



Representing UW-Madison Faculty.
Strengthening Wisconsin.

The GOP Higher Education Agenda

In a column published in the *Waukesha Freeman* in August, Representative Scott Allen (R-Waukesha) wonders why anyone would send their young adult children to the University of Wisconsin. The column contains half-truths, wild exaggerations, and embarrassing contradictions that say much more about Representative Allen's biases than they do about what's happening at the University of Wisconsin.

Let's answer Representative Allen's question: why *would* someone want to go to the University of Wisconsin?

Consider that UW-Madison [has produced](#) the greatest number of Fortune 500 CEOs compared to any other American university (that's more than Harvard, or Stanford, or Notre Dame).

Consider that UW-Madison [sends more](#) Peace Corps volunteers around the world than any other college or university in the country. The Peace Corps' mission is to promote peace, friendship, and the best of American values around the world.

Consider that UW-Madison provides undergraduate students opportunities to work in research labs or archives alongside some of the most talented and gifted experts in the world through programs such as the [Undergraduate Research Scholars](#), the [Wisconsin Idea Fellowships](#), the [WISCIENCE](#) program, and many others.

Or consider the countless opportunities students have to hear from policymakers, politicians, and public officials from across the political spectrum at the [La Follette School of Public Affairs](#) and the [Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership](#). All of this occurs on a campus where according to the vast majority of students, in the most recent survey of students, [report](#) feeling welcome, safe, and respected, regardless of their religious, political, or personal views.

But if Republicans have their way, the University of Wisconsin will be a much less welcoming place for students, and the state of Wisconsin itself would be far less attractive as a place to live. During the most recent legislative session, a number of bills were put forward that make clear the GOP's higher education agenda.

[One bill](#) would have made it illegal for professors to teach any subject that would make students feel "discomfort" when it comes to issues of race or sex. Imagine trying to teach about human reproduction, or about the Constitution's three-fifths clause, or literature by people of color or by women without making students feel uncomfortable.

[Another bill](#) would have made it possible to bring a cause of action if a student felt like they had to 'self-censor' what they said. Under the guise of 'free speech,' this would have allowed any student who felt uncomfortable in the classroom to put the blame on their professor and bring a legal cause of action against them. This would turn universities into places where politically motivated legal actions are everyday occurrences.

Over the last dozen years, the Republican-led Legislature has destroyed the funding model for the UW System, including a decade-long tuition freeze, consistently smaller appropriations than the Regents have requested. The result is that UW has [less money](#) to devote per students than it did over forty years ago, causing some UW institutions to be put on life support.

And with the [1849 abortion law in place](#), and with Republicans refusing to bring the state into the twenty-first century on reproductive health care, fewer people will want to work or live in a state where reproductive decisions could lead to arrests and jail time, and very few individuals interested in obstetrics and gynecology will come to the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health for medical school or to practice medicine in the state.

Public Representation Organization of the Faculty Senate University of Wisconsin–Madison

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Representative Allen and many of his Republican colleagues seem not to value the outstanding experiences provided to students at the University of Wisconsin. The state and university are at a crossroads. According to a report commissioned by the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin has difficulty attracting and keeping young people in the state. At the same time, fewer Wisconsinites are choosing to attend college. PROFS challenges Republicans like Representative Allen to stop making the university a partisan issue and do what is best for the state, its businesses, its citizens—including young people—and its world class university system.

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