



University Relations

1700 Van Hise Hall, 1220 Linden Drive
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
Phone: (608) 263-5512

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2014

UW System announces plan to fund program allowing high school students to take college courses

Governor, State Superintendent laud action and commit to finding a long-term solution

MADISON, Wis.—University of Wisconsin System President Ray Cross today proposed a one-year plan to cover tuition costs for all high school students taking UW courses offered in high schools. The funding plan will maintain access to the popular option for the 2014-15 academic year while state policymakers consider funding and policy enhancements to the state's new Course Options program, enacted as part of the 2013-15 biennial budget.

“One of our state's biggest challenges is to ensure that higher education remains accessible and affordable to Wisconsin students and their families,” Cross explained. “This UW dual enrollment program helps make that possible by allowing qualified high school students to jumpstart their college careers. By taking courses that count toward both high school graduation requirements and college credit, students benefit in two ways: they reduce their cost of a college degree and they complete that degree sooner. That's good for them and good for Wisconsin.”

“The law places a new financial burden on school districts by requiring them to pay part of the cost for their resident students' participation in Course Options,” Cross said. “Some school districts could see an additional cost under the program and have expressed concerns.”

Cross' funding plan pertains only to dual-enrollment programs involving both high school and UW course credits. He described the UW System's willingness to absorb the full cost of tuition for Course Option participants enrolled in UW courses as a “stop-gap” measure.

“The legislative intent of the new dual-enrollment program will be maintained while providing seamless continuity for those students and families taking advantage of UW academic offerings,” he said. “This one-year stop-gap will buy policymakers the time they need to address the concerns and consequences related to the law's funding mechanisms.”

Cross said he and his staff discussed his plan with both Gov. Scott Walker and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers and received their enthusiastic support.



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“Course Options provides Wisconsin students with the flexibility they need to meet and exceed their academic goals,” Gov. Walker said. “This plan will ensure there are many options for all, regardless of income, to reduce costs of college and ensure them the best chance at success. I intend to work with the UW System to find a long-term resolution to the concerns President Cross is addressing through his stop-gap plan.”

“This dual enrollment program is a great way for students to get an introduction to college coursework and earn credits before graduating high school,” said Evers, who also serves as a UW System Regent. “Uncertainty regarding the law created potential barriers to students and parents accessing the UW System for dual enrollment. The UW deserves credit for supporting this financially.”

Through its dual enrollment program, UW institutions around the state have partnered with high schools to offer courses directly to students in their high schools, using high school faculty as adjunct professors, and have charged students a reduced tuition rate for this innovative approach. Each year, about 4,400 high school students earn UW course credits by taking designated courses in their school.

Under Course Options, Wisconsin students can enroll in up to two courses at a time at eligible educational institutions, including the UW, at no cost to the student. However, under Course Options, the student’s school district is responsible for funding the cost of the course, and no tuition can be charged. As a result, some school districts have questioned their ability to cover these new costs.

Cross will present his plan to the UW System’s Board of Regents at its upcoming June meeting. Though final board approval would take place in August, Cross believes his announcement will signal to schools, students and parents that they should begin planning for fall enrollment in UW-related Course Option courses.

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Media Contact:

John Diamond

UW System

jdiamond@uwsa.edu

608-263-7962