

Transition begins to align two UW colleges with UW-Stevens Point

Bernie Patterson, for USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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With the UW Board of Regents' approval earlier this month, the University of Wisconsin is embarking on the largest change in how higher education in Wisconsin is structured since the UW System was created in 1971.



The Regents approved UW System President Ray Cross's proposal to restructure UW Colleges and UW Extension Nov. 9. For UW-Stevens Point, this means aligning with UW-Marathon County and UW-Marshfield/Wood County.

We have begun this process, naming a Regional Transition Committee with representatives from each campus and community. They will lead the work of numerous project teams focused on academics and curriculum, student support, shared governance, informational technology, operations, enrollment management and communications.

Sixteen members of my leadership team toured the Wausau and Marshfield campuses on Nov. 20. With UW Colleges Chancellor Cathy Sandeen and North Regional Dean Keith Montgomery, we held forums to learn more about their operations, get to know faculty and staff, and answer questions. We held a forum with UW-Stevens Point faculty and staff the week before.

At each of these meetings, dedication to students was pronounced. It was clear from our visits how committed faculty and staff are to maintaining access and affordability for students. We respect those goals, which UW-Stevens Point also embraces.

I've also had the opportunity to meet with government officials in Marshfield and Wausau. As owners and supporters of facilities on these campuses, Marathon County, Marshfield and Wood County are important partners. These facilities are community resources as well.

We have begun listening sessions with business and community leaders, who can help us understand regional workforce needs and help us envision a future that is responsive to meeting those needs. We have the opportunity for even closer collaboration.

We must also be realistic. All three UW campuses in central Wisconsin share enrollment challenges, and our two-year campuses lead the enrollment decline among UW Colleges. We are committed to maintaining the services our students need to succeed. The strategic planning process under way at UW-Stevens Point will broaden as appropriate to ensure we are offering the programs students want and communities need. This will require flexibility, ingenuity, teamwork and courage to think in new ways.

These efforts will not be without significant challenges, as we work through the transition and a myriad of questions. We have the collective strength and stamina to overcome hurdles. We have the

intellectual capacity to meet these challenges and turn them into opportunities. We have the opportunity to reinvent our higher education system.

We will succeed, as long as we remain focused on our students.

As the transition progresses, I have encouraged our university community to be guided by two questions when trying to resolve an issue or make a tough decision: 1) How will this enhance student success? 2) What is the right thing to do?

Faculty and staff members at each of our three campuses bring diversity of opinion, thought and work experiences to our partnership. We encourage their input, ideas and collaboration. All three campuses have strengths we can learn and benefit from.

Students on the Wausau and Marshfield campuses will see no immediate changes to course offerings. They will find the transfer process seamless to UW-Stevens Point. Students from each campus will be involved in the regional transition team. Student success is, and will always be, our priority.

This restructuring fortifies and, perhaps in ways not immediately imagined, bolsters the value of a UW-Stevens Point degree. We are all part of the UW System, one of the best in the nation. The highly regarded UW "brand" binds all 26 campuses. As students, alumni, faculty and staff members and community residents, each of us can be proud of this common commitment to high quality, accessible education.

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<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/local/2017/12/05/chancellor-transition-begins-align-two-uw-colleges-uw-stevens-point/919377001/>