



## **Wisconsin's Workforce Development Programs: Training for the Jobs of Today and Tomorrow**

While in office, Governor Scott Walker was dedicated to advancing the notion that Wisconsin was “Open for Business.” In fact, his first Executive Order in 2011 said, “...the people of Wisconsin elected me Governor to help create a new, healthy, and vibrant climate for private sector job creation...”<sup>1</sup> One of the ways that Governor Walker and reformers in the legislature helped address Wisconsin’s workforce needs and improve the economic climate was through important workforce development programs that provide career experience, educational opportunities, and necessary training to job seekers.

Across the country, elected officials are looking at strategies to address a state’s talent pipeline and evaluating if businesses are able to fill vacant positions with capable talent for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Other states should take notice of Wisconsin’s approach to internship programs, apprenticeship programs, and specific collaborations between state agencies and educational institutions as elected officials assess potential workforce needs of a state.

As the Department of Workforce Development Secretary noted in 2015,

“...Manufacturers, healthcare providers, aerospace leaders, construction builders, and IT trailblazers from across the state have expressed to me their need to have skilled workers to grow their business...Governor Walker’s investments in Wisconsin’s workforce have reinforced our state’s talent development system as nimble, innovative, robust, and ready to assist all employers, job seekers, educators, and other stakeholders in filling their industry need to improve Wisconsin’s economy...”<sup>2</sup>

### **Wisconsin’s Approach to Coordinating Internships**

In 2016, Assembly Bill 742 was signed into law and became 2015 Wisconsin Act 283.<sup>2</sup> This legislation addressed the state’s approach to coordinating available internships, as noted in the Wisconsin Legislative Council’s Act Memo, the bill:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/executive\\_orders/2011\\_scott\\_walker/2011-1.pdf](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/executive_orders/2011_scott_walker/2011-1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/proposals/ab742>

“...require[d] the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), as part of its Fast Forward workforce training program, to provide coordination between institutions of higher education and employers to increase the number of students who are placed with employers for internships...”<sup>3</sup>

From this legislation, DWD’s Office of Skills Development (OSD) “...launched WisConnect, a free, mobile-responsive online resource available at InternshipWisconsin.com to help Wisconsin employers meet their workforce needs by growing tomorrow’s talent today through internships...”<sup>3</sup> WisConnect allows students to “Search for Employers” by selecting an industry or “Search for Wisconsin Internships” by selecting a major classification.<sup>4</sup> When looking for an internship, students can see information on the internship such as: location, if the internship is full-time or part-time, and the hourly wage.<sup>6</sup>

Internship programs are mutually beneficial for students, the state, and businesses. Internships allow students the opportunity to gain career experience and to see if they are interested in a certain career field, for example. As noted by DWD, internships are also “... a valuable workforce retention strategy...” meaning this is an important policy issue for the state as well.<sup>5</sup> Internship programs help benefit the state because “...[c]ollege students who intern for a Wisconsin company are more likely to stay in the state after graduation...”<sup>7</sup>

There are also several reasons for a business to create an internship program including “...employers are able to develop their own pipeline of skilled talent to fill open positions...”<sup>6</sup> The National Association of Colleges and Employers have provided the following statistics on business internships, which have been highlighted by DWD:

- “75.2% -- The percentage of businesses that use internships to recruit full-time entry-level positions”<sup>8</sup>
- “67.1% -- The percent of businesses that extend a full-time offer of employment to an intern if a position at the company is open”<sup>8</sup>
- “76.4% -- The percent of interns who were offered a full-time job and accepted it”<sup>8</sup>
- “65.5% -- The percent of interns who become full-time employees and are still with the company after one year; the one-year retention rate for external hires is 46.2%”<sup>8</sup>
- “51.8% -- The percent of interns who become full-time employees and stay with the company for at least five-years; the five year retention rate for external hires is 35.8%”<sup>8</sup>

The process of coordinating internships across the state helps bridge the gap between students and employers. As a result, these efforts are helping to address concepts of “brain drain” and workforce shortages in a manner that benefits students, employers, and the state.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://wisconsinfastforward.com/pdf/wffAnnualReport2017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://internshipwisconsin.com/Student>

<sup>5</sup> [http://wisconsinfastforward.com/pdf/icp\\_waw\\_wrapup\\_1702.pdf](http://wisconsinfastforward.com/pdf/icp_waw_wrapup_1702.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/wisconnect/pdf/FactSheetEmployerKeyFacts.pdf>

## **Wisconsin's Apprenticeship Programs**

In Wisconsin, there are both apprenticeship programs and youth apprenticeship programs, which are available for high school students.<sup>7</sup> Apprenticeship programs provide "...supervised, structured on-the-job learning with related instruction and is sponsored by employers, employer associations or labor/management groups that have the ability to hire and train in a working environment..."<sup>8</sup> As noted by DWD, "[t]he Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship program exists for the sole purpose of preparing students academically and technically to successfully participate in the workforce."<sup>9</sup>

Both of these programs have a strong history in the Badger State. Not only did Wisconsin pass "...the country's first apprenticeship law..." in 1911,<sup>10</sup> but the Badger State established "...the first statewide youth apprenticeship program in the nation..." in 1991.<sup>9</sup>

Today, there are registered apprenticeships within the trades such as: construction, industrial, service, and utility.<sup>10</sup> In 2016, the Wisconsin Technical College System noted that

"...there are currently 2,767 employers with apprenticeship programs and 8,500 apprentices in Wisconsin. Of those, over 6,000 are students in the Wisconsin technical college system taking part in more than 40 apprenticeship programs in the industrial, construction and service industries..."<sup>11</sup>

Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship program has also grown, since it first began. As noted by DWD in 2018, "...During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, there were 3,091 businesses and 4,362 youth apprentices – more than have ever participated before..."<sup>12</sup>

In 2018, U.S. Department of Labor provided a case study on Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship Program.<sup>11</sup> This study noted that

- "...The Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program combines real-world work experience with classroom education so students can explore and gain skills in a career field of their choice. The YA program prepares youth for success after high school – whether they plan to continue their education, enter the workforce, or both. Launched in 1991 as the first statewide youth apprenticeship program in the nation, the YA program is also helping to create the pipeline of future workers that businesses in the state need to thrive..."<sup>11</sup>

Wisconsin's apprenticeship programs provide "on-the-job" training to help meet current and future workforce needs.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/youthapprenticeship/become\\_youth\\_apprentice.htm](https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/youthapprenticeship/become_youth_apprentice.htm)

<sup>8</sup> [https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/pdf/apprenticeship\\_booklet.pdf](https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/pdf/apprenticeship_booklet.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/high-school/pdf/WI\\_Youth\\_Case\\_Study-FINAL\\_20180829.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/high-school/pdf/WI_Youth_Case_Study-FINAL_20180829.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/registered\\_apprenticeships.htm](https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/registered_apprenticeships.htm)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wistechcolleges.org/your-education/making-futures-blog/never-been-better-time-become-apprentice-wisconsin>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/sponsor-story/wi-workforce-dev/2018/11/12/wisconsin-department-workforce-development-celebrates-apprenticeship-week/1981357002/>

## **Efforts by UW System to Address Wisconsin's Workforce Needs**

In the 2017-19 State Budget, there was a provision that included "...26.25 million in new state funding specifically targeted for outcomes-based funding to be distributed to each institution during the 2018-2019 fiscal year..."<sup>13</sup> As noted within the Legislative Fiscal Bureau's summary of the 2017-19 State Budget, Governor Walker directed the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin (UW) System to work with DWD "...to ensure that chosen programs address state workforce needs..."<sup>14</sup> As a result, the Board of Regents developed a list of "outcomes-based metrics" including:<sup>15</sup>

- "Wisconsin high school graduates enrolled as degree-seeking undergraduates"<sup>15</sup>
- "Pell-eligible students enrolled as undergraduate students"<sup>15</sup>
- "Underrepresented students enrolled as undergraduate students"<sup>15</sup>
- "Graduates in STEM disciplines"<sup>15</sup>
- "Graduates in health-related expenditures"<sup>15</sup>

Today, the UW System also has a website dedicated to "Talent Generation in Wisconsin Resources."<sup>15</sup> Employers can find everything on this website from "Keys to Supervising Interns" to "Internship Best Practices" to "...Career Services..."<sup>17</sup> For instance, the "UW System Career Connect" link provides access to the "Employer Portal," which provides "...one centralized location to post jobs, internships, or co-ops for students at all UW System institutions..."<sup>16</sup>

These UW System initiatives are examples of how Wisconsin's educational institutions can help address a state's workforce needs and connect job seekers with job creators.

## **Conclusion**

Wisconsin has chosen to advance policies that address the state's skills gap and provide important training to Wisconsin's workforce in order to help prepare job seekers for the jobs of today and tomorrow. In Wisconsin, Governor Walker endeavored to address the skills gap through innovative workforce development programs due to his belief that

"...[t]he key to Wisconsin's continued success lies in a strong and talented workforce. As we continue to invest in workforce development programs, we will target areas where the skills gap still exists, and ensure that employers are able to hire Wisconsin workers who are equipped with the skills they need to succeed..."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wisconsin.edu/news/archive/regents-approve-outcomes-based-metrics-faculty-workload-policies/>

<sup>14</sup>

[https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/budget/2017\\_19\\_biennial\\_budget/101\\_comparative\\_summary\\_of\\_provisions\\_2017\\_act\\_59\\_entire\\_document.pdf](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/budget/2017_19_biennial_budget/101_comparative_summary_of_provisions_2017_act_59_entire_document.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://media.uwex.edu/content/uwex/talent-generator/resources/talent-generator-in-wisconsin-resources.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.wisconsin.edu/career-connect/employer-portal/>

It is important to recognize the benefits of supporting education and training efforts as a way to address a state's workforce needs. Governor Walker and elected officials chose to advance these programs and policies, so that Wisconsin can "...[equip] our citizens with the practical skills they need to succeed in high-demand jobs..."<sup>17</sup> Other states could benefit from evaluating Wisconsin's efforts to provide appropriate training for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/newsreleases/2017/170308\\_walker\\_gcwi\\_meeting.htm](https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/newsreleases/2017/170308_walker_gcwi_meeting.htm)