

Working Together

HIGHER EDUCATION AND PK-12

Public universities and K-12 schools collaborate to give students needed skills

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No matter that it was a dark, chilly, February evening. Warm lights glowed within Oshkosh's Merrill Middle School. The gym and school corridors were bustling. Family STEM Night (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) was underway.

In one corner of the school, students fashioned "air-powered" vehicles out of paper, tape, Life Savers candies and straws. Engineering was the subject, and University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students were the teachers. In another nook, the University's student scientists invited their Merrill pupils to experience the thrill of being cocooned in a short-lived, human-sized soap bubble. The experiment served as an up-close introduction to physics and chemistry.



THIS MONTH'S COVER features two students participating in the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's Careers in Fire & Emergency Management Camp where students

engage in team-building activities and learn about fire fighting and other emergency management careers.

The WASB's Challenge

In July 2011, WASB Executive Director John Ashley called upon University of Wisconsin System President Kevin Reilly to encourage each university within the University of Wisconsin System to connect with PK-12 school board members.

The University of Wisconsin Stout responded by hosting a special dinner that brought together area school board members and their former students. School board members were joined at their tables by UW Stout students who graduated from their high school, allowing school board members an opportunity to hear first-hand how their PK-12 education prepared them for college.

In addition, information was shared on UW Stout's PK-12 collaborative projects, postsecondary outcomes of regional high school graduates who attended UW Stout as freshman during the 2010-11 academic year. The event also gave leaders from UW Stout an opportunity to here feedback and ideas on future collaborative projects.

"Strengthening our relationships with the PK-12 school districts can only benefit the educational outcomes for students at all levels, across the state," said UW Stout Chancellor Charles Sorensen. □



Even retired UW Oshkosh entomology professor Gene Drecktrah paid students a visit. UW Oshkosh's renowned bug man brought his vast collection of insect specimens.

By the end of the evening, 228 visitors – parents, students and future students – had come through Merrill's doors and interacted with a tight community of teachers, administrators and University mentors.

"Our goal is related to building and developing relationships with students and their families," Merrill Principal Cindy Olson said. "This event gave us another opportunity to further develop that goal. The collaborative work with Dr. Michele Flemming, UW Oshkosh student Kristal Mott and Merrill teacher Oliver Schinkten established a partnership that will remain."

Family STEM Night is just one programmatic bridge connecting UW Oshkosh's student, staff and faculty knowledge, expertise and academic passion to PK-12 school communities' desire to learn and flourish. This one night of science discovery is among more than 60 partnerships, collaborations and initiatives that UW Oshkosh has developed and continues to nurture with PK-12 schools throughout Oshkosh, the New North region and Wisconsin.

Reaching Out

In 2011, WASB Executive Director John Ashley encouraged UW System institutions throughout the state to host informational events and find additional ways to strongly promote their distinct services and programs

to PK-12 school districts. The hope is that, by building awareness, more PK-12 teachers and administrators will tap into the incredibly diverse resources of Wisconsin's regional public universities, colleges and UW Extension branches often mere blocks away from one another, as UW Oshkosh is to Merrill Middle School.

However, as UW Oshkosh has experienced, PK-12 collaborations have proven so efficient and effective, distance typically doesn't matter.



"We need to strengthen our partnerships and collaborations. This ensures our PK-12 teaching, administrative and school board colleagues have the support they need."

— Richard Wells, UW Oshkosh Chancellor

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Following on Ashley's 2011 call to action, UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells commissioned a comprehensive audit of the University's established, and in many cases long-standing, PK-12 collaborations and partnerships. The examination and final report, conducted and authored by Special Assistant to the Chancellor Tom Grogan, shows dozens of campus connections with school districts near and far.

The audit also revealed a tremendous diversity in the partnerships, from programs landing UW Oshkosh nursing students alongside school nurses in the Madison area to a

nimble educational resources program that serves the professional-development needs of school districts from Sheboygan to western Wisconsin. Among the biggest and most directly connected is UW Oshkosh's nationally accredited and acclaimed Cooperative Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) – the state's largest college-transcripted credit program for high school students. With more than 2,400 enrolled students from 42 Wisconsin high schools in the 2010-11 academic year, UW Oshkosh's CAPP program had more students than all others in the state combined.

UW Oshkosh's reputation is strong

in the PK-12 community, and the word continues to spread about these and other successful partnerships. Effective collaborations are begetting more collaborations. And while they enhance school districts' and PK-12 programs' educational richness and quality, they simultaneously provide UW Oshkosh faculty, staff and students valuable, career-and-academic-program-enhancing opportunities in PK-12 classrooms to district's front offices.

"We try to be as responsive as possible," said UW Oshkosh College of Education and Human Services (COEHS) Dean Fred Yeo.

"Small schools have unique problems in terms of staffing and in terms of access to the University. This partnership supports those teachers, those administrators, those board members and those schools."

— *Don Stevens, president, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance*



Supporting Rural Schools

One K-12 colleague gives Yeo and COEHS a lot of credit for pioneering one of UW Oshkosh's most successful outreach initiatives – one designed to meet the unique needs of the state's hundreds of rural schools.

“Clearly, your Dean (Yeo) who has been a crusader for us in this, understands that rural schools and communities – their existence – is, by their very nature, inextricably linked,” said Don Stevens, president of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, which was co-founded by UW Oshkosh. “The rural community is the rural school.”

Also supported by the Wisconsin Cooperative Education Services Agency (CESA) districts, UW System and rural school districts, the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance's mission is to meet the unique needs of the hundreds of rural schools in the state. As the Alliance notes, rural Wisconsin “is home to almost 44 percent of the state's 860,000 public school students.”

“When you think that well over half (Wisconsin) schools are under 1,000 kids, that data point shows there are a lot of small schools,” Stevens said. “Technology will help some, but still, at the end of the day, what really defines education, and even more so public education, is that great teacher in the classroom. That's why this partnership is really, really important.”

The Alliance also, in part, grew out of Yeo's and colleagues' “summer road tours.” These service-focused, relationship-building road trips target regions of Wisconsin where rural school districts with limited resources can greatly benefit from specialized teacher-training, professional-development opportunities and academic program partnerships with UW Oshkosh.

“The whole thing we put out there is, ‘We're here to help,’” Yeo said.

“Small schools have unique problems in terms of staffing and in terms

of access to the University,” Stevens said. “So, the partnership with the University supports those teachers, those administrators, those board members and those schools. That is the noble endeavor that is being undertaken.”

Diversity in Collaborations

UW Oshkosh's concentration on rural school collaborations and support by no means comes at the expense of other PK-12 connections.

It's believed the University's PK-12 inventory of collaborative



Reaching Out to Public Schools

In a recent review of its programs, officials at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh found at least 60 ongoing collaborative programs between the University and public schools across Wisconsin. Here's a look at some of those collaborative ventures:

- The **College Academic Partnership Program (CAPP)**, which has been running for 36 years, recently added a high-school online educational component and courses including Biology, Economics, English, Kinesiology, Mathematics, Political Science and Psychology. CAPP has been accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) – the first nationally accredited program of its kind in Wisconsin.
- The campus-supported, 43-year-old, **Head Start** program, which has served 600 preschool students from low-income families. The state's largest, the Head Start program ensures the future educational success of PK-12 students by providing its preschoolers a first wave of high-quality educational activities, healthy meals and snacks and free medical and dental care. Head Start is housed in UW Oshkosh's Swart Hall.
- The **Alternative Careers in Teaching (ACT)** program, a teacher-licensure program created in 2006 and designed specifically for working professionals with bachelor's degrees and at least five years of work experience. The program targets people with a desire to pursue a career teaching secondary level mathematics or science in PK-12 schools.

It is a cooperative program between the UW Colleges and UW Oshkosh.

- A series of career-introduction camps, including the dynamic **“Careers in Fire & Emergency Management”** camp which, in partnership with regional fire departments, introduces K-12 students to fire fighting and other emergency management careers while engraining problem-solving, team-building and leadership-development activities.
- A host of science outreach programs, from the **“Science Safari”** for girls and the **“Science Expedition”** for boys in third through fifth grades, a “Lighted Schoolhouse” program in collaboration with Washington Elementary School's Kindergarten and first grades in Oshkosh.
- Numerous interscholastic sports camps honing students' tennis, swimming and other athletic, sportsmanship and teamwork values. □



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programs, which detailed at least 60 ongoing initiatives, only scratched the surface of the total. Each year, new partnerships are struck between the 13,500-student University's colleges and divisions and school districts.

PK-12 students even benefit from UW Oshkosh connections when they visit the school nurse.

Kathy Versteegen, RN and school nurse in the Kimberly School District, has worked alongside several UW Oshkosh student nurses enrolled in the Accelerated Online Bachelor's to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program (ACCEL to BSN). First of its kind in the nation, the program allows bachelors-degree holders meeting admission criteria to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) in just 12 months. The equally-valuable end goals: Healthy PK-12 students and new waves of career-ready nurses for the workforce.

The UW Oshkosh College of Nursing has partnered with a number of local and distant districts, from nearby Omro and Kimberly to Madison-neighboring Verona.

"When we take a student from UW Oshkosh's ACCEL program, we're getting someone who is mature," Versteegen said. "They've been out in the work world. They've got a degree already. They are coming to you with that learned leadership."

Wells said it is fitting that in 2011-2012, the "Year of the Wisconsin Idea," institutions double their efforts to promote their strong collaborations with PK-12 schools. The Wisconsin Idea has, for decades, called upon the state's four-year universities, colleges and UW Extension to not only educate their students but also to confront and find solutions to common problems while serving the broader knowledge needs of the state, including those of school districts.

"The relationship between PK-12 school systems and higher education in our state has always been a strong and mutually advantageous one," Wells said. "Now more than ever, we need to strengthen our partnerships and collaborations. This ensures our PK-12 teaching, administrative and school board colleagues have the support they need to produce the high school graduates our UW System institutions require. In turn, we further prepare and propel these graduates as adaptable, civically engaged and career-ready teachers, business entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers, artists and community leaders invested in Wisconsin's long-term prosperity." ■

Hummel is the associate director for news and public information at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

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