

August 22, 2024

Tammie DeVooght, Executive Secretary
Higher Education Aids Board (HEAB)
4822 Madison Yards Way
Seventh floor
Madison, WI 53705

Dear Executive Secretary DeVooght,

Thank you for considering the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities' (WAICU) recommendation for the Wisconsin Grants 2025-27 biennial budget. **Wisconsin has significantly fallen behind other regional states in grant funding for students attending private, nonprofit colleges and universities. To remain competitive in attracting and retaining talent for Wisconsin, WAICU recommends doubling the current Wisconsin Grant appropriation to \$114 million for our sector over the biennium.**

Currently, the Wisconsin Grant biennial appropriation for students attending private, nonprofit institutions of \$57 million constitutes less than 2 percent of all state funding for higher education. This is insufficient when compared to neighboring states, which offer more substantial support to students with financial need. Increasing the Wisconsin Grant appropriation is critical to providing necessary financial aid and ensuring that Wisconsin remains competitive by incentivizing students to stay in Wisconsin.

During the COVID pandemic, many low-income students dropped out or did not apply to college, further exacerbating workforce shortages. Unfortunately, the rollout of the FAFSA for the upcoming academic year was disastrous, making the 2024-25 academic year even worse than COVID for low-income students. To combat this, we must enhance our financial aid programs to help students enroll and persist in their degree attainment. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, of all jobs available in Wisconsin in 2031, nearly 70 percent (over 2 million positions) will require postsecondary education and training.ⁱ

The Wisconsin Legislature recently enacted changes to the Wisconsin Grant formula for private, nonprofit students that aim to:

- Simplify the financial aid application process
- Increase transparency for students and families regarding their financial aid awards

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- Create a more efficient distribution methodology
- Better address the needs of today's changing student population

Wisconsin Grants are a cost-effective way to expand educational opportunity, ensuring that low-income and low-middle income students can attend college and graduate with manageable debt levels. WAICU members, which do not receive direct taxpayer support, contribute significantly to the state's economy and workforce, annually producing 24 percent of undergraduate degrees and 34 percent of graduate degrees in Wisconsin.

Modernizing the grant formula was an important step in increasing the effectiveness of the Wisconsin Grant. Increasing the appropriation is an essential next step to keep Wisconsin competitive and to effectively support Wisconsin students.

Sincerely,

Eric W. Fulcomer, PhD

President

cc: WAICU Presidents
WAICU Financial Aid Officers
Sherrie Nelson, HEAB

¹ Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031 State Report*