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INTRODUCTION TO WiGROW

Purpose & Vision of WiGROW

- To advocate for student-employment as an educational experience
- To enhance student learning in the workplace by providing opportunities for reflection and professional development
- To support and engage supervisors of student-employees in their role as mentors and teachers of students

WiGROW is an initiative of the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. It was adopted and modified from the IOWA GROW™ program at the University of Iowa. Administrative support for WiGROW is provided by the Office of Human Resources and the Office of Student Financial Aid.

What is WiGROW?

Student-employees learn and grow through their on-campus jobs. As a supervisor of students, you are their teacher and mentor, helping them identify, refine, and communicate their skills.

WiGROW contains three components, each of them designed to support student learning and your role as a teacher and mentor of students. These three components are 1) WiGROW conversations between supervisors and students, 2) professional development for supervisors of student-employees, and 3) professional development for student-employees.
Specifically, WiGROW is designed to help students reflect on how the things they are learning in their on-campus job A) enrich their college experience here and now, and B) prepare them to achieve their career goals in the future.

For example, a student might be developing essential time management skills, customer service skills, and a strong work ethic. They might be learning to work with people who are different than them, to navigate workplace conflict, and to find solutions to problems. All of these skills will benefit them in both work and life for years to come!

**How does WiGROW work?**

Students learn by doing and by reflecting. They learn more when these activities are combined.

As a supervisor of student-employees, you make this happen! Each semester, you will have WiGROW conversations with your student-employees about what they are experiencing and learning in the workplace. These conversations prompt reflection and allow your students to make connections between their on-campus job, their college experience, and their career goals.

WiGROW conversations are neutral (not an evaluation), prioritizing students’ reflection over conversations about performance. This takes pressure off of the student and the supervisor and lets the student explore their experiences without fear of judgement. Conversations happen on the following schedule:
• **Initial Conversation:** You will have the first WiGROW conversation with a student within 45 days of them being hired. This allows students to view their job as an important learning experience from the beginning.

• **Semester Conversations:** You will then have a conversation with students once-per-semester, which will encourage continued reflection on their experiences and deepen their learning.

WiGROW conversations can be customized to your workspace and the student. Adapt the program to what offers your student-employees the right balance of challenge and support, and to what makes WiGROW work for you.

• **Conversation Styles:** Within WiGROW, there are three conversation styles – one-to-one away from daily work, one-to-one while working, and in a group. See page 7.

• **Question Alternatives:** Based on your own style and the particular experiences and priorities of the student you are speaking with, you can choose one of the alternative questions provided on the WiGROW question list. See page 10.

WiGROW conversations of all styles lead to continued learning through both organic reflection-in-action, which in turn allow students to continue recognizing and developing transferable skills.
**Why WiGROW?**

Because it works! The key factor in whether students have positive things to say about WiGROW and their job on campus is feeling supported by their supervisor. You make the difference.

**Providing a High Impact Practice:** Our student-employees are active and engaged learners who deserve opportunities to grow. Students who chose to work may have less time for other impactful activities, and, by implementing WiGROW, you support students’ access to high-impact practices.

**Teaching Active Reflection:** Through the WiGROW conversations you facilitate, students are able to actively reflect on their own learning, their work, and themselves. They practice seeking and receiving feedback. They solidify the skills they are already learning at work.

**Retaining Students:** Students feel more engaged in their jobs, and departments have reported that WiGROW helps them retain and promote great student-employees.

**Supporting Key WiGROW and Student Employment Learning Outcomes:** At UW-Madison, students who participate in WiGROW have shared that their on-campus job has helped them...

- Reflect on how the skills learned and used in their job transfer to a future career (90%)
- Reflect on how the skills learned and used in their job impact their college experience (80%)
- Learn to work with people who are different than themselves (94%)
- Feel a greater sense of belonging at UW-Madison (88%)
● Students in WiGROW also report feeling supported by their on-campus supervisor (98%)

● Feeling engaged in their job (94%)

**Following the Research:** Research supports guided reflection on work as a practice correlating with other positive outcomes as well! Students who participate in GROW indicate greater levels of the following:

● Humanitarian and civic engagement (Halper, 2020)

● Critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Halper, 2020)

● Practical competence (Halper, 2020)

● Self-efficacy (Hansen, 2019)

● Desire to do a good job (Hansen, 2019)
WiGROW CONVERSATIONS

**Having a WiGROW Conversation**

WiGROW conversations are particular to the employment context and individual student, varying in setting and style. Conversations help students reflect on their work experiences, what they are learning, and how it might connect to their college experience (academics, student organizations, friendships, etc.) and their career goals.

Your responsibilities as a supervisor are to initiate the conversation, ask the WiGROW questions, and report that the conversation happened.

There are three key features of WiGROW conversations outlined below. Keep these in mind as you initiate the conversation and ask the WiGROW questions.

**WiGROW conversations are neutral and non-evaluative.** Engaging in reflective conversations with their supervisors, separately from performance-related feedback, allows students to approach work as a learning opportunity.

**WiGROW conversations identify transferable skills.** Student-employees develop a broad range of skills in their on-campus jobs. In WiGROW conversations, students and supervisors name these skills and build upon them.
**WiGROW conversations encourage reflection-in-action.** Having these conversations can spark further reflection as students work, helping students to continue making connections between their on-campus job, their college experience, and their career goals.

**Conversation Timeline**

You will have multiple WiGROW conversations with each student per year. In the first 45 days after a student is hired, have an initial conversation to talk through the core WiGROW questions. This allows students to view their job as a learning experience from the beginning. Then, have one WiGROW conversation with a student for each semester they work for you. Consider using alternative questions as you decide they are appropriate for the particular student.

| Initial Conversation Within 45 Days of Hire | 1st Semester WiGROW Conversation | 2nd Semester WiGROW Conversation |

**Conversation Styles**

WiGROW conversations are adaptable. They will look different based on your department, your own preferred style, and the needs of your students. The three styles of WiGROW conversations are outlined below. In each style, the supervisor who facilitates the conversation may be either a professional staff member or a student who serves in a supervisory role. No matter what style, the main priority and focus during a WiGROW conversation is always student reflection. Advice for conducting these conversations virtually or in person can be found on page 12.
Learning Outcomes

Students learn a lot on the job, from technical skills that help them perform their daily tasks to transferable skills like communication, time management, and the ability to work with people who have different backgrounds and perspectives.

Through on-the-job learning, a supportive relationship with you, and reflective conversations about their learning, students will naturally achieve the following learning outcomes:
Students will reflect on their experiences and their learning. Students will develop the ability to receive positive, constructive, and neutral feedback in order to learn from challenging situations.

Students will develop a career mindset and feel prepared for success beyond UW through the development of key career skills and competencies.

Students will develop a sense of belonging at UW-Madison through experiencing employment as a form of campus involvement. Students will make meaningful connections with coworkers and staff members in the workplace.

Students will be able to identify and appreciate the value of their on-campus employment by connecting their academic experiences, ideas, skills, values, and future career goals to job experiences.

Students will develop self-awareness through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. Students will see the value of working with others who have different strengths, experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives other than their own.

Students will develop clear communication skills and the ability to self-advocate in interviews, on resumes and cover letters, and to their supervisors.
**Virtual and In Person Conversation Tips**

In all WiGROW conversations this school year, spend extra time checking in as people to ensure that students feel supported and gain a clear understanding of where students are coming from. Follow any established safety protocols when meeting in person and invite students to request accommodations.

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**STYLE 1: ONE TO ONE, AWAY FROM WORK**

**Virtual Work:**

- Give students an opportunity to write down ideas first/use the chat
- Suggest cameras on
- Set your camera far enough away that student can see your body language

**In Person Work:**

- Take care with location because of volume/privacy
- Listen responsively and confirm understanding

---

**STYLE 2: ONE TO ONE, WHILE WORKING**

**Virtual Work:**

- It is unlikely that work done remotely will allow for productive conversations to take place as you work.
- To get moving during the conversation, take a walk and call each other on the phone
In Person Work:

- Take care with location and volume
- Listen responsively and confirm understanding
- Be prepared to pause the work or pause the conversation and revisit

STYLE 3: IN A GROUP OF 3-6

Virtual Work:

- Use the chat function
- Set guidelines for discussion
- Suggest cameras on and introductions so folks know who is “in the room”
- Have students opt into a group setting

In Person Work:

- Use a dedicated room that allows space for students to feel comfortable
- Set guidelines and offer reminders of the importance of safety regulations
Questions for WiGROW Conversations

WiGROW questions are designed to be conversational, flexible, and lead students towards reflection about the skills they are learning and using in the workplace.

There are five core WiGROW questions, with a bonus question to use as time allows. You should ask all five core questions (or a listed alternative) in each WiGROW conversation.

Tell me what is new with you.

What skills are you learning or practicing in your job?

How have you learned from other people in your workplace?

How does your job impact your college experience?

How is this job preparing you for your career?

QUICK TIP...

If students haven’t been mentored in the workplace before, they may feel like this conversation is an interview or a test. They may rely on you to set a more conversational tone.

Be curious and ask follow-up questions to go deeper. Offer reassurance and encouragement.
To make sure you have the flexibility needed for conversations to be meaningful and adapted to the student, each core question comes with a list of alternatives that you can use. As you conduct conversations, you might decide that a student is ready for a more specific or advanced question. If conducting a lot of WiGROW conversations, you may also find that it is easier for you to remain engaged when you ask a wider variety of questions.

The question alternatives listed on the following page are in order from more introductory (for students new to the job or earlier in their college career) to more advanced (for students with more work experience, in leadership roles, or nearing graduation).
1) **Tell me what's new with you.**
- What's your rose, bud, or thorn for the day/week?
- What has been your favorite [comfort food, mindless tv show, etc.] lately?
- What motivates your day today?
- What are you involved with on campus? How are they going?
- What is one way you're taking care of yourself lately?

2) **What skills are you learning or practicing in your job? // What are you learning in this job?**
- Tell me about a project you're working on and what skills you're using.
- When do you notice yourself being most [interested, creative, curious] at this job?
- If you were recruiting a friend to work here with you, what would you tell them about what you do/how you benefit from working here instead of somewhere else?
- When there is something you don't know in this job, how do you find the answers?
- Tell me about a situation that required you to grow.

3) **How have you worked with and learned from other people in your workplace?**
- Who has influenced you the most in this job? What qualities of theirs would help you thrive in this workplace?
- Who on our team has a really different approach to getting work done than you? What could you learn from them?
- Tell me about a time when you had to interact with someone who was upset. What skills did you use to navigate that situation? Is there anything you would change about your response?
- Is there anyone who is being unheard or overlooked in our workplace? How can you and I advocate for their perspective?

4) **How does your job impact your college experience?**
- Who has influenced you the most in this job? What qualities of theirs would help you thrive in this workplace?
- Who on our team has a really different approach to getting work done than you? What could you learn from them?
- Tell me about a time when you had to interact with someone who was upset. What skills did you use to navigate that situation? Is there anything you would change about your response?
- Is there anyone who is being unheard or overlooked in our workplace? How can you and I advocate for their perspective?

5) **How is this job preparing you for your career?**
- What kind of job or internship do you hope to work in next? How can I help you prepare for it?
- What other tasks or responsibilities in our department do you think you'd like to try if there was an opportunity?
- What skills do you want to be working on in this job? How could those skills follow you to a different role?
- How would you write about this job on your resume?
- What have you learned in this job about the type of work environment you want to find after college?
Why Do We Ask These Questions?

Curious minds want to know! We’re careful to use questions that lead to meaningful conversations and help students reflect on their job. The reason for asking each question is outlined below.

As a supervisor who is conducting these conversations, you will learn what works and what doesn’t. We rely on your feedback to keep improving these questions. If you have suggestions for questions that should be added to this list, let us know!

1. **Tell me what’s new with you.**

We ask this because we care about how students are doing. Real conversations are personal, and starting this way helps you develop a meaningful relationship with each student.

2. **What skills are you learning or practicing in your job?**

We ask this because this question lets students start reflecting on something concrete (their day-to-day experiences) before talking more broadly. It’s a good warm-up and lays the foundation for the other questions.

3. **How have you learned from other people in your workplace?**

We ask this because we care about equity and inclusion in the workplace. This question requires students to recognize what other people are contributing and reflect on their relationship with coworkers who have different strengths, identities, and experiences.

4. **How does your job impact your college experience?**

We ask this because the skills your student-employees are learning in the workplace can help them grow as students, roommates, and community members. Seeing how their job impacts their experiences on student organizations, with friends and families,
and in their classes makes work more meaningful and reinforces their on-the-job learning.

5. **How is this job preparing you for your career?**

We ask this because linking their current work experience to their future work experience helps them express their job skills on a resume, in a cover letter and at an interview. Seeing how their current experiences contribute to their goals can help student-employees see the value their work and feel empowered as employees who are contributing in important ways every day.
**Tips for Successful Conversations**

If a student shares that they have **basic needs** that are unmet, try...

- "Mmmm, that sounds really difficult. I'm sorry you're going through it. You know, Financial Aid has a website that might give us some ideas for where you could find support. Do you mind if I pull it up right now so we can take a look together?"
- "I'm really glad you shared that with me. You can always come to me with this kind of stuff. Do you want me to just listen or would you like me to help you brainstorm next steps?"
- "That is a lot to be dealing with on top of school and work. Is there anything I can do to relieve stress while you're here at work?"
- "Thank you for sharing. Let's make sure we connect you to some of the people on campus who have the right knowledge to help. Can I send an email right now to connect you with [the dean of students’ office, financial aid success coaches, the multicultural student center, the gender and sexuality center, international student services, UHS mental health]?"

If a student is **splitting time with another department** because of staffing shortages, try...

- "I know you have multiple supervisors. I'd like to have a WiGROW conversation with you to make sure you're having enough time to reflect on your different experiences. Can we take 15 minutes to chat?"
- "Have you had a chance this semester to step away from work and talk about your experiences as a student employee? If not, I'd love to spend some time reflecting with you on what you're learning."
- "You're really getting a crash course in learning on-the-job and being flexible. How could you represent this on their resume?"
If you want to make conversations **more meaningful**, try...

- "This time is just for you. If we get interrupted, I'll make sure to find another time when we can revisit this."
- "If when you go back to work, there are more things that you want to talk about with me, I invite you to reach out or come find me. I'm always happy to revisit this."
- “That was such a thoughtful answer. Thank you. I’m curious; would you tell me more about [something they brought up]”
- “I’ve noticed [nonverbal communication or tone of voice]. I want to make sure I’m listening well. Is there anything else you’d like to share?”

If a student is **quiet, uncertain, or slow to share**, try...

- *20 seconds of silence* “Would you like some more time to think on that one? We can always come back.”
- *20 seconds of silence* “Would you like me to ask that differently?”
- *20 seconds of silence* “I’m noticing you’re a little quiet today. What’s on your mind?”
- *20 seconds of silence* “Is this an okay space to talk, or is there somewhere you might be more comfortable?”
- *(In a group)* “We’re going to take a moment to pause and ask anyone who hasn’t had a chance to speak yet to share their insight with the group.”
- *(In a group)* “Let’s each reply to this question by [taking turns, talking with a partner]”

If a student **isn’t sure what they’re learning**, try...

- “Let’s think about the things you did on your last shift. What were your tasks? How did you go about getting them done?”
• “Think back to your first day on the job. What have you learned about working here since then?”
• “I’ve seen you [work hard, make a coworker laugh, pay attention to details, prioritize, make a plan, etc.]. Can you tell me about a time when that has helped you or our team?
• “In this job, we often ask students to focus on [efficiency, quality control, customer service, etc.]. When it comes to this, what do you think you do well?”

If you already have conversations similar to WiGROW, try...

• “We’ve talked before about what you’re doing well. Instead of me giving you feedback, this time is for reflecting on what you’re learning and how you want to learn. There are no right or wrong answers.”
• “In our last team meeting, we talked about [goals, resumes, leadership opportunities, etc.]. Let’s build on that by focusing today specifically on your skills and how they might transfer to other situations.”
• “I’m glad I get to talk with you one-on-one today. Before we dive into the questions I have, are there any recent learning experiences we’ve had as a team that you’d like to focus on in particular?”
• “You’ve got some experience with professional development. Today’s goal is to reflect on what you learn in this job, and how that expertise and skill can benefit your college experience and also your career path. Is there a place you’d like to start?”

If you’re having group conversations, try...

• “We’ll be meeting for about 30 minutes in this space. Please put away or silence your phones so we can really be here for each other. Soon we’ll jump into some reflection questions about what we’re learning on the job, but first, let’s go around
the room and introduce ourselves and share three words that describe how we're doing today.” (For Question 1)

- “Each of us has a set of sticky notes and a pen. Let’s write down as many skills as we can think of that we use in this job. We have 1 minute. ----- Now find someone you aren’t sitting next to and compare your answers. Pick 3 answers you want to share with the group.” (For Question 2)

- “Turn to the person next to you and discuss what strengths do you bring to the team? What strengths does your partner bring to the team? (For Question 3)

- “For this question, we’re going to turn to the person next to us and share our reflections in pairs. We’ll come back together as a whole group in 5 minutes. Be sure to listen well and ask each other follow up questions.” (For any question)

- “Our next question is [ask question]. Take a notecard and write down your initial thoughts. ----- Now turn to a partner and share your perspective. Listen closely and ask follow up questions. -----Does anyone want to share with the larger group?”

If you are struggling to find time for WiGROW, try...

- “We have a busy start to our semester. I do want to make sure you each have a chance to learn and grow in this job. That’s one of the benefits of working at UW! Later this semester, after things settle down, we’ll have some scheduled chances to talk about the learning we do here.”

- “We’re coming together as a group to pause and reflect on our learning in this job. I know everyone came straight from getting work done and we probably have our last or next tasks on our minds. Let’s take a few deep breaths together so we can really focus. We’ll be meeting until [time].”

- “I’d like to have a WiGROW conversation with you later today while we’re working on [physical task]. Just wanted to give you a heads up that we’ll be
talking about the things you’re learning on the job and how those same skills could help you in school or whatever job is next for you.”

- “Hi [coworker], I have a favor to ask. I know you’ve worked closely with [student] before. I’m struggling to find time to have meaningful WiGROW conversations with all of my students. Would you be willing to reflect with them?”
- “Hi [student], You’ve been working here quite a while and have had a lot of WiGROW conversations. Would you be willing to attend the next WiGROW training and facilitate a few conversations with your team members?”

**Where to have WiGROW Conversations:**

- Look for a space with minimal distractions (quieter and less activity is better).
- Some students may be more comfortable in a space that is familiar. A corner of a larger room where they work could lead to richer conversations than a conference room that feels unfamiliar.
- Some students may want privacy. Some students may be more comfortable with other people around. Give the student options and ask them where prefer.
- Avoid rooms that have accessibility barriers for you or your student and be open to learning from students about what rooms do or don’t work well for their needs.

**Reporting WiGROW Numbers**

The time you dedicate to WiGROW is best spent in conversation with students. For this reason, we do not require extensive paperwork. We do need confirmation that conversations are happening with students.
Once per semester, you will be asked the following questions by your steering committee member:

1. Did you supervise students this semester? If so, how many?
2. Did you facilitate WiGROW conversations? If so, with how many of your students?
3. Did you hire new students this semester? If so, how many students had a WiGROW conversation within the first 45 days?

If you are unsure of how to report or record WiGROW conversations, please contact your steering committee member (listed below):

- AIMS: Ryan Perkins & Mike Crawford
- Admissions: Nicole Kaforski
- Business Services: Dawn Rekoski
- DDEEA: Erika Neal
- Facilities Planning and Management: Alicia Meyer
- International Student Services: Mina House
- Office of Human Resources: Marci Birkes
- Office of Student Financial Aid: Kasie Strahl
- Office of the Registrar: Ally Bartelme
- RecWell: Alec Triggiano
- University Health Services: Nicole Mathweg & Mariah Ulness
- University Housing: Jenny Noonan & Marie Kitzman
- Wisconsin Union: Ben Clark

We rely on your experience and wisdom to keep improving the program. We’re always looking to hear what you have learned.
If you have advice to share with other supervisors, or if you would be willing to help train other supervisors at WiGROW events, we’d love to have you complete our supervisor feedback form on the supervisor website!
WEBSITE AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Website
studentjobs.wisc.edu/aboutwigrow

WiGROW Email Address
wigrow@ohr.wisc.edu

This email address will reach the WiGROW administrative team in the Office of Human Resources and the Office of Student Financial Aid. You can also email the below individuals directly.

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