

# ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION NEEDS IN WAUKESHA COUNTY

---

WAUKESHA COUNTY  
**HIGHER EDUCATION**  
COALITION

**The Waukesha County Higher Education Coalition**

*University of Wisconsin - Waukesha  
Waukesha County Action Network (WCAN)  
Waukesha County Executive's Office  
Waukesha County Technical College*

March 13, 2008

WAUKESHA COUNTY  
**HIGHER EDUCATION**  
COALITION

*University of Wisconsin - Waukesha*  
*Waukesha County Action Network (WCAN)*  
*Waukesha County Executive's Office*  
*Waukesha County Technical College*

Special thanks to all financial supporters, in addition to the Coalition, who invested corporate or personal contributions to fund the research for this study.

Aurora Health Care  
Community Memorial Hospital  
Dedicated Computing  
Bronson Haase  
Margaret Farrow  
Judy Jorgensen  
J. Michael Mooney  
Pro Health Care  
Dick Richards  
Zarost Ltd Partnership

Appreciation goes out to the businesses, community leaders, and students who invested time to complete a survey and/or interviews. This valuable insight will serve as the catalyst in elevating public higher educational needs in Waukesha County, leading to increased dynamic economic prosperity.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Waukesha County Action Network (WCAN) is made up of community and private sector business leaders united in their mission to *“Facilitate discussions of unique and broad public policy issues in the community, develop solutions and drive action with the objective of improving the business climate and enhancing the quality of life in the County and Region.”* In line with this, WCAN closely follows business trends in the county and state, including economic development, the county workforce needs, and related higher education trends.

In 2005 WCAN observed debates regarding the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha campus that began under Dan Finley, former County Executive. Several programming options and funding models were discussed with the theme of increasing baccalaureate and graduate degrees. We recognize our workforce lags in percentage of degree holders in our state compared to neighboring states. WCAN believes that in order to grow a dynamic economic region there needs to be a link between higher education providers and business. BEFORE any resolutions are drawn, an understanding of exactly *what types of degrees* businesses need must be understood *first*. Only then can healthy solutions be recommended on the methodology of delivery.

On January 30<sup>th</sup> of 2006, WCAN submitted a report to University of Wisconsin System President Kevin Reilly. Having conducted multiple interviews with top companies in the County, it concluded that there was a need for more baccalaureate and graduate degrees especially in science, engineering, nursing, business and for a research presence. Similar conclusions had been drawn in a number of prior reports.<sup>1</sup> The University System responded to WCAN by asking that it provide greater detail regarding the types of degrees and the number of potential interested students.

In the moving to answer these questions, WCAN linked with higher education providers and County government to form Waukesha County Higher Education Coalition (WCHEC). The Coalition consists of the Waukesha County Executive’s Office, Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC), the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha (UWW), and the Waukesha County Action Network. The WCHEC has succeeded in bringing together all parties vested in public higher education and workforce development in Waukesha County, working together to:

1. Identify specific areas of study and types of degrees required by business.
2. Identify the degree needs and interests of current and future students.
3. Understand the economic trend data in relationship to workforce needs to create dynamic economic prosperity in Waukesha County.

The Coalition contracted with MGT of America, Inc., a national firm that specializes in education evaluations, to assist in the assessment of higher education needs in Waukesha County. The results of this report will provide specific recommendations with action steps to address current and future postsecondary training and education needs and gaps in Waukesha County through both short-term and long-term strategies to meet the needs and create solutions that drive our growing economy in an effort to support Waukesha County.

## **Waukesha County**

Already Wisconsin's third-largest county, Waukesha County grew by 25% from 1990 to 2006, far outstripping the statewide population growth of 14%.<sup>2</sup> An additional near double-digit growth is predicted by 2020.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps of greatest importance, the traditional college-age population (20-24 years old) in Waukesha County is expected to grow by seven percent, while statewide this demographic will decline by the same amount. Waukesha is the only one of Wisconsin's largest counties expecting to see increases in the traditional college-age population. Waukesha is also one of the few counties in Wisconsin to have experienced little to no decline in K-12 school enrollments between 2000 and 2005. In a time when the Governor's initiative is to increase the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or above, Waukesha County will represent an increasingly large percentage of the state's traditional college-age students. Two-thirds of Waukesha's residents do not have a bachelor's degree.

## **Educational Need**

The list of Waukesha County's educational needs is drawn from three different sources combined. One source is the Department of Workforce Development projections of occupational demand in the region.<sup>4</sup> The second is a series of 30 interviews with major business leaders in the County conducted by MGT. The third is a survey of County business leaders completed by 100 (out of 525, or 19%) employers representing a broad cross-section of industries including health care, banking, insurance, printing, real estate, hospitality, information technology, and professional services. Among the respondents were representatives of 17 of the 20 largest employers in Waukesha County; these seventeen companies alone employ 33,500 workers.

DWD projections show that most of the occupations that will have the greatest demand in 2014 are occupations that require technical or on-the-job training. These needs are already adequately addressed by employer training and existing programs at WCTC. Most of the fastest growing occupations, however, require at least a bachelor's degree, as well as most of the occupations where employers report current or anticipated shortages of qualified applicants. The most frequently cited fields of need included engineering (various disciplines, but especially environmental specialties), computer science and information technology, business and finance, and health care; specific occupations where there is need within these fields are shown in Figure 1. Other areas of need include skilled trades (such as plumber and electrician), and education (math, science and foreign language).

Waukesha County employers also indicated that there is general need for bachelor's degree programs that can be completed locally and affordably. Many specifically indicated that they would like to see the University of Wisconsin system have a greater presence in the County. Some employers additionally cited a need for high school graduates with stronger foundations in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

**Figure 1: Waukesha County Occupational Needs by Industry**

<b>Business &amp; Finance</b>	<b>Engineering</b>	<b>Information Technology</b>	<b>Health Care</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers</li> <li>• Analysts</li> <li>• Accountants</li> <li>• Underwriters</li> <li>• Claims Adjusters/Representatives</li> <li>• Loan Officers/Lending Professionals</li> <li>• Personal Bankers</li> </ul>	<p><i>Engineering Specialties</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil engineers                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transportation</li> <li>○ Environmental</li> <li>○ Water systems</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mechanical Engineers</li> <li>• Sales Engineers</li> </ul> <p><i>Non-Engineers Employed by Engineering Firms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technicians                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ GIS/CAD</li> <li>○ Surveyors</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Financial Analysts</li> <li>• Customer Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysts                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Network Systems</li> <li>○ Data Communications</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Software Application Engineers</li> <li>• Software Systems Engineers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurses</li> <li>• Pharmacists</li> <li>• Physician's Assistants</li> <li>• Medical Assistants</li> <li>• Dental Hygienists</li> <li>• Dental Assistants</li> <li>• Surgical Technologists</li> <li>• Diagnostic Sonographers</li> <li>• Personal &amp; Home Care Aides</li> </ul>

Employers' educational needs are not limited to recruitment of new employees; continuing education and staff development for existing employees is also a need. The greatest need for continuing education was in job-specific skills that may tend to vary by industry. Quality of instruction, cost, and convenience are the major factors that determine how employers provide staff training. Many already have partnerships with higher education institutions to provide continuing education, of which WCTC is by far the most common provider. The biggest barrier to the creation of more partnerships is if the partnering institution lacks specific expertise in an employer's field. The areas where there will be the greatest need for continuing education in the next five years are:

- Computer usage/software applications
- Presentation skills
- Information technology/computer science
- Accounting/bookkeeping
- Business Management/Marketing
- Basic Skills
- Engineering
- Skill Trades

### **Student Need**

Employers expressed a need for additional baccalaureate and graduate educational opportunities in Waukesha County; such offerings would be beneficial to prospective students as well. WCTC hosted a survey, focused on current students of the County's two-year colleges, to gauge individuals' long-term plans for higher education as well as factors that would influence the likelihood of those plans coming to fruition. There were 462 respondents to the survey; most were students at either WCTC (44%) or UWW (37%). The remaining were either students enrolled at other area schools (3%) or not currently enrolled in higher education (16%); this latter group likely consists largely of current WCTC or UWW employees. Seventy-

three percent of respondents were female, and 75% were under age 25. The results of the survey point to three main findings:

- Approximately 58% of respondents—80% of UWW students and 44% of WCTC students—considered it "very likely" that they would eventually receive a bachelor's degree.<sup>5</sup>
- The biggest factor in whether or not students actually would complete a four-year or longer degree was affordability. Up to 75% of respondents rated affordability (e.g. cost, availability of financial aid) as having the maximum effect on their likelihood of continuing their education.
- After affordability, time factors were the second most important determinant of completing a baccalaureate degree. Time, as a factor manifests itself in two ways:
  - Over the long run, time *to degree* refers to how many terms it takes to complete a degree. Thus items that reduce the number of credits it would take to finish, such as by getting credit for work or life experience or improved transfer of earned credits to other institutions, would be "very helpful" to more than 60% of respondents.
  - On a daily basis, time refers to how much time investment is required to attend and prepare for classes. Over 60% of respondents said that receiving instruction close to home or work would be "very helpful" in achieving their goal of obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree. Forty-one percent added that having increased options for obtaining their degree locally would make them "much more likely" to complete a four-year degree.

## Conclusions

Waukesha County is the third largest in the state and growing, especially among traditional college-aged students. This study reaffirms the need for more affordable baccalaureate offerings, while additionally identifying areas of specific need. It shows that a sizeable pool of prospective students already exists in the county, students for whom reduction of physical and administrative barriers to education and increased affordability directly translate into increased likelihood of achieving higher education. It also demonstrates that there is an ongoing need for continuing professional education.

## Recommendations

### Short-term Actions

- Provide more bachelor's degrees in the county to increase available public educational options without additional costs to taxpayers
  - Expand existing embedded solutions by which bachelor's degrees offered by other UW system schools can be completed in their entirety on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha
  - Continue collaboration between WCTC and UWW to expand the offerings available to residents without duplication or additional cost

- Lower barriers of accessibility to the UW system, giving students in public higher education full credit for previous educational attainments
  - Students graduating with associate degrees (up to 72 credits) are frequently only allowed to transfer 30 or fewer credits in to the UW system, when many private and out-of-state schools routinely award full credit for prior degrees
- Continue and expand the Waukesha County Higher Education Coalition to include K-12 systems to ensure that high school graduates are prepared for transition to higher education opportunities, both academically and in career preparedness

### **Long-Term Recommendations**

Waukesha County calls on the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System to engage stakeholders (the Governor, the state legislature, Waukesha County Executive Office, and business leaders) to achieve the following objectives:

- Meets the higher education needs of Waukesha County students and businesses
- Builds cooperation that capitalizes on existing strengths rather than sets up competition between entities that share common goals
- Reallocates University System resources to areas of demonstrated need and/or growth today rather than unreflectively continuing to support an architecture built to reflect the economics and demographics of Wisconsin in 1960's
- Provides equitable tax treatment to Waukesha County and State taxpayers
- Complete the re-engineered higher education plan for Waukesha County prior to Fall 2010

This needs assessment builds on previous work, but its basic message has been echoed for well over a decade. With the work of the Waukesha County Higher Education Coalition the time for fact-finding has passed; no additional research will change the facts of the situation in Waukesha County or can provide more specificity as to the nature of the need. It is time now for action. No one will claim that extensive restructuring and reallocation is easy, but the data show that it is long overdue. If the State is serious about workforce development and keeping pace with the quickening global economy, it must support the economic resources it has in its most productive economic areas by feeding them with one of greatest assets Wisconsin possesses: its first-rate institutions of public higher education.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Greater Milwaukee Committee Economic Development Task Force, November 2001; UW Survey of Non-Traditional Students, February 2003; Waldbillig & Besteman College Education Survey, July 2005; UW Increasing Baccalaureate Workgroup, November 2005; Commission on Enhancing the Mission of UW Colleges, December 2006

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

<sup>4</sup> DWD projections are for the Milwaukee-Waukesha-Ozaukee-Washington county area. MGT pro-rated those projections based on the fact that approximately one-fourth of the region resides in Waukesha County.

<sup>5</sup> Most UWW students are enrolled with the intention of eventually transferring to one of the UW systems' four-year colleges. WCTC programs are intended to provide students with the skills required for employment in an occupation, often in fields where a baccalaureate education is not required.