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Madison College president testifies on Capitol Hill
Innovative public and private partnerships to address workforce needs is topic

(MADISON) Feb. 16, 2012 – Madison Area Technical College President Bettsey Barhorst was among the experts who presented testimony today to the U.S. Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety in Washington.

Her presentation coincided with the release of the Government Accountability Office’s report on best practices for programs that address workforce needs at the regional level. Madison College is one of four institutions nationwide selected to speak at the hearing. Barhorst was joined by Pat Schramm, executive director of the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin.

Their presentation showcased the Career Pathways program, recognized by the GAO as a model of collaboration and innovation that creates public and private partnerships that contribute to learner success. The goal of the Pathways program is to aggressively grow a skilled workforce that meets the demands of regional employers.

The effort is managed through the Center for Adult Learning—a unique partnership that leverages the dollars of the Workforce Development Board with the resources of the College to maximize the effort’s effectiveness.

The project, for which planning began in 1999 and was officially set into motion in 2003, includes Madison College; state, regional and local economic development partners; over 100 dedicated industry leaders; the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Workforce Development Board. It was created in response to the need to improve access
to and provide training for unemployed and displaced workers, as well as those whose skills are deficient—with an eye on retention and credential completion.

The Careers Pathways model creates “fast track” certificate programs that provide workers with credentials that can lead to immediate employment. The curriculum for each certificate is designed in collaboration with industry experts. Students may apply credits earned through certificate coursework toward degree and diploma programs at the college, which affords greater opportunity for career advancement, promotion, and higher income.

More than 7,000 workers have received training through the Career Pathways program, many of whom were unemployed, low-skill workers, or long-term employees in entry-level positions. Over the past three years, the credential attainment rate of students has risen from 65 percent to 89 percent. In 2010, the most recent year for which data is available, 36 percent of those were employed within six months of earning their certificate. That number is expected to rise as companies continue to add more employees.

“It is no secret that there is a labor shortage in Wisconsin and across the country,” Barhorst says. To remain economically viable and competitive on a regional and global scale, she contends that maintaining the skills of our current workers and training available new workers is critical. “If we are successful in doing that, everybody benefits,” Barhorst says. “The Career Pathways program is one way to get there.”

To learn more about the Career Pathways program, contact Madison College’s School of Online & Accelerated Learning at 608.245.5848, visit http://matcmadison.edu/dislocated-workers on the web, or contact the South Central Wisconsin Job Center. The Government Accountability Board report is available at http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-97.