

UW System Regents to focus on accountability

by News Bureau - Thursday, October 02, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1325/uw-system-regents-to-focus-on-accountability/>

When the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents meets in Stevens Point this week, the spotlight will be on accountability.

In November 2007, the UW System announced that all 13 of its four-year campuses would participate in a national initiative to publish standardized performance data. Through new Web-based College Portraits, UW campuses and other participants in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) are working to provide consistent, comparable, and transparent information. This data will be useful for students and families, as well as legislators and other stakeholders.

An early adopter of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh published its College Portrait, a Web-based report that presents key institutional information and statistics through a consistent, comparable and transparent template more than four months ago, leading the nation in the official unveiling of the project on Sept. 29, 2008.

At the Board meeting, UW officials will demonstrate how the new reporting tools are being adopted in Wisconsin. The 13 published College Portraits for UW System campuses are available online at <http://collegeportraits.org>.

“Defining ‘quality education’ is critical for the University of Wisconsin System to benchmark educational quality for the future,” said UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard H. Wells, who chaired one of three task forces that developed the College Portrait template. “The VSA College Portrait is an important step toward improving the transparency of data among public colleges and universities, and UW Oshkosh is proud to be a leader in this endeavor.”

The College Portraits provide information on the characteristics of each institution and its students, cost of attendance, student engagement with the learning process, and survey data on core educational outcomes. Additional data will be added to these portraits as the national initiative progresses.

The VSA is a partnership between the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, funded by a grant from the Lumina Foundation. More than 300 colleges and universities, enrolling a total of about 3 million undergraduates, have posted their new College Portraits.

“At a glance, prospective students can see not only how many students are enrolled at a campus, but how many succeed in completing their degree at that institution, and how many choose to finish their education at another campus,” said Mark Bradley, president of the UW System Board of Regents. “Best of all, the standardized format makes it easy for our customers to make better, more informed decisions about their educational options, based on an apples-to-apples comparison.”

“We’re especially pleased with the focus on learning experiences and measurable outcomes,” said Kevin P. Reilly, President of the UW System. “College students know what they need to succeed in the knowledge economy, and they trust the opinions of their peers when assessing student satisfaction. By publishing standardized results from UW Regents to focus on accountability student surveys, the new College Portraits reinforce that UW campuses offer a high-quality educational experience.”

In addition to learning more about the UW System’s VSA participation, the Board of Regents will also learn about efforts to enhance the university’s annual Accountability Report. That document, scheduled for publication in May 2009, will be reorganized to align with seven core strategies in UW System’s strategic plan. It will also include some new performance indicators.

The 2008 UW System Accountability Report showed that graduation rates at UW System campuses reached an average of 64.8 percent. That is nearly four percentage points higher than the current national average, and eight points higher than the UW System’s average from 10 years ago.

Data in this year’s report showed how the typical UW System undergraduate student now takes fewer course credits on her or his path toward a bachelor’s degree. Last year’s average stands at 134 credits, down from 145 in 1994.

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