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UW SYSTEM | 2-YEAR COLLEGES WOULD JOIN 4-YEAR SCHOOLS

## University of Wisconsin officials announce plan to merge Colleges with four-year campuses

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University of Wisconsin System officials are pursuing a plan to merge the state's two-year UW Colleges with its four-year institutions, turning the 13 small schools into branch campuses of the larger universities.

The wide-ranging restructuring plan System President Ray Cross announced Wednesday would also bring UW Extension programs under new administration.

Cross described the plan, which he will bring to UW's governing Board of Regents for approval in November, as a way to address declining enrollment in the UW Colleges — where the number of full-time equivalent students has dropped by 32 percent between 2010 and this fall — without closing any campuses. Enrollment at UW-Madison is up slightly over that period but down at some other four-year campuses.

He acknowledged, though, that it would result in job cuts as some positions are made redundant when administrative functions at the colleges are brought under four-year universities on July 1, 2018.

The statewide office that manages UW Colleges and Extension, now led by Chancellor Cathy Sandeen, would eventually be eliminated entirely, Cross said.

Still, he said, the mergers could create new educational opportunities at the two-year schools, make it easier for students to transfer to four-year programs and better position UW institutions as Wisconsin's population ages.

“Our goal here is to leverage our resources to avoid closures, focus them in areas and respond effectively to these demographics,” Cross told the Wisconsin State Journal on Wednesday.

The proposal — to take effect next summer — would bring each UW Colleges campus under one of seven four-year public universities:

1. The Rock County college would join UW-Whitewater.
2. The Baraboo/Sauk County and Richland colleges would join UW-Platteville.
3. The Barron County college would join UW-Eau Claire.
4. The Manitowoc, Marinette and Sheboygan colleges would join UW-Green Bay.
5. The Washington County and Waukesha colleges would join UW-Milwaukee.
6. The Marathon County and Marshfield/Wood County colleges would join UW-Stevens Point.
7. The Fond du Lac and Fox Valley colleges would join UW-Oshkosh.



A UW System plan would merge the 13 two-year UW Colleges with four-year institutions.  
 UW SYSTEM

UW-Madison would not oversee a college under Cross' plan, but would take on the UW Extension's Cooperative Extension program and the management of its conference centers.

The Extension's Broadcasting and Media Innovations division — which includes Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio — would be brought under UW System Administration, as would the Business and Entrepreneurship Division, continuing education, outreach and UW Flexible Option programs.

## New programs, job cuts on the table

Once the merger is complete, UW Colleges faculty and staff would be considered employees of their campus' partner four-year school.

The same goes for students — those attending what is now UW-Rock County would be considered students of UW-Whitewater's Rock County branch. They would still be charged the two-year schools' lower tuition rates.

Merging the institutions will bring the resources of the four-year universities to the smaller colleges, Cross said. Universities could, for instance, offer new programs that would allow students to earn bachelor's degrees at the branch campuses, where previously they could only receive associates' degrees, he said.

Services such as financial aid and advising — which UW Colleges moved into regional hubs under another restructuring plan in 2015 that followed state budget cuts — would be managed by the college’s partner university.

Cross said some administrative positions would be eliminated, though he declined to estimate how many could be affected, saying many of those decisions will be worked out by the two- and four-year schools as the merger takes effect. It will likely take much longer than the July 2018 effective date for the merger to be fully implemented, he said.

A UW Colleges and Extension spokeswoman said Wednesday afternoon that her organization also did not know how many jobs could be affected.

“Those are questions that will be answered during the implementation process,” spokeswoman Katy Kaiser said. “We have very few answers on any of that right now — we just don’t know.”

## **Potential and pitfalls**

Noel Radomski, managing director of the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education, said Cross’ proposal is not unprecedented — the state’s two-year schools once operated as branch campuses of larger universities, until changes in the 1960s divorced them.

He said the merger would likely give students at what are now the UW Colleges an easier path in transferring to four-year schools. Transfer students are often told that some credits they earned at two-year campuses don’t count at their new university. Radomski said bringing the UW Colleges under the four-year schools could ensure those institutions accept more of the two-year schools’ credits.

Still, he was skeptical that the mergers would address the demographic shifts UW blames for declining enrollment at the Colleges and some four-year campuses. The System also needs to do more to attract minority students and non-traditional students, such as unemployed or underemployed adults, Radomski said.

“Just because you have a branch campus doesn’t mean you’re going to increase enrollment,” he said.