

**From:** [Summers, Greg](#)  
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Colleagues,

The message below is lengthy, for which I apologize. There is not much new to report regarding the pandemic this week. The virus continues to spread dangerously within our [state](#), county, and community. But our university buildings and classrooms, thankfully, remain relatively safe by comparison. Thanks for all you are doing to maintain this trend on campus.

I am concerned, however, about the level of stress, anxiety, and exhaustion we are seeing among our students, faculty, and staff members. Mounting evidence suggests that many of our students are feeling disconnected from our academic community and are struggling to find support in our nearly virtual environment. Faculty and staff members, meanwhile, are reporting they are exhausted, working long hours teaching and helping students in multiple modalities and dealing with the unusual stresses of our COVID workplace. The long period between the beginning of fall semester and Thanksgiving is always tiring; but this year, we may need to consider some unusual interventions to help address and alleviate the stress we are all under. I'll be discussing possibilities with a variety of groups early next week, including department chairs and directors at our weekly check-in meeting on Monday. These concerns are critical to student retention and to our own collective wellbeing.

Speaking of student retention, I want to thank everyone who completed a Week 5 survey report on their students. Using the Navigate platform, we've seen a significant increase in the numbers of alerts. A larger percentage of faculty responded to a large number of requests, giving us a 48% response rate. We now have 849 students marked as at risk, a near doubling from last spring, and over 1300 individual concerns raised. Advising and care team members are already reaching out to these students. As a heads-up, if you raised some alerts, you are likely receiving emails about cases being closed. This is so you know the outcome of the contact with the students. In some cases, we are consolidating multiple alerts into one, in which case the system emails you when that has occurred. If you'd like to know the status of an alert you've raised, you can click on the link in the email and view details. Any feedback on this process is welcome and can be sent to Dean Gretel Stock ([gstock@uwsp.edu](mailto:gstock@uwsp.edu)).

Finally, I'd like to provide some additional background related to the budget planning we need to begin as we enter another state biennial budget process. The state budget process is always uncertain, but never more so than this year given the shifting financial impacts of the pandemic. Although UW System President Thompson and the Board of Regents are requesting new funding from the state, most UWs are planning for some level of reduction as a result of the enrollment and revenue fluctuations we have experienced in recent months, which may continue in the year ahead.

As many of you know, we have been working to develop a new activity-based budget allocation model for the degree-granting colleges, one that gradually moves financial resources toward the areas of our curriculum with the greatest enrollment and workload, expressed in terms of student credit hours (SCH), majors, and graduates. We're discussing with Common Council how best to utilize this approach. Regardless of how these conversations conclude, I want to share a few broad points that I hope will inform our campus discussions in the months ahead.

- At present, decisions about how to allocate budgets rest entirely with the administrators who supervise their respective areas. The chancellor decides how to allocate dollars among UWSP's four divisions, and as provost, I am responsible for making these allocations among the colleges and units of Academic Affairs. This isn't transparent, and it depends too much on the whims of those in particular administrative roles.
- Worse yet, this practice isn't strategic, either, since too often the easiest default is to either add or reduce available dollars through an even, across-the-board percentage distribution. Although this practice might seem equitable, when utilized too often over successive years of reductions, it also drains resources from those programs best positioned to grow enrollment.
- As imperfect as any set of metrics might be in guiding budget allocations, agreeing on a methodology offers the opportunity to render this decision-making process more transparent, and to empower the deans, faculty, and staff members in the colleges with greater responsibility and authority over their resources. Simply put, if faculty and staff members know what levers to pull to improve their budgets, they can make their own decisions about how best to do so.
- Finally, no budget model or method of allocation will make spending reductions easier. Models don't produce new dollars, in other words; they merely help to allocate the dollars we have. As we're all painfully aware, there is too little funding available.

In the weeks ahead, we will continue to discuss how best to make budget decisions together as an academic community. I will provide further updates as we learn more.

Greg

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