



CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON
College-Workforce Transitions

Documenting Wisconsin Residents' Views of the Aims of Higher Education

What are the goals of this research and why should we care?

The rising price-tag of higher education and its benefits to students and society are central issues in legislative and public debates on future of public higher education in Wisconsin. In order to enrich and inform this debate, the Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT) is launching a new research project to document what Wisconsin residents consider to be the primary aims and benefits of a college education. Documenting the views of Wisconsin taxpayers is essential in order to ensure that debates about higher education policy are informed by the real-world perspectives and experiences of the state's citizens.

How will we document what Wisconsin residents think about the aims of higher education?

The research team is made up of a diverse group of University of Wisconsin - Madison undergraduate students from around the state who are interested in issues of higher education, research, and policy.

Drs. Bailey Smolarek and Matthew Wolfgram of CCWT will lead the project and facilitate a series of workshops to train a group of undergraduate Student Researchers in social science research and qualitative methods. Training for the student researchers will include a critical analysis of the research and philosophy regarding the aims of higher education, and the collaborative development of an interview protocol and a sampling strategy that will aim to recruit a wide ranging group of Wisconsinites to participate in the research.



After training in the ethics and technical procedures in human subjects research, the Student Researchers will recruit five participants from their home communities and conduct audio-recorded interviews about their experiences with higher education and what they view the aims of higher education to be in their state.

The team will transcribe, code, and analyze interviews to identify themes and patterns in how this group of Wisconsin residents are thinking about the purpose and aims of public higher education..

What will our team be able to deliver to state higher education policymakers and administrators?

This research will document and identify how the constituents of state funded higher education—the citizens of Wisconsin—consider the aims of higher education. Findings will be reported to state higher education policymakers and administrators of the UW and WTCS systems with the goal of enhancing discussions about the role of public higher education in the state. The team of student researchers and academic staff will hold an event on the UW-Madison campus to report the results of their research in the Fall of 2017. The research team will also produce a policy report for Wisconsin state legislators and legislative staff. The project has the additional benefit of providing a group of UW-Madison undergraduates with formal training and practical experience with conducting social science research.

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