

RETENTION REVIEW NEWSLETTER



University College
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

February 2025

Did You Know?



UWSP held its first Retention Summit on the afternoon of Friday, 14 February. Summit events included a welcome from Chancellor Gibson, a keynote from Dean Stock of University College and myself, break-out sessions, and closing remarks from Provost Cornell-Swanson. Most important, the afternoon included opportunities for participants to engage in conversation with their colleagues about unit-wide retention successes, questions, and ideas for the future.

The keynote address shaped participants' conversations by outlining retention targets for each unit. These targets, projected by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE), will help the university meet both our short-term and our long-term retention goals: 75.5% retention of those first-year students who entered UWSP in the Fall 2024 cohort, and 80% retention of each year's incoming first-year cohort starting with the Fall 2027 cohort.

Participants generated a robust collection of retention ideas at the Summit. These ideas include the following: targeted and timely surveys about students' experiences and needs; strategic departmental outreach; pre-orientation education, information, and preparation for college; explicit instructions, expectations, and guidance both in and outside of the classroom; peer/near-peer mentoring or Q & A sessions; themed housing communities; identification of and proactive support

for high-risk students; strategic use of extra credit; career-focused conversations in entry-level courses for the major; cross-campus collaborations; and—last but not least—opportunities to socialize over ice cream. If you would like support in implementing these ideas or adapting them for use in your own unit, please let me know. I am happy to help you identify high-risk students and introduce them to appropriate supports, establish cross-unit collaborations, connect with resources, collect or locate relevant data, and tweak your approaches both to implementing retention initiatives and tracking their success.

After generating retention ideas and goals, participants at the Retention Summit could choose from one of five break-out sessions. These sessions highlighted the tools available to support student success and offered insight into creating an engaging classroom and supportive campus community. For more information on the breakout sessions and to access materials from each session, please visit [the Retention Summit website](#).

In addition to the break-out sessions presented by UWSP faculty and staff members, student panelists shared their experiences, revealing the big ways that little things can influence students' sense of belonging and academic confidence. Being the only bilingual person in the room, being unable to find a classmate with shared cultural experiences, wondering who else is worried about failing but not knowing how to engage with such questions and conversations: these are the kinds of invisible challenges that can make or break a student's sense of belonging and academic confidence.

Challenges of this sort are compounded by the fact that students must also begin internalizing the way language, research, attitudes, behaviors, and worldviews work in *each* of the different subjects they study. Each discipline, for example, favors certain grammatical or rhetorical styles, certain approaches to research, and certain types of data. For experienced faculty and staff, this kind of knowledge simply serves as the backdrop of our work. It's easy to forget that our students don't share this taken-for-granted knowledge and must learn it explicitly. [The resources linked here](#) offer additional insight into the kinds of knowledge, behaviors, and assumptions so deeply ingrained in our own work that we may overlook the need to explicitly teach them.

If you were unable to attend the Retention Summit, you'll have opportunities to recreate the experience with colleagues in your unit. Keep your eyes peeled for an invitation from me (Lori Randall, UWSP Director of Student Retention) to walk through the reflection and discussion activities undertaken during the Summit. If you did attend the Summit but have not yet had a

chance to complete the participant feedback survey, please take a few minutes to share your feedback, so that my colleagues and I in University College can continue to plan retention programming that best meets your needs.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with each of you!

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