

**Milwaukee Journal Sentinel**

## **Higher stakes in higher ed**

*Leaders discuss access, affordability, direction*

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In the fourth of our yearlong series of round-table discussions, we asked leaders in higher education to come together to discuss how their institutions can affect the quality of life regionally. What follows are excerpts from their hour-long conversation with members of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Editorial Board:

**Carlos Santiago:** I think what's important to realize is that the economy has changed quite dramatically in the last 20 years. Universities and colleges and schools are now at the heart of economic change and successful economic transition. In many respects, our institutions need to make the case that we not only educate the citizenry of the state, but we're also creating the knowledge that's driving the economy.

**Mary Meehan:** As the president of a private college, I would say that it's very hard to look anywhere and say that education isn't what's going to make our city vibrant and our state and our country vibrant and flourishing.

**Tom Hefty:** Higher education . . . needs to change to match the new regional economy, the new world competition in terms of both biotechnology in Madison and manufacturing and engineering here in southeast Wisconsin. . . . It is important to keep in perspective that Wisconsin spends more per capita on post-high school education than any other major Midwestern state. As we look at the changing world, I think the question is how do we change higher education to match the new work force needs.

**Charles Pruitt:** I think the challenge for all of us is, as leaders in higher education . . . to make very clear the choices that exist if we don't invest in higher education going forward.

**Rob Grover:** We always need to keep in mind the main consumers of the product, which is higher education. And that's the students. . . . I think it needs to be a goal that some day if you graduate from a high school in Wisconsin, then you can get into one of the UW schools.

**Darnell Cole:** We have to provide an access to education that's cost-effective and one that gives our residents the skills that they need to play an important role.

**Robert Wild:** The bottom line is quality education, and it's more than simply professional training. It's also training people in ethical values, training people to be contributors to the society in which we live. . . . Research is tricky because professors pursue ideas not necessarily focusing on (commercializing) ideas but certainly results. When you have a sufficient mass of people, you will sooner or later get that advantage as well. Good education and research do go hand in hand.

**John Wiley:** I think it's remarkable that as a society we require K-12 education tuition-free. We provide public K-12 education, charging no tuition to the parents, and . . . we taxpayers are spending about \$8,500 per pupil per year to do that. . . . If you multiply it by 13 years, (it's) near enough to \$100,000. If you go into the workplace with nothing more than a high school diploma, no post-secondary education of any kind, no post-secondary training for a high-skilled job, you're very unlikely ever to repay in state and local taxes the cost of that high school diploma. So society gets back its investment in K-12 education only through whatever incremental investment they make in post-secondary education. That's why I'll say confidently it's not expensive; it's an investment. It's the only way you ever get back the much bigger investment in K-12 education.

**Santiago:** Clearly there's been a transition among public universities nationally. If you look at Madison today, I would suspect that the state support (of) the operating budget of UW-Madison is about 18%. At UWM, it's 23%. Just 10 years ago on our campus it was over 40%. That trend toward the declining state support is a reality that we live with. . . .

The irony is that while I think there's a realization that universities are indispensable in today's economic landscape, the public sector has been disinvesting in public higher education across the country. . . . I think at the end of the day what public institutions will need to do is to sit down with the state political leadership and craft a compact, an agreement, that we will provide certain things and we will receive a certain amount of public funding to provide those attributes that we're trying to create in our students.

**Wiley:** I can announce that we just got a \$125 million grant today. But that's all earmarked. There was a budget that went with that proposal telling the (U.S.) Department of Energy, in this case, exactly what we're going to do with the money. I cannot reallocate that to higher (levels of ) Spanish instruction or more math faculty or anything else. I can't use it to subsidize student tuition. I have to use it for the purpose intended.

Every university in this country gets that base budget support from just three sources: the state, if they're a public institution, the students, and gifts and endowment income. That's it. . . . We rely in the base budget on those three sources. Either you have a multibillion-dollar endowment to take the place of state support or you live on state support and tuition.

In our state, that balance between tuition and state support has been shifting. . . . No one sat down and said, "Let's make college more expensive for the students." They said, "We just don't have enough money. Raise your tuition support." . . .

We're . . . just going down a path blindly, budget year after budget year, balancing the (budget) by cutting back support to higher education and raising tuition.

**Meehan:** Of all the colleges and universities in the United States, the percentage of students receiving public grants, my school's fifth in the country. So they're poor students financially, and it's also a very diverse school - 37% of our students are women of color. . . .

If you look at the amount given per student in . . . aid (in Wisconsin), it's actually one of the lowest in the Midwest, second only to Iowa. . . .

It's a common wisdom, when you say private schools, (that they) should have the more wealthy students. It's actually not the case in Wisconsin. More students of low income go to the privates than the public.

**Pruitt:** This shift to user fees, essentially, over the last decade has had one of the most profound effects in terms of shrinking the percentage of low- and moderate-income families and students in the University of Wisconsin system. . . .

If we are going to be serious about increasing the number of . . . college degree holders in this state, we have to reach (out) to low- and moderate income families. . . . It may not seem a lot of money to go pay \$7,300 to the University of Wisconsin-Madison if you live in Mequon or in Fox Point. It is a major deal if you are a lower- or moderate-income family and looking at the rising tuition, particularly because, historically, Wisconsin has been a low-tuition, low-aid state.

**Wild:** The government historically had been an important part of trying to solve that, but obviously both at the federal and the state level, the money is slow(ing), . . . So that's a real challenge. We meet that in the private sector, true, by getting out there and asking our alumni and others to help contribute, but more and more we're seeing the public sector doing exactly the same thing.

We're all out there begging money for these institutions that are so important to the well-being of this state and this country.

**Cole:** For the technical two-year colleges, (the biggest challenge) is responding to the publics that we serve . . . making sure that this part of the country has a dynamic work force.

We're not able to do that unless we have these dynamic partners . . . (who) provide an opportunity for individuals to participate in customized training programs so that they can immediately go into the work force - like those programs with Bucyrus and Trumont, where they can't wait for a student to complete a one-year and two-year program. They need welders right now. And the alternative is if they can't get those welders from us, then they go to some other part of the country and get those welders and bring them into our community and then the employment rate that we all are tussling with continues to be here.

**Grover:** Coming from a student's standpoint, tuition is always the biggest concern of any student. I really think . . . that we're probably at a point where certain groups of students are being priced out of education in Wisconsin. It's a huge concern. . . . Something has to be done . . . because . . . it's hard to get an education in the UW System for certain students at the lowest end.

**Hefty:** We need to have higher education move more quickly to respond to the changing economy, both regionally and nationally and even internationally. I can't say we don't need more

resources, but I can say that most other states that are growing faster have changed their education approaches in the last 35 years, and Wisconsin remains unchanged 35 years later. . . .

If you look at Minnesota, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, they've realigned their public university systems . . . by region and combined two-year colleges and four-year colleges, as an example.

Or Massachusetts just realigned their university system by specialty and eliminated one whole layer of the university administration. And so you go state by state where they're achieving faster growth, they've made changes institutionally in their public system.

Second thing, Milwaukee depends uniquely on private colleges. Fifty percent of the students attending college in Milwaukee go to a private college or university. That's totally different than the rest of Wisconsin. Yet . . . Wisconsin has among the lowest levels of aid for low-income students attending private college. So it disproportionately hurts Milwaukee by having that as a policy decision of the state. It hurts Marquette, it hurts Alverno, and the students who might chose to go there.

Finally, there are a number of states that are moving to encourage STEM education - science, technology, engineering, math - by supplementing their programs for low-income students.

**Wiley:** Actually, if you want to know what's really different about Wisconsin, we over-rely on public higher education. We have more students in public institutions in this state than most other states.

Minnesota's a very good neighbor comparison. They have both more public universities and lots more private universities than we do. We're light on the private university side of the equation compared to almost any other state I can think of. . . .

The other thing to keep in mind is that the private school model will not scale up to the size required to handle the vast majority of educational needs.

(On campuses transforming) We've had just massive changes in our curriculum. . . . From 1975 to the present we have eliminated entire colleges, lots of departments, merged others, renamed others, and changed their curricula to be more consistent. . . . There are many majors around today that didn't even exist in 1975.

Virtually every part of the campus has been touched in some way. We've consolidated from offering more than 18,000 differently named courses to about 12,000.

**Santiago:** It's important to note that students today change jobs multiple times in their career. Students today have got kind of a life-long learning experience.

In Wisconsin you have a myriad of different institutions trying to meet some of those different needs. It's not very comprehensive. It's hard for a student to go from a two-year institution or to a technical college into a four-year institution. It's not entirely seamless.

In Ireland, for example, you have . . . regional universities. You have a university where someone can come in, walk in the door. They're public institutions. If they want to be a welder, they can become a welder. If they want a PhD in physics at the same institution, they can be a PhD in physics. . . . It gives a lot of opportunity for students to transition and to decide - if a welder wants to become a PhD in physics in the same institution, maybe they can do that.

**Pruitt:** One of the concerns I always have with Wisconsin . . . is I think sometimes - I don't mean to sound Pollyannaish - I think sometimes we really don't appreciate what we have. . . .

You look at Gov. Spitzer in New York who just created a higher education panel to review the system. One of the three university systems he identified as the model he wants New York to look like is the University of Wisconsin System. . . .

We've got changes to make, we've got transformations to make, many of them are already ongoing, but we also have to build on what we have and recognize we're never going to be the lowest-taxed state in the country, we're never going to have 80-degree weather in January.

**Cole:** We've put in place programs that are called the Badger Track and the Panther Track to provide greater opportunities for Wisconsin residents who may not get into (UWM and UW-Madison) initially.

What those two programs allow taxpayers to do is to send their sons and daughters to Milwaukee Area Technical College and enroll in a program that was designed by the faculty from UWM and faculty from UW-Madison, and if a student completes those courses and completes them at a certain grade point average, that student can begin their junior year on those campuses without re-enrolling, applying for admission. To me that shows where we're working together.

**Wild:** The challenge in this environment . . . on the one hand is to be more engaged with the workplaces. . . . There needs to be more active relationships, definitely, so that we're preparing the students that are needed. At the same time . . . they need a certain level of broader training . . . to really give people the flexibility of mind, and the ability to see that the world keeps changing.

**Grover:** I think the universities need to transform and build partnerships with the business areas and things like that, (but) we also need to keep in mind that in the UW System . . . we operate under the Wisconsin Idea, which is we are supposed to help solve the problems of the state of Wisconsin. The stuff that we're doing should directly benefit the state.

**Hefty:** States that are growing faster, both in their incomes and their work force, have transformed their university systems. They use private higher education as part of the system.

Massachusetts, the publics and privates, actually cooperate on shared programs. . . . States that are doing more in their transformation of higher education are also growing faster as they respond to the economy. I'll just put out another number. If you look at science, technology, engineering, math education, the work force for biotech in Madison and advanced manufacturing

in southeast Wisconsin, the UW System produces only 21% of its majors in STEM fields. The national average is 31%.

If we believe that we have to compete internationally in the two areas of Wisconsin strength, it says we need to reallocate resources to accommodate those work force needs.

(How?)

By having discussions like this to convince people that the world economy is changing, and if our children and grandchildren want to successfully compete in that world, we need higher education. But we need it aligned with the changing economy.

**Wiley:** You're getting the cart before the horse. It wouldn't do Wisconsin one bit of good if we could magically wave a wand and Monday morning next week produce 20% more graduates, more degree holders and 20% more science and math degree holders. It wouldn't do us any good whatsoever if they just sat unemployed or had to move to other states to find jobs in those fields.

We've got a mismatch between our historic . . . legacy economy and the way the rest of the world is going. We're catching up, but it's going to take time. . . .

One of the things we need to do is build UW-Milwaukee and unleash them from some unreasonable constraints that have been imposed on them over the years. It's a fact. As Milwaukee goes, so goes the whole state. A lot of the economic problems of this state are right here Milwaukee, and we all have a big stake in solving them.

I look forward to the day when Milwaukee is a larger and better funded, more dynamic research institution than it is today. And it's already a way lot better than your paper, or anyone else in the state, realizes.

What we're seeing on my campus is an almost frightening increase in the interest in biology-type majors. I think it's getting to be a mismatch.

There's a need for a lot more different types of degrees and training in biotechnology than just biology.

So we can't satisfy the demand for biology majors. Pretty soon we'll be, instead of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, we'll be the University of Biology because every student, it seems, wants to have some kind of life science-oriented major, so we don't have enough people interested in computer science, physics, chemistry, engineering, and most of those who are interested are international students, especially at the graduate level. There's a real challenge we have. . . .

In part it's a K-12 problem. In part it's a television problem - the way scientists and engineers and mathematicians and so on are characterized and stereotyped on TV shows. We noticed a huge increase in interest in law degrees just because of the show "L.A. Law." I'm not kidding.

**Meehan:** It's interesting because we often find that first-generation students are not as exposed to a broad array of careers. For example, our nursing program, as is true with all of our schools, is burgeoning at the seams. But we've really taken upon ourselves to ask some of these young women, are you sure you want to be a nurse, you seem to really like being in a laboratory more than perhaps you like being on a floor. But they don't really fully always understand, and that is our job to teach them.

**Wild:** There are a variety of things that have to be done, but one of them, I think, is just sheer leg work and selling to younger people, giving them the sense of possibility.

We've seen that in engineering, whereas the country's engineering enrollment actually heads downward, we've been able to reverse the trend and push it upward. A lot of that has been hard work with high schools, with grade schools. . . . We have summer engineering camps now. . . . We've tried to do that in dentistry.

Some of it is simply giving people a sense of possibility for their future because many kids see their future in very narrow terms.

**Wiley:** Another interesting trend which I think is noteworthy is that more and more students are not expecting to simply go to work for someone else when they graduate. Instead, they're expecting to start their own companies. Entrepreneurism is really on the rise, and we're doing everything we can to encourage that, because that, as much as anything else, is the best hope for the Wisconsin economy.

We're not going to be attracting Toyota to come in and build cars here so much as we are going to create a swarm of bright well-trained students who can come up with great ideas and start new companies.

**Santiago:** (On whether the universities are doing enough to enroll students of color) If you look at our admissions requirements, they have not changed at all in the last five to 10 years. The door has been open pretty widely. . . .

The difference, though, is we're struggling with students who come to us unprepared and under-prepared for rigorous college work, and it is a real challenge for us. We're doing a lot of remediation. We do a lot of summer programs. The amount of money that we put into remediation is truly significant.

It's a tough problem because we don't have full control over the educational disadvantages that students have as they come to the institution, and that impacts our diversity. That impacts our retention and graduation rates, and it's a real challenge for us, particularly being in Milwaukee.

You can't talk about higher education unless you talk about K-12. . . . If that pipeline is not full and working effectively to move students through to get to the university, then we've got some issues at our end.

**Pruitt:** I don't think you can ever do enough in this area. This is clearly the challenge and it deals with the pipeline. . . . Personally, I think one of the really encouraging signs is over the last few years the state has begun to appreciate this more and more.

I think the Wisconsin Covenant is a very important, new idea that's been put on the table by the governor. Because it's not just about sort of guaranteeing access . . . but it's also about giving students and giving kids at the eighth-grade level an earlier sense of hope and a sense of optimism and a belief that if they do the right thing, they can access this university system.

**Wiley:** I'd like to . . . give you what I think is a startling number. . . . I know the impression around the state is it used to be easy to get into Madison and now it's virtually impossible unless you have a stellar GPA and ACT score. It really isn't true.

We have no bright-line test above which you're automatically admitted, below which you're not. But the fact of the matter is we get 23,000 applications, and we can't handle more than about 6,000 freshmen.

So we're sending out a lot more rejections than we used to. But to compete in that pool minimally you would expect students need to be in the top half, maybe the top quarter of their class and have an above-average ACT score, meaning above 22. That's (the) minimal expectation.

In 2008, there'll be 51,848 high school graduates who are white and 9,241 who are non-white. Of the 9,241, a total of 856 will be in the top half of their class and have an ACT above 22. Only 608 will be in the top quarter with an ACT above 22.

That's the entire pool of non-white Wisconsin high school graduates that all of us will compete for. It includes 93 African-Americans, 170 Hispanics, 43 American Indians, 302 Asians.

That's the stark reality. What we have to do is not just wait for them to graduate and then hope to out-compete Alverno or Marquette or Milwaukee for the best and brightest non-white students, we have to actually get in at the middle school level and start working with them and bring them along so that they're ready to get admitted.

Tom said earlier we were a high-tax state, and I think most of us would agree that property taxes and personal income taxes are well above average for the country. That's what people think about when they think about taxes.

But the fact of the matter is we way over-rely on just those two taxes and under-rely on lots of other revenue sources and user fees and so on compared to most any other state.

It's way past time for Wisconsin to get out a clean sheet of paper and redesign this tax system. . .

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That's the best single thing you could do for education at all levels, redesign Wisconsin's tax system.

## **Round Table Participants**

**John Wiley**, chancellor, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
**Carlos Santiago**, chancellor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
**Father Robert Wild**, president, Marquette University  
**Darnell Cole**, president, Milwaukee Area Technical College  
**Charles Pruitt**, regent, UW System Board of Regents  
**Mary Meehan**, president, Alverno College  
**Rob Grover**, president, UWM student association

### **OTHER VIEWS ROUND-TABLE EXCERPTS**

*Editor's note: We asked the participants in our higher education round table to tell us what, a year from now, they might say that they or their institutions accomplished. Here are their answers:*

**John Wiley:** I've talked to a lot of alumni groups, and almost always there's someone in the audience who remembers the first day of class when a professor said, "Look to your left and look to your right, because only one of you is going to graduate." That was really true 30 or 40 years ago - a 33% graduation rate. We're now at 80%....We just changed our target a couple of weeks ago to 85%....That's transformational.

**Robert Wild:** The biggest thing we'll do...is to raise endowment funds to support this (access) effort. Affordability at all levels is a significant issue going forward but certainly as we try to recruit students who are from economically limited backgrounds.

**Darnell Cole:** Our institutions must continue to cultivate the partnerships to provide opportunity and access for individuals to come to our college and begin their education...Of the 50,000-plus students that we have on our campus, close to 20,000...don't have the preparation level to move into a traditional program...We're providing them remediation...So we've got to help those students.

**Rob Grover:** I think your involvement on campus, other than your academics, is the seconded part of your education. So it's a big thing that on the student association we're going to need to work on and we're are going to need to...make sure that we are a group that is connecting students to this campus, making them feel comfortable... I think overall what I can do is try to work with the administration, my university, and encourage other student governments to do that to make sure that we're always working together in a partnership.

**Charles Pruitt:** I would certainly hope that a year from now... we will see a state budget passed that is somewhere along the lines of the growth, access and affordability agenda that the University of Wisconsin has put forward. I think it's terribly important as a first step to growing the number of college degree-holders, to continue to expand access for students and to keeping the University of Wisconsin a great deal.

**Mary Meehan:** Our mantra is affordability, accessibility and accountability on our campus. So this time next year, I hope that I can still tell you we are (the) lowest tuition in the state of Wisconsin for any private school, that we will remain the most diverse and that we will continue to do learning outcomes and assessment and make public how our students are doing.

**Carlos Santiago:** I think that in the next year we want to ensure that the institution remains accessible. We will continue to raise money to support scholarships and fellowships for students and hopefully make some headway on decompressing the campus, doubling the size of the school of engineering and creating an academic health center and school of public health downtown and building more housing for students.