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University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Written Testimony
House Select Committee on the Economy

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University of Wisconsin-Parkside

Chair – Jim Himes (D – Conn)
Ranking Member – Bryan Steil (R – Wis)

Link to all members

[Members | Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth \(house.gov\)](#)

Good afternoon, Chairman Himes, Ranking Member Steil, Congresswoman Moore, and members of the Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth, it is our pleasure to welcome you to Southeastern Wisconsin, the most diverse region of our state and what is today an epicenter of vibrant economic growth.

As mentioned, I am Debbie Ford, proud to be the Chancellor here at UW-Parkside, representing more than 4500 students, over 27,000 alumni, and a remarkably talented faculty, and staff. I welcome you to UW-Parkside and appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. It has been a pleasure working with Rep. Steil during his time on the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, and now as a member of Wisconsin's Congressional Delegation.

According to the Kenosha Area Business Alliance and the Racine County Economic Development Corporation, during the past few years, Kenosha and Racine counties have been home to hundreds of new business ventures, tens of thousands of new jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in capital investment. Combined with the continued success of businesses of all sizes that have fueled this region for decades, the opportunities are here.

UW-Parkside, the youngest University in the University of Wisconsin System, was founded in 1968. Local leaders in Kenosha and Racine came together as advocates for combining the two-year University of Wisconsin center campuses in Kenosha and Racine to provide students with the opportunity to earn a four-year degree without having to leave the area.

For more than 53 years, UW-Parkside has been transforming lives and I most often hear from our alumni how grateful they are for the higher education opportunities from UW-Parkside. Often, they start their stories with “If not for Parkside...”

Since our founding, the student body has reflected the diversity of the communities we serve.

- More than 50 percent of UW-Parkside undergraduate students identify as first-generation students
- 31.4 percent of all UW-Parkside students identify as an underrepresented minority (compared to 14 percent throughout the entire UW System); and 17 percent of UW-Parkside students identify as Latinx – UW-Parkside is Wisconsin’s only public four-year university recognized as an Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution
- 31 percent of UW-Parkside students are over the age of 25, including 20 percent of undergraduates
- 38 percent of our degree-seeking undergraduates rely on the Pell grant – without that valuable federal financial aid program they would not be able to pursue a degree. We support increases to the Pell grant as these funds open doors to pathways to higher education.

○ Facts on Pell Grants:	Aid Year	Recipients	Average Award
	▪ 2021-2022	1,196	\$4,482
	▪ 2020-2021	1,146	\$4,382
	▪ 2019-2020	1,679	\$4,340

- The availability of Pell Grants over the summer gives students greater opportunity to attend year-round, saving them money, accelerating time to graduation, and providing access to UW-Parkside talent for the workforce even sooner.
- Students from Wisconsin can attend UW-Parkside without needing any loans if they have an EFC (estimated family contribution) of \$1,500 or less, assuming they are not living on campus or require loans to assist with personal expenses
- More than 700 students from Wisconsin who are currently attending UW-Parkside receive enough Pell Grant support and state aid to fully cover tuition and segregated fees

We all agree that education is one of the keys to transforming lives and I am proud to lead a University that prioritizes investing in people and communities. Our mission has been and will always be to provide affordable access to higher education “for all.” There are few things that make me prouder than to see our students succeed against tremendous odds thanks to their tenacity and perseverance, and thanks to our intentional efforts to continuously improve student success.

UW-Parkside’s Bold Goal is to increase the number of graduates by 50% by 2025. We set this bold goal in response to the increasing needs from our employer partners and to lead

in increasing higher education attainment in our region and state. The state of Wisconsin lags in higher education attainment in the US and the Midwest, and in this region the gaps are even higher, especially for under-represented students.

Southeast Wisconsin embraces the transformative power of higher education at all levels by offering a wide array of certificates, two-year, four-year, and advanced degrees. We know this is vital for competitiveness in today's knowledge economy.

Historically, Kenosha and Racine have been centers for innovation. To continue that trend, our region needs more graduates. During the past two years – pandemic years – UW-Parkside set records for the number of graduates, and we increased the graduation rate for both underrepresented minority students and majority students. Based on current projections, the May 2022 class of UW-Parkside graduates will set another record. More importantly, we are making progress in reaching our bold goal and this progress results in more ready talent for our thriving region.

Today's conversations about the economy revolve around talent -- across the dimensions of Attraction, Retention, Education, and Collaboration. As an institution of higher education, we are dynamic partners in developing the next generations of talent. The state of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin and our partners in higher education will continue to be destinations for education because our area is a destination for exciting careers beyond today's horizon.

I am often asked: What does a chancellor do to prepare for what is on the horizon? Key roles for me are promoting lifelong learning, protecting, and enhancing the value of a UW-Parkside degree and creating an optimal learning environment for our dedicated faculty and staff to do their best work so our students can receive high quality and relevant educational experiences – inside and outside of the classroom.

At UW-Parkside, we continue to seek input from regional employers who serve on our College Advisory Boards to modify, design, and add academic programs to give working professionals the opportunity to upgrade various skill sets. Over the past five years we have added or modified more than 40 new academic programs—master's programs, majors, concentrations, certificates, and minors. Thirteen recent programs are at the graduate level, 10 are fully online, seven are collaborative programs with other UW campuses, and 17 are certificates, providing opportunities for degree holders and other non-degree seeking students to enhance their education credentials.

Certificate programs in sales, leadership, green chemistry, health communication, environmental sustainability, conflict analysis and resolution, and many others, are examples of how UW-Parkside has enhanced and refined curriculum to meet the talent demands of those serving new and established corporate and community partners. Our curriculum remains responsive and market-relevant, and the outcomes are amazing.

- Science programs at UW-Parkside, especially those that lead students to careers in health sciences (a high-demand career area) are second to none: 89-percent

placement rate in health sciences professional schools including medical school, for UW-Parkside health sciences graduates.

- We offer the only AACSB accredited competency-based Bachelor of Science in business, known as the Flex BSBA, with more than 200 students enrolled.
- 7 in 10 undergraduate students participated in two or more high impact learning practices, including community-based learning, internships, capstone projects, and undergraduate research, before graduating.

UW-Parkside has developed extraordinarily successful student, faculty, and community experiential learning centers, including the UW-Parkside App Factory, Cybersecurity Lab, Ralph Jaeschke Solutions for Economic Growth Center, SC Johnson Integrated Science Lab, Natural Products Testing Lab, Digital Design and Fabrication Center, Digital Media and Production Studio, and the GIS Factory, to name a few. These experiential learning centers create opportunities for students and industry partners to explore and work together on solving today's challenges.

The level of experiential learning helps students develop the skills necessary to be valued contributors in their careers of choice. We often hear from employer partners that UW-Parkside student interns and graduates are well-educated, ready to fully engage, and leaders in addressing the organization's highest needs. For example, a recruiter from Northwestern Mutual said, "Students from UW-Parkside not only contribute to the growth of our firm, but they enhance our culture, bring fresh business perspectives, and are eager to challenge themselves personally and professionally."

Responsive and quality academic programs coupled with experiential learning opportunities across the curriculum ensure that UW-Parkside graduates will be ready for the emerging needs in today's global knowledge economy. I remind students during new student orientation that the careers many of them will pursue do not exist just yet, but I assure them they will be ready with a UW-Parkside education.

UW-Parkside thrives in Southeast Wisconsin because of strategic partnerships with K-12 schools, higher education institutions, elected officials, nonprofit organizations, and business and industry. One such partnership is the Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA), an Alliance of the 18 Colleges and Universities and 10 community-based organizations representing the seven counties in Southeast Wisconsin. UW-Parkside and Gateway Technical College were founding members of HERA and both Dr. Bryan Albrecht and I serve on the executive committee and lead HERA's strategic goals. HERA was established to ensure that students have the appropriate higher education pathways to earn the academic credentials and relevant knowledge that will enable them to succeed. The more educational institutions work together, the greater the opportunities for student success and with that, more talent to meet the needs of our corporate and community partners.

On a national scale, our engagement with EAB's Moon Shot for Equity ensures we are serving the unique needs of our students while taking meaningful action to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Together with our partners Carthage College, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Milwaukee Area Technical College, we formed the nation's first regional consortium working to eliminate equity gaps in higher education by 2030. You can learn more about Moon Shot for Equity at eab.com/moon-shot-for-equity/. This initiative is one of the ways we are being intentional about increasing the number of baccalaureate-degree holders in our surrounding counties, which will, in turn, fuel the economic growth of our region.

Locally, the long-standing partnerships with Gateway Technical College, Carthage College, and Herzing University are recognized across the state as innovative and forward-thinking. This past October, the UW Board of Regents approved a first-of-its-kind academic pathway that allows Gateway, together with UW-Parkside, to offer associate of arts and associate of science degrees. Partnership programs, like these create more opportunities for students to achieve their educational goals. This is great news for our region as hundreds of Gateway graduates choose UW-Parkside to further their education and earn a four-year degree. A special thanks to Dr. Albrecht for his commitment to partnerships on behalf of our students.

Building partnerships with local, regional, and international businesses such as Jockey, Snap-on, SC Johnson, Case New Holland, Amazon, Nexus, Uline, Haribo and many others help organizations quickly appreciate the value of UW-Parkside graduates and create real-world opportunities for UW-Parkside students and faculty. An HR (Human Resources) professional at Snap-on Incorporated said, "We value our partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and are fortunate to have a strong local resource for candidates and hiring events. Further we are proud to have many UW-Parkside graduates among our ranks."

We are committed to developing mutually beneficial collaborations with new and existing partners and are open to new ways of thinking. The naming of Haribo Court in the UW-Parkside Alfred and Bernice De Simone Arena launched the Ranger Vision campaign to enhance facilities for student athletes and to financially support UW-Parkside students through scholarships. Haribo also served as presenting sponsor for the annual Parkside Day in 2021 to benefit fund raising for scholarships.

Connecting employers to talent is a primary goal for leaders in HERA. We agree that working together creates new opportunities. Later this week, UW-Parkside, Carthage College, Gateway Technical College, and Herzing University will jointly host the Spring Internship & Career Fair with 70 employers and 18 on the waiting list. The talent in Southeast Wisconsin is in high demand and we are collaborating to meet their evolving needs.

Higher education must understand the talent needs of industry and community partners, and industry and community partners must be aware of partnership opportunities within higher education. Working together is the way to ensure that talent demands can be met today, for the next 25 years and beyond.

Partnerships in our communities are important to build new opportunities for family sustaining careers. That is one of the reasons why UW-Parkside, along with higher education and k-12 partners are part of the Kenosha Innovation Neighborhood on the site of the former Chrysler Engine Plant in the heart of the city. And why we are working closely with the City of Racine to become a model for Smart Cities in the Midwest.

We are the innovators, educators, and leaders who are transforming lives and preparing for what is on the horizon. The goals remain to:

- Assess the talent needs and create talent alignment
- Develop – based on talent-needs assessment – appropriate academic programs to meet marketplace opportunities and challenges
- Collaborate with education partners to enroll an increasing number of citizens from our region
- Determine research and other faculty and staff partnership opportunities

One of the challenges for all institutions of higher education is to ensure that student success is as diverse as the student population. At UW-Parkside we continue to work with student groups and organizations to better understand the needs and challenges of underrepresented populations. The goal is to create a learning community where all students have equitable opportunities to succeed. We are eliminating barriers to an affordable, transformative education for students in southeastern Wisconsin.

We are working purposefully to increase access to higher education and attainment of college degrees for as many students as possible, regardless of age, gender, race, occupation, cultural background, or family status. We are committed to this charge because we recognize that a university education is crucial to building equity in a competitive, 21st-century, global economy.

Thank you for your committee's recognition of the importance of higher education in these conversations. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.