

THE “WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE” FOR UW-MADISON BACHELORS DEGREE RECIPIENTS: ANNUAL UPDATE¹

Clare Huhn, Academic Planning and Analysis, Office of the Provost, November, 2008

The expression “Wisconsin Experience”² is used to describe the educational experience of UW-Madison undergraduates (degree recipients in this analysis) as they apply in and out of classroom learning to significantly and positively impact the world. The term “Wisconsin Experience” is grounded in the *Wisconsin Idea* and the university’s progressive history, directed at producing UW-Madison graduates who are creative problem solvers; passionate, engaged and adaptable world citizens; critical thinkers able to create and evaluate new knowledge; and future leaders of their global communities.

The Wisconsin Experience captures four inquiry-based opportunities including:

- Substantial research experiences that generate knowledge and analytical skills
- Global and cultural competencies and engagement
- Leadership and activism opportunities
- Application of knowledge in the “real world”

In this analysis, we evaluate the proportion of our undergraduates, by school/college, who have engaged in certain Wisconsin Experience activities before graduation from UW-Madison. Ideally, every graduate will have at least one of these experiences. ***Results measuring the experiences that are identifiable through official records show that almost 9 in 10 (87%) bachelors degree recipients in 2007-08 participated in at least one Wisconsin Experience activity, up from 69% in 2002-03 when we first started these analyses. Sixty-six percent (66%) had two or more different experiences.***

DEFINING AND QUANTIFYING THE WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE

Linking experiences inside and outside the classroom, increasing student exposure to diversity, applying classroom knowledge to real-life experiences, conducting research with faculty members, working with faculty members in small groups, exploring individual areas of interest and living in a residential learning community are all part of the Wisconsin Experience and have been shown to affect many outcome measures of interest in higher education such as persistence, degree attainment, interest in post-baccalaureate study, marketability after graduation, preparation for work and educational satisfaction³.

This study’s purpose is to measure the Wisconsin Experience activities that are objectively quantifiable through student academic records, course descriptions/titles, or other official records (see end of report for definitions and methodology). The number of graduates participating in Wisconsin Experience activities is likely higher than those countable in this study because not all such experiences are part of a student’s official record. For the purposes of this study, the Wisconsin Experience is quantified as:

- Studying abroad
- Living in a residential learning community
- Participating in a FIG (first-year interest group)
- Taking a service-learning course
- Having an undergraduate research experience – measured by participation in the Research Fellows, Research Scholars, McNair, or Med Scholars programs, or by taking a research or thesis course
- Participating in an “internship” type experience for academic credit
- Working closely with a faculty member in a seminar course, honors course, or independent study (including Hilldale Fellowship and Holstrom Scholarship recipients).
- Having a capstone experience within the major program.

¹ See www.apa.wisc.edu (Degrees and Outcomes tab) for reports from previous years.

² See <http://www.learning.wisc.edu/>

³ Astin, A. *What Matters in College*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

PERCENT OF GRADUATES HAVING A WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE

In the 2007-08 academic year, 6,175 students completed undergraduate degrees. Of these graduates, 87% participated in at least one Wisconsin Experience activity as defined for this analysis. Sixty-six percent (66%) participated in two or more such activities.

**Table 1
Number of Wisconsin Experience Activities for Bachelors Degree Recipients in 2007-08**

	Percent of Graduates by School/College									
	ALS	BUS	EDU	EGR	HEC	L&S	MPH	NUR	PHM	Total
Zero	0	24	3	20	4	15	0	0	0	13
One	21	27	14	26	9	23	0	0	0	21
Two	21	19	16	24	26	26	31	32	46	24
Three	26	20	28	17	30	18	46	36	46	21
Four	18	6	23	10	17	10	17	12	8	12
Five or more	14	5	16	4	13	8	6	20	0	9
<i>Total one or more</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>87</i>
Total Degrees	522	603	466	576	317	3,470	52	156	13	6,175

Over the last six academic years, the percentage of graduates participating in at least one Wisconsin Experience activity has increased from 69% (2002-03) to 87% for 2007-08 graduates. This increase is partially, but not entirely, due to changes in what experiences are counted and to better recording of these experiences in the student record system. The increase also occurs because we have ramped up the Wisconsin Experience campaign aimed at encouraging student participation in these activities.

The percentage of graduates not participating in any recorded Wisconsin Experience activities decreased from 31% in 2002-03 to 13% for 2007-08 graduates. An increasing percentage of graduates are participating in more than one of these activities. Over the last six years, the percentage of graduates participating in more than one Wisconsin Experience activity has risen from 34% to 66%.

**Table 1a
Trend in Number of Academic Enhancement Experiences for Bachelors Degree Recipients**

	Percent of Graduates by Academic Year					
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Zero	31	27	20	16	18	13
One	35	28	28	27	24	21
Two	22	22	24	26	26	24
Three	8	15	16	18	17	21
Four	3	6	8	9	10	12
Five or more	1	3	4	4	6	9
<i>Total one or more</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Total two or more</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>66</i>
Total Degrees	6,102	6,144	6,289	6,256	6,017	6,175

TYPES OF WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE ACTIVITIES

The most frequent of these Wisconsin Experience activities (shown in bold) is taking a seminar course. Forty-three percent (43%) of graduates took at least one seminar course and 40% took at least one independent/directed study course. Twenty-seven percent (27%) took at least one honors course and 22% studied abroad – seventeen percent through a UW-Madison program and 5% through a program at another institution. Twenty-three percent (23%) participated in some type of field work experience such as cooperative education, internship, student teaching or practicum.

Thirteen percent (13%) of graduates lived in a residential learning community at some point as an undergraduate and 14% had at least one type of undergraduate research experience. This is the second cohort of graduates who had first-year interest groups (FIGs) available to them when they were freshmen. Six percent (6%) of these graduates participated in a FIG. Twelve percent (12%) took a course that had a designated service-learning component.

There are differences by school/college in participation rates for the various academic enhancement experiences. For example, graduates receiving degrees from the School of Business had high study abroad participation rates (25%) but the lowest participation rates in seminar courses (10%). Graduates receiving degrees from the School of Education had high rates of participation in field work (73%) but lower participation in undergraduate research (3%).

Table 2
Types of Wisconsin Experience Activities for Bachelors Degree Recipients in 2007-08
(most frequent experience in each school/college in BOLD)

	Percent of Graduates by School/College									Total
	ALS	BUS	EDU	EGR	HEC	L&S	MPH	NUR	PHM	
Study Abroad (Unduplicated)	9	25	17	12	17	28	2	9	0	22
UW-Madison Program	7	22	13	12	11	21	2	6	0	17
Other Program	2	3	4	0	6	7	0	3	0	5
Residential Learning Comm.	12	8	13	14	9	14	2	7	31	13
First-Year Interest Group (FIG)	4	2	5	0	5	8	2	3	8	6
Service Learning Course	13	6	33	1	35	10	54	13	0	12
Research Exp. (Unduplicated)	11	38	3	2	11	14	4	14	15	14
Research "Programs"*	4	0	2	1	1	2	2	1	0	2
Research Course	4	38	2	1	8	6	2	6	0	8
Thesis Course	4	0	0	0	2	6	0	9	15	4
Field Work (Unduplicated)	20	17	73	41	71	6	100	100	0	23
Co-op	1	0	0	41	0	0	0	0	0	4
Student Teaching	1	0	50	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
Practicum	5	0	68	0	1	1	100	100	0	9
Internship	16	17	7	0	70	5	0	1	0	10
Honors Course	26	10	9	22	7	36	6	17	8	27
Independent Study	43	31	43	45	56	39	25	24	100	40
Seminar Course	51	10	55	26	43	48	54	42	100	43
Capstone Experience	99	27	59	19	38	8	54	100	0	27
Total Degrees	522	603	466	576	317	3,470	52	156	13	6,175

*Research programs include Research Fellows, Research Scholars, McNair and Medical Scholars.

Over the past six years, participation in each of these Wisconsin Experience activities has generally increased or remained steady. The overall increase in the proportion of graduates participating in at least one Wisconsin Experience activity is not being driven by increases in one particular activity. The percentage of students who participated in independent study has shown relatively large annual fluctuations in the past. Also, the capacity of some of these activities (FIGs and residential learning communities for example) has increased with demand.

Table 2a
Trend in Types of Wisconsin Experience Activities for Bachelors Degree Recipients

	Percent of Graduates by School/College					
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Study Abroad (Unduplicated)	14	14	18	21	22	22
UW-Madison Program	14	14	14	16	17	17
Other Program	*	*	4	5	5	5
Residential Learning Community	11	11	12	13	13	13
First-Year Interest Group (FIG)	*	*	*	3	5	6
Service Learning Course	4	6	8	12	12	12
Research Experience (Unduplicated)	8	10	11	13	13	14
Research "Programs"	2	2	2	2	2	2
Research Course	3	5	7	7	6	8
Thesis Course	5	5	5	5	5	4
Field Work (Unduplicated)	20	19	20	22	21	23
Co-op	5	4	4	4	5	4
Student Teaching	3	4	2	4	4	4
Practicum	7	9	8	10	9	9
Internship	8	7	8	8	7	10
Honors Course	18	19	22	25	26	27
Independent Study	41	35	46	43	37	40
Seminar Course	32	34	35	38	40	43
Capstone Experience	*	*	*	*	*	27
Total one or more experiences	69	73	80	84	82	87
Total Degrees	6,102	6,144	6,289	6,256	6,017	6,175

* Notation of study abroad experiences at other institutions was recently added to students' official academic records and first documented for graduates in 2004-05. The extent to which students participated in study abroad at other institutions prior to 2004-05 is not known. Participation in a FIG was first measured for the 2005-06 graduates. This is the first group of graduates who had FIGs available to them when the majority of them were freshmen. This year's report is the first year that capstone experiences (culminating course or experience) have been tabulated.

GRADUATES WITH ONE WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE ACTIVITY

The graduates with one and only one type of Wisconsin Experience activity are most likely to have taken a seminar or independent/directed study course (19% each). The next most common activity for graduates with one experience is taking an honors course (15%) and a capstone experience (14%).

The most common sole experiences by school/college are highlighted in **bold** and show differences by school/college. Even though taking a seminar course is tied for the most common sole experience overall, Letters and Science is the only school/college where it is the most common sole experience. The School of Business is the only school where research (coursework) is the most common sole experience, CALS is the only school/college where capstone experiences are the most common activity, and the School of Education is the only school/college where independent study is the most common sole experience.

Table 3
Bachelors Degree Recipients in 2007-08 with One Wisconsin Experience Activity

	Percent of Graduates by School/College									Total
	ALS	BUS	EDU	EGR	HEC	L&S	MPH	NUR	PHM	
Study Abroad	0	7	11	4	3	13	---	---	---	10
Resid. Learning Community	0	4	6	1	0	5	---	---	---	4
First-Year Interest Group (FIG)	0	1	2	0	0	1	---	---	---	1
Service Learning Course	0	3	3	0	0	4	---	---	---	3
Research Experience	0	37	0	1	7	2	---	---	---	6
Field Work	0	6	26	40	66	3	---	---	---	10
Honors Course	0	9	3	15	0	19	---	---	---	15
Independent Study	0	9	43	32	24	19	---	---	---	19
Seminar Course	0	3	6	5	0	29	---	---	---	19
Capstone Experience	100	22	0	1	0	5	---	---	---	14
Total with One Experience	110	162	65	151	29	806	0	0	0	1,323

WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE ACTIVITIES FOR TARGETED MINORITY AND TRANSFER STUDENTS

This is the third year we have looked specifically at the Wisconsin Experience activity participation rates for targeted minority graduates and graduates who started at UW-Madison as transfer students. Ideally, targeted minority graduates would participate in these activities in at least the same proportion as non-targeted graduates. A recent report based on the 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results shows that participation in these types of activities is particularly beneficial in terms of retention and degree attainment⁴.

Graduates who started as transfer students have generally been at UW-Madison for less time than graduates who started as freshmen. Because some of Wisconsin Activity experiences are offered primarily to freshmen, we do not necessarily expect graduates who started as transfer students to participate at the same rate. Several recent initiatives have focused on improving and streamlining the transfer experience. Measuring participation rates for transfer students will give one benchmark against which to measure the effects of these initiatives.

⁴ Indiana University, Center for Postsecondary Research. 2006. *Engaged Learning: Fostering Success for All Students*. School of Education. Indiana University Bloomington.

Table 4 shows the participation rate in Wisconsin Experience activities for targeted minority graduates compared to non-targeted graduates. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of non-targeted bachelor's degree recipients participated in at least one of the academic enhancement experiences measured in this report. A slightly higher proportion of targeted minority degree recipients, 89%, participated in at least one of these experiences.

Table 4
Bachelor's Degree Recipients in 2007-08 by Targeted Minority Status

	Number of Graduates		Percent of Graduates with at Least One Wisconsin Experience Activity	
	Non-Targeted	Targeted*	Non-Targeted	Targeted*
ALS	489	33	100	100
BUS	583	20	77	75
EDU	441	25	97	88
EGR	554	22	80	86
HEC	293	24	96	92
L&S	3,241	229	85	88
MPH	51	1	100	100
NUR	150	6	100	100
PHM	12	1	100	100
Total	5,814	361	87	89

*Note: Targeted minorities include African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian and Southeast Asian domestic students (citizens, permanent residents and refugees). Non-targeted students include all other groups – White, International, and non-targeted Asian students as well as those who chose not to report a race/ethnicity at the time of application.

Table 5 shows participation rates in Wisconsin Experience activities for graduates who started as new freshmen at UW-Madison compared to those who started as transfer students. Overall, 90% of freshman-starts participated in at least one academic enhancement experience. Overall, graduates who started at UW-Madison as transfer students participated at lower rates – 79%.

Table 5
Bachelor's Degree Recipients in 2007-08 by Type of Entrance to UW-Madison (Freshman or Transfer)

	Number of Graduates		Percent of Graduates with at Least One Wisconsin Experience Activity	
	Freshman-Start	Transfer-Start	Freshman-Start	Transfer-Start
ALS	395	127	100	100
BUS	492	111	80	59
EDU	349	117	99	91
EGR	464	112	84	65
HEC	236	81	97	93
L&S	2,729	741	88	73
MPH	26	26	100	100
NUR	78	78	100	100
PHM	10	3	100	100
Total	4,779	1,396	90	79

DEFINITION OF TERMS AND TECHNICAL NOTES

Graduates with multiple occurrences of the same experience are counted once in all of these tables. For example, a graduate who did two internships would be in the “one experience” category. A graduate who did two internships and also studied abroad would be in the “2 experiences” category.

For many of the Wisconsin Experience activities, we are comparing the experiences in our student record system to student responses about similar activities during the most recent administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in spring 2008. Differences between what is recorded in the student record system and what students themselves report can exist for several reasons, including:

1. The NSSE survey is a sample of students whereas this Wisconsin Experience report is a census of graduating seniors. It's possible that the NSSE sample is not representative of all graduating seniors and/or that there are differences in NSSE response rates by school/college.
2. The NSSE questions are sometimes not specific enough to ensure comparability. For example, if a NSSE question asks if students “ever” participated in an activity a NSSE respondent might answer about an experience in high school or during the summer between years of college. This Wisconsin Experience report only captures activities that took place during college.
3. This Wisconsin Experience report captures activities that are recorded in the student record system – for-credit experiences and participation in university-sponsored activities. Students responding to the NSSE survey may be reporting on non-credit activities (work, volunteering, leadership in organizations) that are not part of the student record system.

Study Abroad

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who had a record indicating at least one semester abroad. Until the 2004-05 academic year, only students who studied abroad through UW-Madison-sponsored programs were included. Starting in 2004-05, we were able to identify students who studied abroad through programs at other institutions.

In the 2008 NSSE, students were asked if they had ever studied abroad. Twenty-six percent (26%) of seniors replied “yes”. This percentage is higher than the 22% of graduates who can be identified as studying abroad through our own records. One reason for this difference might be because the seniors who were surveyed have not yet graduated or because some of them may have participated in a summer term study abroad experience without receiving any academic credit.

Source: UW.RETENTION_SEMESTER_HISTORY data view (UW-Madison programs). ISIS table U_SR_TSCRPT_TXT (non UW-Madison programs).

Residential Learning Community

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who had a University Housing record indicating they had ever lived in one of the following residential learning communities -- Bradley Learning Community, Chadbourne Residential College, International Learning Community, Multicultural Learning Community, Women in Science and Engineering (WISE).

Source: Division of University Housing records.

Undergraduate Research Experience (non course-based)

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who have a student group record showing participation in one of the many undergraduate opportunities for research with faculty members outside of class. The groups included in this analysis were participants in the Undergraduate Research Fellows, Undergraduate Research Scholars, McNair, and Medical Scholars programs.

Source: <http://www.provost.wisc.edu/undergradresearch/>, UW.RETENTION_STDNT_GROUP_HIST data view

Comments: In this analysis, 2% of bachelors degree recipients can be identified as having such an experience. This is much lower than the 33% of seniors that reported on the 2008 NSSE that they had worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of class. Many of the experiences that students may have identified on the survey are the types of experiences that are not part of their official student records such as student hourly employment in research labs.

Service Learning Course

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course (or course section) that was indicated to have some kind of service learning, volunteer, community service or other such experience.

Source: ISIS CLASS_NOTES Table, UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view.

Comments: This only encompasses *courses* identified as having a service learning component – there are numerous non-course-based opportunities for students to engage in service learning and/or community service. In this analysis, 12% of bachelors degree recipients can be identified as having taken such a class.

There is no searchable field in the Timetable for service learning courses. Students are notified of a service-learning component in the class footnote section of the Timetable and it is this field that was used to develop the list of service learning courses for this analysis. There are several examples of courses that are believed to have a service learning component that are not identified as such in the Timetable. For this reason, we supplemented the list of courses identified in the Timetable with additional courses identified by the Morgridge Center for Public Service. The Provost's Office and Morgridge Center for Public Service are working with the Registrar's Office to determine the feasibility of implementing a better means of identifying service learning courses for students. Since service learning courses often have a significant time commitment outside of class, it is important that students understand this commitment when registering. Furthermore, students who are seeking a service learning course currently must look through the Timetable for notes about classes – there is no searchable field. Once a better system of identifying these courses is implemented, the analytical opportunities for examining service-learning course participation will also be enhanced.

For the 2007-08 graduates, we identify 12% of graduates who have taken a class with a service learning component. This is much lower than the 38% of seniors who responded to the 2008 NSSE that they had taken such a course. Some of the differences in responses might be due to differing understandings of what constitutes a service learning course (i.e. a direct tie to the curricular content of the course) but another likely reason is that the course the NSSE respondent is thinking of was not identified as a service-learning course in the Timetable.

Undergraduate Research Course (non-thesis)

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course with the term “research” in the title/description where research/lab opportunities with faculty members are highlighted. We intentionally exclude research methods courses where students may be learning about research methods but not having a “substantial research experience that generates new knowledge”.

Source: UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view

Capstone Experience

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who graduated from a degree program requiring a capstone experience – either a single culminating course or a combination of course(s) and activities. Many of these capstone experiences are also experiences that are already counted in other areas of this report. For example, in the School of Education student teaching IS the capstone experience. Therefore, in this analysis, degree recipients will be counted in two places – once in the field work category and once in the capstone category. In other cases, particularly in CALS, the capstone experiences do not duplicate other experiences counted in this analysis.

Independent Study Course

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course identified by the section type as independent study (except those with “thesis” in the name and those that are really field work). These are generally courses that end in “89”, “98” and “99” including 100 and 200-level courses. Some internships and co-op sections are coded as independent study rather than field work. Regardless of how coded, all internships and other field work have been included in those categories and not in independent study.

Source: UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view.

Undergraduate Thesis Course

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course identified by a course type of “independent” with “thesis” in the course name. These are generally, but not always, courses numbered 681, 682, 691 and 692.

Source: UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view

Field Work

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course with the term internship, co-op, practicum etc, in the title/description and courses of this nature identified by a course type of “field work” in the Timetable.

Source: UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view.

Comments: In this analysis, 21% of bachelors degree recipients can be identified as having taken such a class. This is much lower than the 62% of seniors who reported on the 2008 NSSE that they had had “done a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience or clinical assignment”. The Office of the Registrar has recently identified a means of recording non-credit field work experiences that are not currently recorded in the student record system. Future Wisconsin Experience reports could measure participation in these non-credit field work experiences if school/colleges and departments make use of this new ability to record these experiences.

Seminar Course

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course identified by the section type as a seminar, a type of academic instruction that brings instructors and students together in small groups and focuses in depth on specific issues related to a particular field of study.

Source: UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view.

Honors Course

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who ever took a course section for honors credit. These sections are identified by the presence of an “8” as the middle digit of the course or section number or have other Honors designations.

Source: UW.RETENTION_COURSE_HISTORY data view

First-year Interest Group

Definition: Bachelors degree recipients who have a student-group record indicating participation in a FIG. The student groups that indicate FIG participation for these graduates include “FIG 2002 Students”, “FIG 2003 Students”, “FIG 2004 students”, “FIG 2005 students” and “FIG 2006 students”.

Source: UW.RETENTION_STDNT_GROUP_HIST data view

Comments: In this analysis, 6% of bachelors degree recipients can be identified as having had such an experience. This is much lower than the 26% of UW-Madison seniors who reported on the 2008 NSSE that they had “participated in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together”. There are several possible reasons for these differences. One may be that the FIG participation is very specific and students may be thinking of other programs where courses are linked. Another possible reason for the difference is in the use of the term “learning community” in the NSSE question. On the NSSE, learning community is defined as linked academic courses. However, at UW-Madison we often use the term learning community to refer to other experiences that do not involve linked courses, such as residence hall-based learning communities. Some students may have found this confusing or not have read the rest of the question and only answered based on their own conceptualization of a learning community which may not have been the same as the one used by NSSE.

Source: UW-Madison 2007-2009 Undergraduate Catalog. Identification of academic programs requiring a capstone experience was determined based on program descriptions in the Undergraduate Catalog.