Building on its rich history and tradition, University of Wisconsin-Stout requests that the institution be designated as Wisconsin’s polytechnic university. In 1974, the Board of Regents defined UW-Stout as a special mission university with a select array of programs leading to professional careers and serving the needs of society. These programs are delivered through an approach that combines theory, practice and experimentation. We are witnessing significant societal transformation, and higher education must adapt to the rapidly changing environment. The educational foundation has been established during the past three decades, and the new designation would be the next step to becoming a distinctive, great institution. The focused mission of UW-Stout will remain, serving the needs of the state to educate its citizens and to remain an engine for economic development.

Definition of a 21st Century Polytechnic University

Polytechnics are comprehensive universities offering professional, career-focused programs in the arts, social and related behavioral sciences, engineering, education, and natural sciences and technology that engage students in active, applied learning, theory and research essential to the future of society, business and industry.

UW-Stout is seeking official designation as Wisconsin's polytechnic university. This will convey a distinct brand for UW-Stout, providing a clear difference from other state universities and the basis for a marketing effort in a time of increasing competition from both private and public institutions. The characteristics that define the 100 or more American polytechnic universities mirror those of this institution and how it has evolved over the past century. UW-Stout is a fine university, one that has focused sharply on its select mission, served its constituents extremely well and is now positioned to move to an even higher level of excellence.

It is important to note that there is no single definition of a polytechnic university, although all share characteristics. UW-Stout will develop the concept around its historic mission of balancing access and excellence, providing educational opportunities for all ethnic groups and social classes that demonstrate the ability and desire to succeed. Yet, the university will continue to offer high-quality, challenging programs.

Benefits

The benefits of this new designation are myriad:

**Student Learning:** Our student body would be the foremost beneficiary of this designation. We have been a leader in educational innovation. UW-Stout is a totally modern technological university, a recognized leader in educational innovation and the only UW System institution (*and only one of 125 schools nationwide*) to provide a laptop computer to all undergraduate students. We are one of the few schools to adopt effective assessment tools for the program. As a wireless and wired campus, 90 percent of our classrooms are modern, mediated learning centers, and we are committed to using modern technology for all education and business functions. Lab-based experiences are provided for the majority of students in all programs. A polytechnic designation would reinforce this active, applied focus — a real benefit for all students.

**Career Focus:** Professionally focused programs lead to productive careers for UW-Stout graduates. The university has strong relationships with the private sector. In an average year, nearly 80 percent of our graduates have completed at least one co-op experience, and the result is an extraordinarily high graduate placement rate of nearly 98 percent. Employers are surveyed annually and nearly all respond that they are very satisfied with the preparation and job performance of our graduates.
**Program Development:** UW-Stout will retain a broad range of programs, and all new program efforts will be within the polytechnic framework and will apply the same educational philosophy for active, applied learning in the classroom. We are seeking UW System approval for two new engineering programs: polymer engineering and computer/electrical engineering. We have minors or concentrations in bioinformatics, biotechnology and nanoscience; faculty are engaged in an aggressive planning process for a specialization in interactive digital environments, a minor in cognitive neuroscience and educational certification in a joint science/technology/math program.

**Collaborative Research and Learning:** This designation will more easily facilitate relationships with other institutions, such as Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, for research or classroom learning projects that will benefit our students and faculty. Collaborative research also will extend to foundations and agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health as UW-Stout continues to partner with universities and technical colleges to further applied research efforts involving faculty, staff and students.

**Economic Development:** UW-Stout has been successful in numerous technology transfer projects over the past two decades, projects supported by federal grants through NIST since 1992. Our program array and new program development enhance the state’s effort to attract and keep companies with desirable, high-paying jobs. Our outreach centers in vocational rehabilitation, packaging engineering, product design, industrial design and others are dedicated to assisting existing and start-up companies to become more competitive in the global market.

**New Peers:** When we applied for and received the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, we increased the number of peer comparisons to demonstrate that we equaled or exceeded universities nationally. Most of our peers were polytechnic or technological universities. The new designation would officially include UW-Stout as part of this new peer group, allowing us to benchmark and share best practices with institutions that share the same core values, embrace a similar educational philosophy and face like challenges in supporting educational practices common in polytechnic universities, such as strong lab-based experiences. This collaboration with comparable institutions will benefit the student experience at UW-Stout and provide important benefits to the state of Wisconsin.

**New peer institutions**

- Arizona State University Polytechnic
- California Institute of Technology
- California Polytechnic State University-Pomona
- California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo
- Ferris State University
- Illinois Institute of Technology
- Indiana Institute of Technology
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (aspirational peer)
- Michigan Technological University
- New England Institute of Technology
- New Jersey Institute of Technology
- New York Institute of Technology - Old Westbury
- New York Institute of Technology - Manhattan
- Polytechnic University
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (aspirational peer)
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Southern Polytechnic State University
- Stevens Institute of Technology
- SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica-Rome
- Wentworth Institute of Technology
- Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Charles W. Sorensen became UW-Stout’s sixth leader in 1988. A native of Moline, Illinois, Sorensen received a baccalaureate degree in history and political science from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, and an M.S. degree in history from Illinois State University. He holds a Ph.D. degree in American history from Michigan State University and attended the Harvard University Institute for Educational Management.