfer students driving 15.5 percent enrollment growth here since 2000](#), he is ready to further his academic journey here in pursuit of a degree and preparation for a career-ready plunge into the state workforce.

This is just one student's – one family's -- story out of 13,500 stories tied to UW Oshkosh. And Kempen, like other young alumni, would agree her education was worth the price.

According to the 2010 young alumni survey, UW Oshkosh students felt stronger than national peers that their college education was worth the time and money – 94 percent vs. 89 percent nationally. Ninety percent of UW Oshkosh young alumni who responded in the survey also said they were charged a “fair price” for their college education, far exceeding the 76 percent response in the national sample.

Impact on the region and its communities

Every year, UW Oshkosh's collaborations with higher-education, economic-growth, community-agency and business partners in the New North increase and expand. UW Oshkosh is a founding member and active, collaborative partner in the Northeast Wisconsin Educational Resource Alliance (NEW ERA), a consortium of 13 publicly-supported institutions of higher education in northeast Wisconsin. NEW ERA is a founding partner of New North Inc., a regional economic development collective within the 17 counties of Northeastern Wisconsin.

Here are just a few ways we serve these and other regional partners as an aligned, responsive, economic and community catalyst within our state:

- Nearly 240 businesses and organizations hosted co-op or intern students from the UW Oshkosh College of Business alone in the 2010-11 year. Many of these interns are such valuable contributors, they evolve into highly-skilled, high-impact employees with regional companies.
- Within the College of Business, our distinctive [Wisconsin Family Business Forum \(WFBF\)](#) and [Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#) have become incredible resources for entrepreneurs in our region. In 2010-11, the WFBF provided assistance to more than 37 Wisconsin family businesses and nearly 160 other businesses. The consultations are highly strategic for small and medium-sized enterprises looking to lock financing and other resources necessary to expand and hire new employees. Students work alongside faculty and staff, giving them hands-on opportunities to assist and counsel the kinds and array of businesses whose success is crucial in our state's economic recovery.
- Likewise, as previously mentioned, the Business Success Center's expertise is proving invaluable to regional manufacturers and the NEW Manufacturing Alliance, which tracks New North trends. A [2011 BSC survey](#) was executed by student interns, part of a recurring partnership with the NEW Manufacturing Alliance. Of the 179 manufacturing companies that responded to the survey, two out of five planned to hire more employees in 2011, with half of them planning to modernize their plants in 2011-12. The BSC collaborative survey's findings are invaluable insights and validations that our region's manufacturing strategies are aligned with the broader state economic recovery goals.
- Through internships, nursing and human services majors are also helping Wisconsin serve its neediest populations in community-based agencies devoted to providing low-to-no cost health care and emergency shelter. Since 1995, in collaboration with Winnebago County's Department of Human Services, College of Nursing Community Health Class students have helped staff the off-campus Living Healthy Community Clinic. In 2011, the clinic for the uninsured had 3,600 visits, with 400 first-time users. Meanwhile, College of Letters and Science social work [student interns were instrumental in the start up of services within the Oshkosh-based Day by Day Warming Shelter](#), a first-ever, free community refuge for homeless people. The future workforce value of these practical nursing and human services experiences to students and our state is priceless.
- In our College of Education and Human Services, the Alternative Careers in Teaching Program, or ACT has established a partnership between UW Oshkosh and the UW Colleges. It is a response to the demand for highly qualified math and science teachers throughout Wisconsin. In summer 2011, the five-year-old program admitted its 100th student. Thirty individuals have completed program, several of whom received offers for teaching positions before completing it. Since its inception in 2006, 29 students have been awarded nearly \$350,000 from one of two Robert Noyce National Science Foundation grants that total \$1.5 million dollars. The ACT program's creators expect to present another \$850,000 in Noyce awards to students who are currently enrolled or accepted into the program in the future.
- Our College of Letters and Science and entrepreneurial UW Oshkosh Foundation are linking biology faculty and student expertise with energy and agricultural companies' innovations to [develop, fund, build and operate biodigester facilities](#) producing clean energy from methane. It is an innovative and sustainable process that will benefit our campus, our regional agricultural economy and our environment for generations to come. The efforts are strongly connected to faculty and student biosolids research in our campus's Environmental Research and Innovation Center.

This list and examination of UW Oshkosh's broader economic value to Wisconsin could go on for pages and pages. We will provide a more comprehensive list of additional initiatives in our forthcoming economic development collaborative programs audit Web site.

Since 2000, UW Oshkosh has been able to dramatically grow its enrollment and increase the annual number of degree-holding graduates by 27 percent, from 1,700 to more than 2,150. This is despite several years of biennial budget shortfalls amid the economic downturn leading to well more than \$500 million less in GPR funding for UW System institutions. We have reached the point where continued erosion of funding to our institutions is not just endangering impressive statistics but the Wisconsin Idea itself – the idea that each University be an economic and quality-of-life catalyst.

Our graduates have told us that their investment in a UW Oshkosh education was an affordable and wise one. Our regional partnerships are helping reenergize enterprise. We believe UW Oshkosh makes the ongoing case for strong support from Wisconsin's stewards, the taxpayers and donors of our state. Their return on investment is prolonged economic prosperity and enhanced quality of life.

- *Editor's note: Prepared by Chancellor Richard Wells for presentation to the [Special Task Force on UW Restructuring and Operational Flexibilities](#) on Jan. 11, 2011.*

On Jan. 9, Governor Scott Walker [unveiled the first phase of his Wisconsin Working agenda, which includes creation of a P-20 College and Career Readiness Workforce Council.](#) The panel will be created by executive order to examine the connection between Wisconsin's education and workforce needs.

This announcement coincides with completion of an independent University of Wisconsin Oshkosh economic development alignment audit. The audit details UW Oshkosh's impact in developing career-ready graduates for workforce development, creating programs to assist community enterprises and directly contributing to local, regional and state economies.

The related report (above), "UW Oshkosh: Community Catalyst in a Challenging Economy," was part of a package of information prepared by Chancellor Richard Wells and presented to the Special Task Force on UW Restructuring and Operational Flexibilities on Jan. 11.

Learn more:

- [CLICK HERE to see video of Chancellor Wells' Jan. 11 Special Task Force on UW Restructuring and Operational Flexibilities presentation via WisconsinEye.](#)