

UW Colleges and UW-Extension

Chancellor David Wilson

“Maximum Access: Building on Excellence”

Speech

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Thank you, Regent Walsh, for your kind introduction. To UW System President Kevin Reilly, Board of Regents President David Walsh, Regent Danae Davis, and other regents, my fellow chancellors, state legislators and other elected officials, our deans, students, faculty and staff, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome all of you joining us here today at the Pyle Center and the hundreds of others, who, I understand, are watching this presentation on the Internet.

I come before you this afternoon to speak first about my observations during the past nine months in Wisconsin, and second, about our shared vision for the UW Colleges and UW Extension.

Let me start my remarks this afternoon by invoking the word “pre-var-i-ca-tion.” Now for those arm-chair lexicologists in the audience and crossword fanatics like me, you know that prevarication means to lie about something. Well, let me say at the outset that I think I was not told the entire truth as I pursued this leadership opportunity within the University of Wisconsin System. You see, a lot of people spoke with me about why this would be such a great professional fit, given what they knew about my background, and what they thought it might possibly take to get me to leave Auburn University and

the state of Alabama, my birth state. They knew that I was looking for an institution with a heart, and a state that was progressive in thought, beliefs and actions.

They spoke persuasively with me about how good the state of Wisconsin is, how good the UW Colleges and UW Extension are, how good a system the UW System is, how good the faculty and staff are, and so forth. Looking back, I believe all those good will ambassadors, though well-intentioned in those conversations, committed prevarication. They strayed from the whole truth.

Let me explain. During this first nine months, I have traveled all over this state and let me tell you Wisconsin, you vastly undersold yourself to me. This is not just a good state in which to work and live, it is a GREAT state—from the south, north, east, west, and all points in between.

Wisconsin abounds with natural beauty. From Lake Superior to Lake Michigan and from the Mississippi River to the Fox Valley. The landscape is aesthetically pleasing; the people are smart, friendly and hard working, and the scores of small towns I've visited, though some of them challenged economically, show an enormous amount of pride and civic engagement. People fish in the many beautiful lakes and streams throughout the state - and the water is so clean that we can actually eat the fish we catch! The wildlife here is impressively diverse and abundant. Most of all, a healthy balance exists between individual freedom on the one hand, and participation in the collective good, on the other.

I can say with complete honesty and candor that I have become quite smitten with Wisconsin, and I am passionate about my work here. Together, our aim is to continue to make Wisconsin an even better place for current and future generations.

UW-Extension programs are not just good programs; the vast majority of them are cutting-edge programs, some of the best in the nation. The UW Colleges is one of the most effective institutions in the United States at preparing students for degree success, and our faculties within both institutions brim with passion and bring an impressive set of credentials and preparation to the teaching, learning and educating roles they play. In my view, our faculty and academic staff within the UW Colleges and UW-Extension have no peers.

In my 25 years of experience in higher education, I have lived and worked in eight states. I have served in numerous national leadership roles. I have participated on scores of accreditation teams—from the Ivy League to international universities. I can say to you this afternoon that I have rarely seen the combination of passion, preparation and dedication to institutional missions as I am experiencing here in Wisconsin. I have been awed by the quality of both traditional and non-traditional scholarship produced by our faculty. I have been deeply moved by the contagious passion they bring to the teaching and education function; and I have been energized by a faculty who take teaching seriously – and who do it uncommonly well -- whether it is teaching on one of the UW Colleges campuses, or teaching an online course; whether it is teaching families how to eke out a living by making wise choices with their meager resources, or teaching dairy workers the rudiments of the calving and dairying process on family farms around this state; whether it is teaching existing and potential entrepreneurs how to make their businesses more competitive, or bringing educational programs via the on-air networks of Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television to thousands of citizens every day, **OUR FACULTY AND STAFF EXCEL IN THEIR COMMITMENT TO**

TEACHING. THEY ARE UNSUNG HEROES AND MAGNIFICENT JEWELS IN THE UW SYSTEM'S CROWN.

And last, but not least, our students. As I have traveled the state and engaged in conversations with scores of our 12,000 plus students, I am amazed by their multitasking. They have numerous balls in the air at the same time, and do a remarkable job juggling them. They meet, in large measure, the high academic standards set by our faculty while working numerous hours per week to pay for their education. Many of our returning adult students have family responsibilities, child care issues and transportation challenges—yet they are able to do all of this while maintaining an extraordinary commitment to the pursuit of a college degree, and to the redeeming and transformative value that education promises.

Please indulge me as I celebrate and affirm a few of the things I think the UW Colleges and UW-Extension do extraordinarily well.

Let me start with the UW Colleges. As I do so, I am reminded of the story of the elementary school teacher who one day decided to query his students about what they wanted to be when they grew up. The responses were wide and varied, “a football player,” one student shouted; “a doctor, an astronaut, a professor, the president, a teacher, a fireman,” others shouted from all across the room. All of the students in the class indicated what they wanted to be except one—Tommy. The teacher noticed that Tommy was quiet and asked, “Tommy, what do you want to be when you grow up?” Not missing a beat, Tommy replied—“A GREAT POSSIBLE !” “A GREAT Possible?” the teacher asked, “Now what kind of answer is that? “Why do you want to be a great possible?” “I want to be a great possible”, Tommy said, “because everybody seems to be telling me

that it's impossible to achieve greatness in my life. So I want to show them that it is, indeed, possible!

Within the UW Colleges, we enable students to make "being great" possible! We enable students to fulfill their dreams of pursuing a higher education, and to achieve greatness in their lives. We do this by taking many students like Tommy and putting them in classroom settings that are welcoming. We do this by taking students like Tommy and matching them with dynamic professors who respond well to their learning styles and needs. We do this by imbuing our students with critical thinking skills, solid communication skills, and an understanding and appreciation of the world in which they live. Our liberal arts foundation prepares our students to grapple with bold and imaginative ideas, ideas that form the basis of the innovative and knowledge-based economy for which we as a state are striving to become.

Students tell me in glowing terms why they come to us. They tell me that our campuses teach them how to develop stronger relationships with faculty, and because of these strong nurturing relationships, they have the strength when they transfer to be bold in acquiring the same relationships with faculty at UW Stevens Point, UW Milwaukee, or UW-Oshkosh. And this is one of the reasons **THEY TELL ME THEY DO SO WELL WHEN THEY TRANSFER.**

Within UW-Extension, we make it possible for people to bring greatness to their lives. With so many examples, where do I begin? Let me start and end with three words that capture UW-Extension's essence: trust, unbiased, and solutions. One thing I hear repeatedly, everywhere I have been in Wisconsin, is the impressive level of trust in the information UW-Extension brings to the public. Why do Wisconsin citizens trust us

unconditionally? People throughout the state have told me, “Chancellor Wilson, we trust UW-Extension so much because it is not trying to sell us anything but the truth.”

People trust Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television to bring them unbiased information, beyond 10 second sound bites and five minute documentaries. They trust this information to help them form their opinions on important issues facing our state, our nation, and our world. They trust the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs’ Network and the Small Business Development Centers to offer fresh ideas that spur innovation and promote business growth. They trust that the courses we offer online, or through our continuing education divisions around this state are high quality. And last, they trust the research-based information, programs and strategies that local Extension educators bring to local communities. People fondly refer to our local extension educators as the “solutions people.”

In fact, I met a blueberry farmer from the Chippewa Valley region recently who compared UW-Extension to Verizon wireless. That’s the company with those commercials where you see hundreds of phone technicians and engineers following the person with the cell phone. Well, to her, UW-Extension is the same. She put it bluntly. “Chancellor Wilson, when I call my local extension educator, I imagine the entire university of Wisconsin faculty standing behind him or her.” “Through that local contact,” she told me, “I have access to all of these incredible people and awesome resources.” Although she was speaking about our Ag program, the same is true of our other programs and divisions. Citizens see Extension educators as exceedingly adroit at working with local communities on a variety of thorny issues, and they do this in an unbiased way. Another community leader remarked to me that she was amazed at how

well Cooperative Extension educators are able to walk on a razor's edge without cutting themselves.

In sum, what I am saying to you this afternoon is that people in this state who know us, trust us because:

- We listen to local needs.
- They trust us because we are trustworthy, unbiased solution seekers.
- They trust us because we work with them to identify community-based innovative strategies to help people and communities solve their own problems.
- They trust us because we bring appropriate partners and university resources to the table.
- And they trust us because we are humble—we are servant leaders and the people of this state have told me they respect that.

With such a strong foundation of excellence firmly in place, what of our shared vision going forward? How do we build on what makes us special?

More than 100 years ago, the University of Wisconsin President Charles Van Hise and Governor Robert LaFollette defined a third mission to be added to the teaching and research functions of the state University – a mission that would extend the resources of the University to serve the needs of Wisconsin people. These courageous leaders had a dream that gave birth to the Wisconsin Idea: the idea that educational programs should emanate from the University to address the relevant social, economic, environmental and

cultural issues of Wisconsin's citizens. The UW Colleges and UW Extension are the great heirs to that tradition, a tradition that is as relevant today as it was ten decades ago.

As we move ahead, our goal is to position our institutions to build on our strong foundations of history and our strong foundations of excellence.

Our shared vision is that the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the University of Wisconsin Colleges will be the MAXIMUM ACCESS institutions within the UW System. Let me repeat 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 is a vision that EXCITES US AND connects both of OUR INSTITUTIONS at the head and the heart. IT IS A VISION that will enable us to continue to help this state achieve its goal of a vibrant knowledge-based economy where all communities benefit. It is a vision that will enable us to reach out even more to the underserved populations and regions throughout Wisconsin.

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. The UW Colleges and UW-Extension will also eliminate roadblocks that might get in the way of the 5.4 million Wisconsin citizens who want to take greater advantage of the various resources within the UW System. I see UW access for every citizen within their UW System!

To achieve our vision of maximum access, we will need to embrace a number of ideals that will build upon the foundations of excellence we have in place. Many of these ideals will challenge us to think differently about the way we carry out our missions.

First, in order to achieve our vision of maximum access, we will be leaders in innovation.

Through the efforts of Cooperative Extension, in particular, we have used our vast and impressive network of a presence in every county in the state to transform the agricultural industry in Wisconsin. That network has also been effective in improving the health of state families, in part, through a massive nutrition and education program that has led to lower infant mortality rates, a decrease in obesity, and an increase in food availability.

Glancing into the future, we are seeing some trends in some of our cities and communities that are calling, indeed screaming, to us for greater assistance in helping them do what we do best—help them figure out what to do to bring about positive and transformational change in those communities. Now, more than ever, we need to be leaders in what I call **social innovation**.

A quiet crisis is taking place in many Wisconsin communities that could use our impressive skills in community capacity-building to bring about even more transformation. The crisis is in Milwaukee and in some areas of rural Wisconsin. And I think the state and our county partners would be wise to invest more heavily in the UW-Extension network, a network that is an ideal conduit to use to address social problems before they become unwieldy and difficult to manage. Such an investment would be a smart investment on the part of the state and our county and federal partners.

Areas in Milwaukee and some areas in rural Wisconsin are confronting many of the same intractable challenges: low-performing public schools, increased drug use among teens, homelessness, quality health care, teenage pregnancy, and crime—which has led to the proliferation of jails being built around the state. These communities are reaching out to us for additional help, and we need to heed their call. Therefore, we will seek **new** ways to use one of the most valuable resources in Wisconsin – UW-Extension – to work with the city of Milwaukee, UW-M, and numerous other partners, to enhance Milwaukee’s vibrancy. We will do the same thing in rural Wisconsin. We will continue to bring the most innovative practices to these areas to assist them in becoming more vibrant, economic communities and more vital and safe places for people to live and work.

In order to achieve our vision of maximum access, we will continue to explore how to take greater advantage of Wisconsin’s largest daily classroom—Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television. Each day, more than 150,000 Wisconsin citizens listen to a Wisconsin Public Radio program or watch a Wisconsin Public Television program. We will support the effort on the part of those networks to explore cutting-edge technology like data-casting to deliver educational courses to the public at large.

Within the UW Colleges, our faculty will always be on the forefront of instructional innovation. Our campuses are small enough to depart from the traditional lecture approach to instruction and embrace advanced and dynamic teaching strategies that are more compatible with the needs of today’s students.

One of the themes we have heard around the state is that both UW-Extension and UW Colleges must be more agile. Unfortunately, as the premier access institutions in the state, we don't have the luxury of debating issues *ad nauseam* while needs around us change so quickly. We have to continually adjust to meet the needs of our communities, our businesses and our service areas, if we expect to remain as relevant in the next decade as we are now. Within the UW Colleges we will need to embrace a more accelerated academic degree program and look at offering accelerated courses. 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. Much of this growth will be in online enrollments. Our current student headcount is more than 12,000, with about 1,400 students enrolled in UW Colleges Online. During the next 3-5 years, I see our enrollments surpassing 15,000 students, with a 100% increase in online

enrollments. We have a great brand, and we will make it more visible, and make our courses and degrees more available to the entire state.

Second, to maximize access to the UW, we will look within UW-Extension at how we can take greater advantage of technology, and how to strengthen our relationship with the comprehensive institutions to connect their most recent scholarship and innovations to emerging state needs. Wisconsin is fast becoming a national leader in the areas of alternative energy, biofuels, and sustainability. We must continue to invest in these areas with our research universities, and use the results of that research to help the state grow this industry even more.

Third, in order to achieve our shared vision of maximum access, we will have to embrace more collaborations and partnerships with our county, state and federal partners. We will need to work toward greater collaborations with the Wisconsin Technical College System and with the comprehensive and doctoral institutions. Collaboration, however, must start with us—the UW Colleges and UW Extension. And it has! We will pursue with utmost zeal the Adult Student Initiative, which aims to use our vast statewide networks to bring thousands of adults in this state into our classrooms and online, giving them the best start for the life they want. In areas where we have both a UW College and a Cooperative Extension Office, we will promote service-learning opportunities for the joint faculties and academic staff, and for our students.

Fourth, to achieve maximum access, we will seek more collaboration with the technical colleges to take our liberal arts courses and the associate degree in liberal arts to their campuses and deliver programming to meet the needs of students across the state. This is a model that many business people and community leaders around the state with

whom I have been talking are urging us to embrace instead of unnecessarily duplicating programs. It is a model that could save local and state taxpayer resources while meeting local needs. And in an era of parsimonious public resources, we need to embrace this kind of collaboration.

Fifth, in order to achieve maximum access, we will explore ways to bring more baccalaureate degrees, especially in engineering, to the areas of the state where we have campuses. These degrees would serve the needs of the adult, place-bound students, students who are finding it increasingly difficult to uproot themselves and go to the comprehensive campuses to complete these degrees. We will explore this option in two ways. First, we will seek to form more collaboration with the comprehensive universities, and, second, we will explore some restricted baccalaureate degree authority on the part of the UW Colleges, if a comprehensive university cannot meet the local need in the area where our campuses are located. This is the same approach as I am suggesting for the collaboration that should occur between the Wisconsin Technical Colleges System and the UW Colleges.

Sixth, in order to achieve maximum access, the UW Colleges must remain affordable. We must seek ways to make our tuition more comparable to that of the technical colleges, while preserving the high quality instructional program that is the hallmark of the UW Colleges. Many of the students we serve on our campuses come from families where the average household income is about \$50,000 a year. Often they are the first in their families to go to college. We must not price college out of reach for these families. As you might have guessed by now, access and affordability are two principles upon which I firmly stand as Chancellor of our institutions. I can't talk about

these concepts without invoking a little of my personal background. I know a lot about wanting to go to college, but having few resources to do so. I grew up, as some of you know, under extremely penurious conditions. As the son of Alabama share-cropping parents, we did not have much in the way of financial resources.

I remember so well the events on Sunday morning, August 26, 1973. I recall getting out of bed at five o'clock in the morning to get ready to go off to college. When I got dressed, I went into my parents' room, and kissed my mom goodbye. As I was about to exit our front door, my father put his hand on my shoulder and this is what he said to me: "Son, I am so proud of you. You are about to do what no member of this family has ever done. You are about to go to college!" I looked at him and I had never seen my dad cry before, but a tear came down his cheek as he put his other hand in his pocket and pulled out a \$5 bill. "Here," he said, "take this! You know I would give you more if I had it, but this is all I have." I smiled, took the \$5, embraced him and walked out the door.

That scene will stay with me for as long as I have a career in higher education. Each time I look at how much we are forced to increase tuition to keep our institutions operating, I am reminded of the families around this state who can barely afford today's equivalent of \$5 to give to their son or daughter who is trying to attend college to better themselves. Therefore, my desire is to keep the tuition within the UW Colleges within reach of the average citizen in this state. Lack of resources should not be a barrier to developing one's academic and intellectual potential.

Seventh, in order to achieve maximum access, we will seek ways to become more diverse institutions, and to serve more diverse audiences. We must increase our

efforts to attract more diversity among our faculty, staff and student body. As *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman and other scholars constantly remind us today, the world is flat. We see numerous examples in several communities around the state, where immigrants are coming to Wisconsin in record numbers to work in several industries. Our institutions must seek to work more closely with communities experiencing this increase in diversity so that these individuals are duly integrated into the fabric of our state. At the same time, we must be vigilant in recruiting more diverse faculty, staff, and students.

Eighth, let me say again that in order to achieve maximum access, we will need the state of Wisconsin to invest more heavily in its “grassroots” UW institutions. Both of our institutions lack sufficient personnel for the work loads we manage, and both are excellent stewards of the resources that are entrusted to us. But going forward, we desperately need a greater investment if we want to move to the next level of excellence in the service we provide to the state.

And last, in order to achieve the goal of maximum access, both of our institutions need to shed the label I have heard no less than 500 times in various settings. And we need to shed it fast! That is the label of being the state’s “best kept secrets.” We will continuously explore ways to let more people know who we are and what we do. Being the state’s best-kept secret is no longer a badge of honor. And while I know it is uncomfortable for our two self-effacing institutions to promote ourselves, I think we need to take a lesson from the barnyard rooster and crow in the morning and crow at night, if need be, about how essential our combined services are to the continued success and progress of this state.

As I close, I am reminded of a story about a young boy who fell asleep one night and had a dream. He dreamed he was being chased by a large, terrifying monster. Everywhere he ran, the monster would be right behind him, making ghastly noises and breathing down his neck. In an attempt to get away, the boy ran into a canyon that had no way out. He was trapped. With his back against the canyon wall, he watched as the monster came closer and closer and closer. When the monster was within inches of the boy, the boy cried out: “So what are you going to do with me?” The monster looked at him and said: “I don’t know. That’s up to you. It’s *your* dream.”

The history of our two institutions is one of many successes, and some struggles, in the pursuit of excellence in service to the state of Wisconsin. In 1971, as a result of the UW System merger, UW-Extension and the UW Centers became separate statewide institutions. The UW Centers, as they were called then, included nine former Extension centers and five two-year centers. For the next 35 years, we grew separately though still connected by the access mission we both were serving. We are now woven together again by that common goal of access, and by the common desire to take the dream of the Wisconsin Idea, (a dream supported so vigorously by former President Van Hise to the next level of excellence—that being to make our institutions the maximum access institutions within the UW System. Join with me in embracing our vision and supporting our efforts to benefit more people in this beautiful state.

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and partners, it’s my vision, it’s your vision, it’s our vision. It will be what we make it!

Thank you!