

## UPDATE ON THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN FLEXIBLE OPTION

### BACKGROUND

Following the announcement of the UW Flexible Option in June 2012, the UW System became the first public university in the country to develop a competency-based program at the system level, awarding degrees and certificates from UW institutions. The UW Flexible Option has garnered considerable statewide and national attention and the UW System is recognized as a national leader in competency-based education. The UW Flexible Option builds on the System’s reputation for quality and innovation, its foundation in the *Wisconsin Idea*, and its ongoing commitment to provide affordable, accessible, high-quality education to more Wisconsin residents.

Presenting a new way to progress towards a UW degree, UW Flexible Option dramatically differs from traditional campus- or course-based instruction, whether delivered face-to-face or using online formats. Both the curricular and delivery models are distinctive, involving new kinds of partnerships between UW-Extension and UW institutions. The programs are offered through a format that is self-paced, competency-based, and designed to serve a large, adult, non-traditional student population whose needs for post-secondary education are not being met. The competency-based model emphasizes mastery of demonstrated student learning outcomes. Instead of creating specific classes for Flex Option students, faculty from the partner institutions have identified specific competencies, or skills and knowledge, which together are necessary for a UW degree. Students in the UW Flexible Option use the knowledge they have acquired through prior coursework, military and on-the-job training, and curated content provided by the faculty to take assessments that demonstrate their mastery over academic content wherever and whenever they are ready. The programs are designed to meet areas of strong student demand, economic growth, and workforce development needs.

The UW Flexible Option opened for applications on November 18, 2013 and the first cohort of students began their academic work on January 2, 2014 through programs at UW Colleges and UW-Milwaukee. UW-Extension is providing key administrative leadership and support. After seven months of operation, enrollments are ahead of projections and continue to grow. Interest in UW Flex programs remains strong. The following enrollment information reflects January-September 16, 2014:

Program	Enrollment
B.S. Information Science	82
B.S. Nursing	53
Associate of Arts & Science	44
B.S. Biomedical Sciences Diagnostic Imaging	18
Business & Technical Communications Certificate	7
Non-Degree	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>

Signaling their strong interest in the program, the Board of Regents has conducted a number of discussions on the UW Flexible Option since its announcement, including an extensive report at the April 2013 meeting, the approval of the tuition pricing and subscription model in July 2013, and a status report on development at the December 6, 2013 meeting. At its October 9, 2014, meeting, the Board will hear an update on major milestones and ongoing developments.

### **REQUESTED ACTION**

For discussion only; no action is required.

### **DISCUSSION**

UW Colleges and UW-Extension Interim Chancellor Aaron Brower will report to the board of Regents on major accomplishments relating to the UW Flexible Option, with a focus on the student experience, ongoing challenges, emerging opportunities, and how the job market informs program development. He also will update the Regents on the U.S. Department of Education's recent approval to make federal financial aid available to eligible students in the UW Colleges Associate of Arts and Science degree program in the Flex format.

### **RELATED REGENT AND UW SYSTEM POLICIES**

None.