



## **2025 Undergraduate Student Experience *Ad Hoc* Working Group**

### **I. Introduction**

The Student Experience *Ad Hoc* Working Group was formally created in fall 2024, growing out of conversations that began in spring 2024. In its formal charge, Chancellor Mnookin tasked the group with offering “a fresh assessment of 1) our overall success and ... potential further areas of improvement in supporting all undergraduate students and 2) our more targeted efforts to further reduce student success gaps and differentials between and among various subsets of our undergraduate student population.” The charge called for a final report and recommendations from the group by June 2025.

The group met regularly through the 2024-2025 academic year. Its work included exploring the complex meaning of student success, including not only academic performance and progress toward degree but also experiencing engagement and belonging as a member of the UW-Madison community. The group also gathered evidence related to student success at UW-Madison, investigated the structure of student support services at UW-Madison, and reviewed information about student success and student support at peer institutions.

By April 2025, the group had arrived at the conclusion that the university should strongly consider the reorganization of campus level efforts to support student success. The group agreed upon a set of principles to guide that consideration and to facilitate engagement with key stakeholders. During April and May 2025, the group engaged with various stakeholder groups across campus and in the community in conversations about the principles and, using those principles, what considerations should guide the exploration of organizational changes.

This report offers 1) an overview of the context of student success work at UW-Madison; 2) a statement of principles that emerged from the group’s deliberations and guide its recommendations; and 3) core findings and recommendations to advance our shared goal of aligning and organizing our efforts to best support the success of all UW-Madison students.

## II. Context

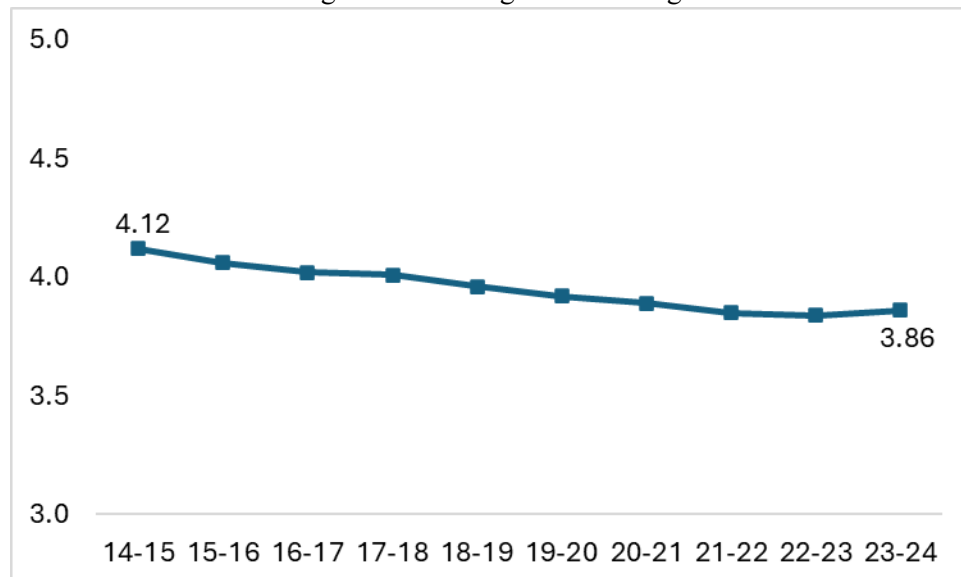
### A. The complexity of student success

The broadest context for the working group's deliberations is the fundamentally complex nature of student success. Typically, student success means persisting in one's studies and graduating in a timely manner. By these measures, the UW-Madison undergraduate student body is on the whole incredibly successful. As the table and figure below show, the 4- and 6-year graduation rate and time to degree have improved markedly in the last decade, and first year retention rates have returned to pre-COVID levels following a temporary decline:

Retention and Graduation Rates of New Freshmen by Fall Semester Entrance Cohort

Fall Entrance	Cohort Head Count	1-Year Retention Rate	4-Year Graduation Rate	6-Year Graduation Rate
2014	6,264	95.8	66.9	88.5
2015	6,270	95.4	69.3	89.2
2016	6,430	95.3	71.2	89.2
2017	6,610	95.4	72.8	89.3
2018	6,862	95.2	75.1	89.5
2019	7,550	95.2	75.5	
2020	7,306	95.2	75.8	
2021	8,465	94.3		
2022	8,628	94.5		
2023	7,964	96.1		

Average Time-to-Degree for Undergraduates



Even amid this progress, data and analyses from Data, Academic Planning, and Institutional Research (DAPIR) reveal ongoing differences, or gaps, in these metrics for some student populations (see Appendix 1). A fall 2023 analysis from DAPIR, for example, notes that student financial need (as measured by receiving a Pell grant) is significantly correlated with a modest increase in time to degree. Important work remains to be done, building on this analysis, to understand the correlations of student academic performance.

Even so, these standard metrics do not tell the whole story of student success. While we want our students to persist in their studies and graduate in a timely fashion, we also want them to take full advantage of the rich and engaging academic opportunities UW has to offer as well as to flourish as full human beings.

Annually we report on student engagement in the Wisconsin Experience Report. The Wisconsin Experience describes what students might expect and then pursue during their time at UW-Madison. The Wisconsin Experience is tied to the Wisconsin Idea, including co-curricular activities and a collection of high-impact learning experiences that are a part of the undergraduate learning environment at UW-Madison. The high-impact experiences included in the report, while not including all high-impact experiences, have the important features: they link experiences inside and outside of the classroom; increase student exposure to diversity; apply classroom knowledge to real-life experiences; include research with faculty members; and incorporate learning and working with faculty members and peers in small groups, exploring individual areas of interest through independent study with faculty, and connecting with peers and instructors in academic-themed curricular-based learning communities. UW-Madison's longstanding goal is that every graduate participates in at least one of these experiences. Of 2023-24 bachelor's degree recipients, the most recent report available, 91% participated in at least one high-impact experience during their time at UW-Madison.

We are also committed to the career success of our students when they become our alumni. We track this success in a variety of formal and informal ways. For example, each year we survey the most recent graduates to learn about the plans of our bachelor's degree recipients. Of our most recent graduates (2023-24), almost 75% planned to work, including serving in the military or participating in a volunteer or service program such as Teach for America or Peace Corps after graduation. Three-quarters of those students had accepted a position at the time of graduation. Other graduates (approximately 25%), planned to or were considering furthering their education in graduate or other continuing education programs.

Academics and careers are not the only components of success for our students. We want each of them to have the full positive Badger experience; to be and to feel part of our rich and varied campus community; and to flourish during their time with us. In the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement, 88% of seniors rated their experience at UW-Madison as good or excellent (compared to 81% at peer institutions) and 90% said they would attend UW-Madison again (as compared to 82% at peers). These are promising statistics, but there is still work for us to do in understanding how to determine correlations and what gaps persist for distinct groups. Given that overall rates of subjective satisfaction are quite high, we now have the opportunity to focus intently on the contours and complexities of student belonging on our campus.

By any measure, success is widespread among UW-Madison students. Our responsibilities and opportunities are to be found in 1) ensuring that all our students, regardless of their experiences, backgrounds, interests, or points of view, find pathways to success and support along the way; and 2) building an ecosystem of student support that nurtures the intellectual and personal growth central to the Wisconsin Experience.

## **B. Past work and current state of campus-level student support**

Before turning to recommendations for the future, it is worthwhile taking a moment to review past efforts to support student success and taking stock of the current state of student support work at the campus level.

Investing in Student Success: the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates. From 2009-2014, the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates (MIU), drawing on a supplemental tuition charge, invested \$40 million per year in instructional support and course access; advising and student services; and need-based financial aid. Concurrently, UW-Madison addressed issues related to student success including but not limited to degree

complexity; prerequisite structure and enforcement; and access to and quality of bottleneck courses. MIU was meant to promote success for all UW Madison undergraduates. As noted above, while there is more work to do, we have indeed seen considerable progress among all undergraduates on standard metrics including retention, time to degree, and graduation rates.

Division for Teaching and Learning. In 2011, MIU invested in the creation of the Office of Undergraduate Advising, now the Office of Academic and Career Success (OACS). OACS provides undergraduate advising for students still exploring majors, and also convenes, coordinates, and supports the community of advisors who are in schools, colleges, departments, and programs across campus. OACS is now part of the Division for Teaching and Learning (DTL). At the time of its creation in 2021, DTL also included the Office of Undergraduate Advising, WISCIENCE, and the Office of Student Learning Assessment. Changes since 2021 have included relocating learning support and tutoring work formally found in Student Affairs to OACS and relocating the Morgridge Center for Public Service from the School of Education to DTL. Plans are in place to move Testing and Evaluation Services from its current home in the School of Education to DTL in summer 2025.

Student Affairs. Student Affairs (SA) was created as a separate administrative division of UW-Madison in 2018. Student Affairs challenges and supports the whole student by enhancing learning, building community, and fostering well-being. Furthermore, Student Affairs is committed to fostering an inclusive environment where every student experiences a supportive campus community where they can thrive and flourish. The unit provides holistic support frameworks that recognize and leverage the multiple backgrounds and dimensions of student experience to aid academic, personal, and professional growth, ensuring every student has the tools and resources to flourish.

Division of Enrollment Management. The Division of Enrollment Management (DEM) houses the Office of Admissions and Recruitment, the Office of Student Financial Aid, the Office of the Registrar, and the Student Success Through Applied Research (SSTAR) lab. The Division also provides foundational support and services for academic infrastructure throughout the student lifecycle. The Division leads a comprehensive strategic enrollment approach to attract, enroll, support, and graduate the most talented undergraduate students by keeping students firmly at the center of their actions, decisions, processes, and services.

As this overview suggests, campus student support work is organized, broadly speaking, along functional lines:

- Recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and enrollment are centered in the Division for Enrollment Management
- Campus level involvement, student development, well-being, and community support, all to allow for a sense of belonging and purpose, is centered in Student Affairs.
- Campus level academic support—including academic advising; learning support and tutoring; and career services—is centered in the Division for Teaching and Learning.

This broadly functional approach to institutional organization recognizes distinct kinds of expertise and takes advantage of efficiencies of scale. It also promises enhanced navigability both for our students and for colleagues doing similar work in units distributed in schools and colleges.

There are several additional units on campus providing levels of student support worth noting and relevant to the recommendations offered in this report:

- University Housing plays a vital role in involvement, community, and belonging for students. It reports to the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration.
- Data and analysis efforts related to student support and success are found in a variety of campus level locations, including DAPIR; DEM; and the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement (DDEEA) generally reporting through the Provost's office.
- Student basic needs and financial crisis support work is also found in a variety of campus level locations, including DEM, DDEEA, and SA.
- Student disability accommodations are coordinated through the McBurney Center in Student Affairs, while Testing and Evaluation Services, soon to be part of DTL, has become a de facto campus center

for accommodated testing. We have not yet discussed DDEEA in detail. In examining its structure, it is notable that the make-up of DDEEA stands in significant contrast to the general (if complex) approach to organizing campus level student support services by student-centered functional areas.

Student programs in the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement. DDEEA was created in 2010, before the existence of Student Affairs and the Division of Teaching and Learning in their current forms. Several key units were transferred to the direct supervision of what was then a vice provost. The goal of this consolidation has been described as seeking to enhance the impact of programs and services, as well as creating new collaborations, leading to more equitable educational outcomes. Today, DDEEA houses a variety of employee-facing services, including employee disability resources and equal employment opportunity. DDEEA staff are also responsible for several campus level events each year. In the 15 years since its creation, DDEEA has also become home to several cohort-based student programs, including the Center for Educational Opportunity, McNair Scholars, Mercile J. Lee Scholars (formerly the Chancellor’s Scholars and the Powers-Knapp Scholars programs), OMAI/First Wave, Posse, and PEOPLE. These programs pursue a holistic model, integrating the diverse types of support that functionally differentiated units like DEM, DTL, and Student Affairs offer to non-DDEEA students. DDEEA programs have historically worked to serve underrepresented students of color, first generation students, and students with financial need. Given changes in federal law, the programs have shifted to focus expressly on serving first generation students and students with financial need.

As of Spring 2025, 1,666 students are part of DDEEA programs. While this is a large number of students in an absolute sense, it represents a small fraction of all students on campus. Further, as noted in the table below, these students represent less than one quarter of all underrepresented students of color, first generation students, and Pell Grant Recipients at UW.

Groups of Students	# of students in DDEEA programs	% of students in DDEEA programs
Underrepresented students of color	1,330	23.2%
First Generation Students	1,012	16.2%
Pell Grant Recipients	996	14.3%

Note that in DDEEA programs, as in the student body more generally, these categories overlap. For example, in the entire undergraduate student body:

- 40.8% of underrepresented students of color are also first-generation students.
- 45.7% of underrepresented students of color are also Pell Grant recipients.
- 52.7% of first-generation students are also Pell Grant recipients.

This table shows the overlap between categories by number of students:

Groups of Students	URSOC	First Gen	Pell
Underrepresented students of color (URSOC)	5,707	2,328	2,609
First Generation Students (First Gen)		6,259	3,296
Pell Grant Recipients (Pell)			6,942

The integrated and high-touch nature of DDDEA’s student programs is reflected in their relatively low student-to-staff ratios:

Program	Students per FTE
CEO	49.8
First Wave	8.3
Mercile J Lee	90.2
PEOPLE	15.7
Posse	24.5
Average for DDEEA Student Cohort Programs	29.4
Cross-College Advising in DTL; included here for comparison	301.0

Thus, we see that the holistic student programs in DDEEA provide substantial additional support to a group of just under 5 percent of our overall undergraduate student population. At the same time, these programs impact only a modest minority of students in any demographic category, including underrepresented students, high financial needs students, or first-generation students. A majority of students in any of these categories are not currently given the opportunity to participate in DDEEA holistic programs.

The table below draws on analyses from DAPIR to compare students in DDEEA student support programs to all undergraduates on standard student performance metrics. It is important to note that along with the support provided by DDEEA programs, various other factors influence these student performance metrics.

Program	1 <sup>st</sup> year retention rates compared to all undergraduates are...	4-year graduation rates compared to all undergraduates are...	6-year graduation rates compared to all undergraduates are...
CEO	slightly lower	lower	lower
First Wave	slightly higher	lower	lower
Mercile J Lee	slightly higher	the same	slightly higher
PEOPLE	slightly lower	lower	lower
Posse	Higher	lower	similar

In addition, it is important to note that students in these programs generally self-report that these programs have a positive impact on their experience.

Created at a time when other campus student support structures had yet to fully develop, DDEEA’s student programs have taught us much about the workings and potential of holistic cohort programs. The division has done impressive and important institutional work incubating holistic support programs and began to do so in a period when DTL had not yet been created and when our student affairs apparatus was far less substantial. We see and deeply appreciate how DDEEA’s focus on cohort-based student support has contributed to our campus. That said, given the evolution of our support ecosystem, legal shifts in permissible focus, and the resource intensive nature of DDDEA programs, we strongly believe the time has come to consider reorganization, including a strong commitment to economies of scale through functionally aligning expertise.

### III. Principles

As we reviewed the current state of student support and success at UW-Madison, the working group developed a set of principles to ground consideration of the pathway forward, including possible organizational changes. These principles should not be particularly surprising. They already inform much of our current work and, at the same time, reflect our ongoing aspirations; nonetheless, it is worth being explicit about the beliefs that drive the work that we do:

1. Advance success for all students. At UW-Madison, we admit students we are confident can—and typically do—find academic success here. Over the past decade, in part due to investments made through the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates, we have seen significant progress on standard metrics of student performance, including retention rates, graduation rates, and time to degree. We are committed to building on this success and to addressing remaining differentials among student populations, with a particular focus on graduation rates.
2. Connect every student with the best support for them. Because we recognize the varying experiences of our students, we also recognize that students benefit from different kinds of academic, social & well-being, and personal support. We will build an easily navigable system of support; make personal and personalized support available to all our students; and draw on data and technology to help match students with the support from which they will most benefit.
3. Ensure pathways to belonging for all students. We reaffirm the centrality to our educational mission of working collaboratively to create a campus that is welcoming and inclusive for all students, recognizing the different backgrounds, perspectives, interests, and viewpoints they bring to our campus community. In line with UW-Madison's vision, we also recognize that student success is grounded in learning through experiences both in and out of the classroom. These opportunities create transformational educational journeys, helping students live the Wisconsin Idea. We appreciate the ways that our rich student opportunities, open to all, (ranging from our nearly 1,000 registered student organizations to our multicultural student center to our Union directorate), strengthen our students' sense belonging; we believe that our work to support students must continue to strongly support their sense of belonging and, simultaneously, also challenge them to connect across their differences of background, experience, and viewpoint.
4. Strategically organize campus-level student support work. Our students find support in various Vice Chancellor units, including Academic Affairs; Finance and Administration; the Division for Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement; and Student Affairs (as well, of course, at the school and college and department level). We will advance the data-informed and strategic organization of this work, recognizing both the efficiencies to be gained by differentiating between different support functions located in different units and the value to students of providing holistic support structures.
5. Engage in continuous assessment and improvement. We will set clear, measurable goals related to student success and monitor our progress towards those goals by leveraging data and evidence, using available metrics, and determining areas where additional information is needed. We also commit to reporting on these metrics clearly and transparently. This is imperative for holding ourselves accountable, being clear about goals, and measuring where we succeed and where further efforts or shifts in approach are warranted.
6. Steward our resources responsibly. As we enhance our student support work, we are committed to harnessing efficiencies of scale, eliminating unnecessary duplication of services, limiting non-mission critical expenditures, and continuing to support sustainable student-centered investments.

### IV. Recommendations

During April and May 2025, members of the working group discussed these principles with various campus stakeholders, exploring implications for possible organizational changes. Drawing on those conversations, along with its months-long work exploring the student support ecosystem at UW-Madison and other institutions, the group offers several recommendations:

1. Enhance access and support both for students with demonstrated financial need and for first generation students. One of the striking recognitions of our exploration of our programs and current structures is how little direct student and academic support focus has been specifically tailored to first generation college students and students with high financial need. We believe that these groups deserve additional focused attention. Given data on student academic success, current legal and policy structures, as well as data-driven intuitions about who might most benefit from additional support, we therefore recommend strengthening our ability to offer timely, personalized academic support, with a focus on students with demonstrated financial need. Prioritizing support for these students is a natural corollary to campus's substantial investment in Bucky's Tuition Promise and Bucky's Pell Pathway. A distinct but overlapping group is first generation students, who may arrive to campus with fewer support structures that come with multi-generational family college experiences. Thus, we also recommend additional investment in community support to ensure these students enjoy pathways to full belonging on our campus.
  - a. Create a new Office for First Generation and Low-Income Students in Student Affairs to start Fall 2025 or Spring 2026.
  - b. In conjunction with planning to create a new Office for First Generation and Low-Income Students, charge a cross-functional team from the Office of the Provost and Student Affairs to explore basic needs support in Student Affairs and Success Services in the Division of Enrollment Management. Reports, including recommendations for potential plans for reorganization due to the Chancellor by August 1, 2025. These forms of support have existed in several different administrative verticals. Is that appropriate, or should they be consolidated? Are there other changes that would best support our students?
2. Reposition various aspects of campus level student support to better align organization with function.
  - a. Recognizing the vital role that residential experiences play in fostering student success, belonging, and holistic development at the University of Wisconsin– Madison, we recommend that University Housing have a dual report to the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs for residential activities. If this recommendation is approved, a memorandum of understanding will be developed no later than July 16 by the VCFA and VCSA to ensure a smooth and seamless plan for this new reporting model.
  - b. Student Affairs and the Division for Teaching and Learning should determine enhancements to the McBurney Center, focusing on both student and instructor support. Student Affairs and DTL should enhance coordination and support for instructors on students with disabilities with an update on improvements to the deans by early August 2025 with a plan for the 2025-26 academic year. There should be continued discussion during 2025-26 about future efficiencies and effectiveness, including possible reorganization.
3. Enhance Academic Support for all UW-Madison Undergrads.
  - a. Although it made excellent sense at the time of DDEEA's creation, we do not believe it makes sense any longer to have DDEEA's holistic support programming separated from our broader engagements in student support. We believe that much of DDEEA's work—including its work involving high impact academic practices—may be used effectively to benefit a meaningfully greater number of students; therefore, we recommend that we relocate and integrate current student engagement and scholarship programs and high impact practices from DDEEA to DTL effective summer, 2025.
  - b. We strongly recommend that we maintain all scholarship commitments to all current DDEEA students, as well as ensuring that they do have continued opportunity for holistic support.



- c. Embark on a collaborative reimagining of DTL, charged with efficiently serving more students to close gaps on academic performance metrics. These plans should reflect both the efficiencies of scale possible in an expanded division and insights gleaned from the holistic support models developed in DDEEA. Initial plans due to Provost by August 15, 2025.
4. Enhancing Use of Data to Advance Student Success.
  - a. Evaluate and determine appropriate structures in DAPIR to serve units at all levels of campus by providing timely flows of data and analytics, including connections to the Division of Teaching and Learning, Student Affairs, and Division of Enrollment Management, to facilitate linking students to the kinds and levels of support from which they will most benefit. Include already existing DAPIR staff, including data analyst currently funded by DTL and focused on data flow to academic advisors
  - b. Relocate data and research staff (3 FTE) from DDEEA to DAPIR, effective no later than summer 2025, to expand capacity for this important work and to pursue it in a streamlined manner.
  - c. Charge a team with representatives from DAPIR, DTL, Student Affairs, and DEM, perhaps working with DoIT, to explore the creation of a data-powered academic navigator service. While the details of this navigator must still be determined, other institutions provide a strong model of best practices.
  - d. Charge a cross-functional team with building shared understanding of the work of the SSTAR lab and consider possible reorganization. Report due to Provost by August 15, 2025.
  - e. Explore moving Student Learning Assessment from DTL to DAPIR. Report due to Provost by August 15, 2025.

## V. Goals and Metrics

The overall aim of the recommendations offered here is to build on and enhance the success of all UW-Madison undergraduates. We encourage campus leadership to set ambitious and attainable goals and to identify clear metrics along several lines:

1. Operational Goals and Metrics. Taken together, our recommendations envision campus level units serving more students through integration and efficiency, with a particular focus on first generation and low-income students. In the next 1-2 years, the number of students served by campus level support units should therefore increase. Initial goal: 25% more first generation and/or low-income students served by campus level student support units by academic year 26-27. We anticipate that this can and should be achieved without growing the total employee FTE of our existing support infrastructures across all units, though it may involve movement within and across them in terms of FTE numbers.
2. Outcome-based Goals and Metrics. Our recommendations are intended not only to serve more students more efficiently but also, and importantly, to advance student success in its full complexity. In the next 1-5 years, we should expect continued progress on key indicators:
  - a. Time to degree. We believe our focus should be on maintaining our already outstanding time to degree for a UW-Madison undergraduate (already under 4 calendar years) rather than further decreasing it, though we should continue to attend to differentials in time to degree for different student populations. Initial Goal: Within 5 years, decrease time-to-degree differentials for low-income students and other student groups for whom measurable gaps continue. More specific five-year target goals should be set by January 1, 2026.
  - b. Retention and graduation rates. It is important to note that UW-Madison undergraduates

already perform very well on these metrics. Our goals should focus on improving outcomes for individual students and for populations of students who will most benefit from enhanced support. Initial Goal: Within 5 years, decrease retention and graduation rate differentials for low-income students and other student groups for whom measurable gaps continue. More specific five-year target goals should be set by January 1, 2026.

- c. Measures of student academic and social engagement. As with retention and graduation rates, UW-Madison already outperforms peers on many of these metrics. Our focus should be on facilitating access for all students, which should marginally increase overall engagement and, more significantly, address differentials among student populations. Within five years, increase the percentage of students taking part in high impact practices, as defined by the annual Wisconsin Experience report. More specific five-year target goals should be set by January 1, 2026.
  - d. Belonging. Campus should develop clear goals and appropriate metrics for student belonging and engagement across difference. We recognize the complexity of measuring both of these important aspects of the educational experience, but we hope proposals for how best to assess/measure this can also be set by January 1, 2026.
3. Strategic Goals. Our specific operational and outcome-based goals should be part of a comprehensive vision for the undergraduate student experience, which, in turn, should be fully aligned with the campus strategic framework currently under development. Put differently, we should build an efficient and effective student support ecosystem that positions UW-Madison as a leader in the strategic promotion of student success.

**Date Submitted:** June 30, 2025

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