UPCEA MEMBER INSTITUTION
CASE STUDY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–WHITEWATER

The University of Wisconsin–Whitewater (UW–Whitewater), a public university in southeastern Wisconsin, enrolled approximately 11,600 students in the 2024–25 academic year, including around 1,550 graduate students. Founded in 1868 as a Normal School to train teachers, UW–Whitewater has maintained its strength in teacher education while also becoming a leader in business education, launching its first online MBA in 1999. The institution's graduate programming today is primarily online and caters to part-time, professional students.

DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIT

The School of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education (SGSCE) administers all aspects of graduate education including application, enrollment, curricular oversight, and graduation clearance. It supports a wide range of learners through summer youth camps, adult graduate programs, and dual enrollment opportunities. The SGSCE also manages online undergraduate degree completion programs (notably its ECE4U and SPECED4U teacher licensure programs) and oversees the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. The 2024 launch of the Warhawk Dual Enrollment Academy marked an expansion into high-quality, asynchronous online learning for high school students, developed in partnership with the Universities of Wisconsin Office of Online and Professional Learning Resources.

INITIAL CONDITIONS BEFORE UPCEA ENGAGEMENT

Graduate enrollment grew after 2020, fueled by strong online programs—especially the MBA, which surged during the pandemic. As MBA numbers returned to pre-pandemic levels, the unit shifted to diversify through dual enrollment and youth programs. While new specialized master's programs drew modest enrollment, they were cost-effective by using existing courses. The unit's broad portfolio—graduate programs, camps, and dual enrollment—maximizes both digital and physical assets. Most graduate students are adult learners who consistently favor flexible, asynchronous online formats.

KEY METRICS PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION

- Graduate Enrollment: ~1,550
- Summer Camp Participation: 6,000+ annually
- Online Program Launches: Notable programs include ECE4U, SPECED4U
- Course Modality: Primarily asynchronous, online for graduate learners
- Operational Integration: Graduate research and undergraduate research housed within SGSCE

CURRENT PERFORMANCE OF THE UNIT

Since implementing its strategic plan, SGSCE has continued diversifying offerings and improving internal processes. While graduate enrollment is stabilizing, headwinds remain. Investments in high-quality instructional design and CRM systems (Slate) have boosted student engagement and process efficiency. Stackable microcredentials in Communication, Instructional Design, Finance, and Marketing have shown promise, and expanding to other programs is being explored to align with evolving employer and student needs. Partnerships with the Universities of Wisconsin Office of Online and Professional Learning Resources and local employers have expanded, increasing the unit's visibility through UPCEA membership and professional development efforts.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

- Enrollment: Graduate enrollment has stabilized; dual enrollment shows growth.
- Revenue: Sustained by MBA and specialized master's programs with stackable credentials.
- Completion Rates: Not explicitly provided, but online modality supports part-time learners' persistence.
- Partnership Outcomes: Strong collaboration with UW OPLR and local employers.
- Operational Improvements: Slate CRM system implemented; improved data-driven decision-making; enhanced internal communication using UPCEA consulting tools.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Key contributors to success include:
- **Strategic Decisions:** Adopting the Slate CRM system in 2022 and building new programs on stackable certificates.
- **Culture: Emphasis** on an entrepreneurial mindset and cross-functional collaboration.
- **Technology Adoption:** Investment in high-quality, in-house course development and integrated CRM systems.
- **Partnerships:** Deep collaboration with Universities of Wisconsin OPLR and external validation through UPCEA consulting.

LESSONS LEARNED

Top lessons include:
- Collaborate early and consistently with IT when implementing new systems.
- Balance urgency with thoughtful planning—avoid launching programs without sufficient marketing groundwork.
- Empower staff with trust and clear guidance to foster innovation and informed decision-making.

Avoidable missteps included under-investing in marketing, underscoring the need for dedicated resources and strategic planning. A surprising takeaway was employers' preference for brief, in-person training over fully online formats, even in professional settings.

OUTLOOK (NEXT 1–3 YEARS)

SGSCE is focused on:
- **Growth Areas:** Expanding the Warhawk Dual Enrollment Academy, summer camps, and undergraduate research programs.
- **Challenges:** Rising competition in online graduate education, especially if employer tuition reimbursement declines.
- **Strategic Priorities:** Stabilizing graduate enrollment, launching microcredentials in high-demand fields (Safety, Cybersecurity, Finance, Communication), and improving credit transferability of dual enrollment programs statewide.
- **Innovation Areas:** Curriculum innovation, stackable credentials, and targeted short-format training options.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

The UPCEA consulting engagement was a pivotal moment—validating leadership insights, equipping UWW with compelling data visualizations, and enhancing internal storytelling. Their participation in MEMS and other UPCEA programs has been instrumental for staff development, networking, and staying ahead of higher education trends. This blend of strategic investment, cultural agility, and partnership-driven action positions UW–Whitewater as a model for graduate and continuing education in a competitive landscape.