Lawmakers push interstate campuses

CLUSTER, From 1A

with Rep. Scott Jensen (R-Town of Brookfield) to seek funding in the new UW System budget to study the interstate alliance. The same two lawmakers have been the main legislative advocates of an expected campus merger proposal, seeking to combine two-year campuses in Waukesha and Rice Lake with UW-Milwaukee and UW-Stout, respectively.

But like the mergers, the interstate concept is running into

early opposition.

UW-Superior administrators compare the Minnesota endeavor to a merger, and contend that it would usurp control from Wisconsin taxpayers, reduce student access to higher educa-

tion and create an unworkable partnership.

"This is simply a bad idea," Vice Chancellor David Prior said in a prestatepared ment.

A student lobbying group known United 25 Council UW Students, which already is leading a campaign to the derail has mergers, reservations about the Minnesota experiment, too.

Details on plan

Rence the Stieve. group's legislative director, said students are suspicious of the reform ideas emanating from Madison because, she said, lawmakers have not outlined their plans in detail. "It's just very odd," Stieve

said of the interstate alliance. "Why now? And where is this coming from?"

Facing a \$1.6 billion budget deficit, state officials in recent months have discussed a variety of strategies for reconfiguring Wisconsin's higher education system, which includes 13 four-year universities, 13 twoyear campuses and 16 technical colleges. After a state administrative

panel in December called for awarding more bachelor's degrees throughout Wisconsin. Kreibich and Jensen focused on merging two-year campuses into neighboring four-year universities. UW System administrators

also have floated a cost-saving idea to combine the administration of two-year campuses with that of the UW Extension Scrvice. An interstate cluster with

Minnesota would take higher education reform efforts to a new level, reaching outside Wisconsin for the first time. The proposed arrangement is modeled after Tri-College University, a Fargo, N.D.-based con-

sortium that was forged more

than 30 years ago by North Da-

kota State University, Minneso-



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Rep. Scott Jensen (M-Town at Brookfield)

ta State University-Moorhead, and the private Concordia College in Moorhead.

Although the three institutions remain autonomous, their administrators cooperate on a number of levels, including recruiting students and operating a course exchange that allows students to attend more than one college simultaneously.

Out of about 20,000 students enrolled in the three institutions, more than 1,200 take advantage of the interstate consortium.

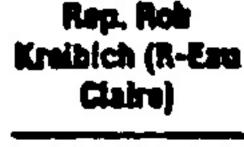
Stretching dwindling dollars

Minnesota State-Moorhead President Roland Barden said the arrangement helped his campus weather a financial crisis 10 years ago, because budget

cuts could be targeted at services that stuwould dents find still available at the partner schools.

"lt's been a model." great he said. "If two or three institutions want make it it work. works."

Larry Isaak. president the Midwest-Higher ern Education Compact, 3 group that promotes interstate cooperabelieves tion. such alliances Will become more popular



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as states look for ways to stretch their dwindling dollars.

improved service

The biggest payoff comes in improved service for students, Isaak said, although he added that Tri-College University has achieved financial savings for its partners, too. "It's been a real success sto-

ry," he said.

Lawmakers hoping to duplicate the achievement in Wisconsin already are thinking of how the model could be used elsowhere in the state, including the horders with Illinois and Michigan. "Higher education is going to

be more regional," Kreibich said. "I think we can reach out to our neighbors." One potential obstacle in Wis-

consin is the distance to neighboring universities. Unlike the Superior and Du-

luth campuses, which are less than 10 miles apart, prospective campus partners in Illinois or Michigan could be harder to reach Jensen said although such al-

liances would be difficult to build, he hopes that the initial experiment will demonstrate what is possible from rethink-

ing old assumptions. "We need to look anew at the university system," he said. "Piece by piece, we are asking the system to think anew."

For more information about Tri-Codege University, go to www.tri-college.org.