

## QUESTIONS FOR Jim Perry

# Access key to growth for UW-Fox

Dean Jim Perry talks turkey on mission, costs

Sean Johnson



*Jim Perry, dean and campus executive officer of the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley, says the college's growth agenda is to increase access to adult learners and non-traditional students.*

**What is the status of the school's latest growth proposal? What is the justification?**

The campus is landlocked by a bowling alley, U.S. Highway 441, an elementary school and the business park. We are currently doubling up on space in some disciplines, particularly engineering. Our intent is to move the engineering programs to the former ATS building. We would also move some office space and continuing education programs.

The last time there was an expansion on the campus, it was designed for a capacity of 1,500. We have 1,739 students now and have been between 1,700 and 1,750 for several years. We will gain some space with the theater renovation, but not enough for the engineering program.

The Fox Valley is predicted to grow substantially with an increased demand for education in the area. When you are the institution of access, there will be demand. Our parking lot is full from 8 a.m. to well into the evening.

The Communication Arts Center was constructed to add additional floors, but when we did the soil samples, the ground will not support the additional weight.

**The school has grown tremendously during the past decade. What do you attribute that growth to?**

We have become involved in the

collaborative degree programs and we offer students an opportunity to earn bachelor's degrees in four disciplines. Engineering has also been a major factor. It certainly gets the most attention because it is vital to the industry in this area.

We have seen growth in the accelerated learning programs for working adults, where they can take the classes they need in shorter blocks.

Tuition has played a role. People have been concerned about the rising cost of a college education for some time. The cost for many UW schools has risen dramatically while at the same time support from the state has dropped from 64 percent to 35 percent, a cost shift directly to the students. Our costs are the least. This is the place to start.

I use the analogy of Toyota vs. Mercedes. Both will get you to the same destination, but the Toyota will cost you a lot less.

**There are several University of Wisconsin campuses in this area, as well as a technical college presence. How does UW-Fox fit into the equation?**

If the 1,739 UW-Fox students did not go to school here, they would go to those other schools and add to the numbers and pressures there. This school was created to be a local access point to the UW system. When we recruit, we don't reach out past

Outagamie and Winnebago Counties. We were created specifically for local education.

**In these days of tight budgets, can taxpayers afford that option? How do you sell the school to the budget writers in Madison?**

Our growth agenda within the system is for access. That's more access for the adult and non-traditional learners. About 35 percent of our student body is non-traditional. They are in the workforce right now and are in need of additional education. The state does not own or budget for our physical plant. They are getting a great bargain to educate students who stay in the community.

**With the changing economy in Northeast Wisconsin, what is the role of UW-Fox in keeping the workforce trained?**

It is less right now than it can be in the future. However, the engineering program is one that I can point to as an illustration of our role. Out of 20 to go through the program, 18 are working here in the Fox Valley. The others are still within the state.

We could probably do more, but most of the students who start here have to go to another school to finish. By law, the most we can offer is an associate's degree. The adult learning program is where we will be able to make an impact. **M<sub>p</sub>**