



Op-Ed
for immediate release

Enriching Minds. Changing Lives.

In our 45th academic year, our mission at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside is clear and unchanging. It is, and always has been, to serve as a catalyst for strength and growth in southeastern Wisconsin. The needs of our communities are changing; the skills and talents of students must keep pace.

As stewards of our mission, we are committed to continually improving the student experience and educational outcomes. During the past four years, strategic initiatives are now producing positive results in the areas of student retention, and graduation.

Our year-one to year-two retention rate for fall 2013 is up 10 percent compared to fall 2012. It is also exciting that UW-Parkside has graduated its largest classes ever each of the past three years and we are ahead of our "More Graduates for Wisconsin" goal established by UW System.

In addition to the important metrics of retention and graduation, UW-Parkside measures how the educational experience we provide transforms lives and creates value for our students, their families and our communities. As one example, sample groups of our seniors and freshmen participate in the nation-wide Educational Testing Services (ETS) Proficiency Profile test every three years. As you would expect, our seniors score significantly higher than our incoming freshmen on critical thinking, reading, mathematics, and writing abilities. You may be interested to know that UW-Parkside seniors score slightly above their national peers in writing, mathematics, and reading. These results demonstrate that our graduates benefit from the education they receive, are competitive with their national peers, and are career ready.

Furthermore, we are working at the leading edge of methods for incoming student assessment and remediation as well as aggressively forging new pathways to earning a college degree. This is critical as we understand there are new opportunities for the needs of today's students. We now offer more than 200 courses online, have advanced new certificate programs for in-demand areas such as sales, cyber security, and app development, and will offer new certificates through the UW System online Flex Option.

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This fall, my colleague Bryan Albrecht, president of Gateway Technical College, and I announced our commitment to additional seamless transitions between our institutions. The “Forward Together” partnership provides transfer agreements for Gateway students who have earned associate’s degrees in business to enter the UW-Parkside business program, which is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), with junior academic status.

At the same time, we are building the academic rigor and partnerships that lead our students to success in graduate and professional schools, as well as relevant career opportunities. Recently, we signed an agreement with Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science that reserves up to 10 placements each year for our pre-health graduates to enter its college of pharmacy. This partnership is possible because of the strength of our faculty and our national reputation for student success – 90-percent of our pre-health students are accepted into medical school and other professional health programs (the national placement average is less than 40 percent).

These and other partnerships will help improve retention and graduation rates, as well as remove the barriers of time and money that many students face in seeking quality higher education and great careers.

If you have not been to campus recently, I suggest it is time. In addition to our diverse academic offerings, performances and cultural events at “The Rita” or one of the many athletic contests our NCAA Division II Rangers host each year, there is something at UW-Parkside for you.

I am proud to be the chancellor of a university committed to providing greater access and options to students of all educational and social backgrounds. I am thankful that our community has sustained this commitment for 45 years. It is for our students, our 21,000 alumni, and our faculty and staff that I am unyielding in my commitment to student success at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

Dr. Debbie Ford is chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

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