

Humanities will continue under proposed changes at UW-Stevens Point

Bernie Patterson, for USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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“The report of my death was an exaggeration.”

I’m reminded of this quote from Mark Twain (*New York Journal*, 1897) as responses come to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point’s proposal to discontinue some majors. The recommendations, made March 5, outline a path to stabilize declining enrollment, and address significant fiscal challenges.



I’m gratified by the passion of our students, faculty and alumni, who clearly and rightfully are proud of our academic programs. I am proud, too, both of the programs and those who have or will complete their degrees in them. For four hours Thursday night, we answered student questions, and heard their concerns, one of several forums scheduled.

Reaction has also led to an incorrect narrative. Allow me to clarify a few points of confusion:

- The liberal arts are not going away. English, Political Science, History, Philosophy, World Languages and Art will continue to be taught at UW-Stevens Point. Most of our students who take courses in these fields do not major in them. Approximately 80-percent of the humanities courses offered at UW-Stevens Point will continue under this proposal.
- The proposal is a starting point for the formal decision-making that lies ahead. It is also the culmination of years of strategic planning, during which we invited input from faculty and staff. We have updated the campus community on our challenges, and our academic deans and department chairs have been involved in developing our proposal. This is the beginning of a process to prepare a formal proposal, which will be reviewed by a campus governance committee of faculty, and ultimately by the UW System Board of Regents.
- All of our current students, and all who begin in the fall of 2018, will be able to complete their chosen degree path. Even if some majors are discontinued eventually, students will have every opportunity to complete their degrees in these programs. Our accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission, requires this.

Twenty-five years of my academic career was in teaching and administrative roles at a college of arts and science, so I cannot emphasize enough: A broad liberal arts education is crucial. We remain committed to ensuring every student who graduates from UW-Stevens Point is thoroughly grounded in the liberal arts, as well as prepared for a successful career path. It is critical our students learn to communicate well, solve problems, think critically and creatively, be analytical and innovative, and work well in teams. This is the value of earning a bachelor’s degree.

It is a false choice to suggest we must offer these broad skills or majors with career pathways. Both are essential, and both will continue to be offered at UW-Stevens Point.

A bit of context is helpful:

- Less than 10-percent of current UW-Stevens Point students are majoring in programs proposed to be discontinued. (This is closer to 6-percent, if we focus on a student's primary major, the one that attracted the student to UW-Stevens Point.)
- Of the students admitted to UW-Stevens Point for fall 2018, only 3.6-percent have indicated intent to major in one of the programs proposed to be discontinued.

Minors and certificates will continue to be offered in these programs. We will maintain a major in English with a narrower, more professional focus. Majors with teaching emphasis in English and History (broad field Social Science) will continue. Political Science will reposition to offer a program in Public and Global Affairs. Sociology will develop a new major in Criminal Justice, and Social Work will continue as a major. Graphic Design, the most popular Art program, will become a major. Several new interdisciplinary majors in the humanities, world languages and social sciences are being explored, including Environmental Studies.

As UW-Stevens Point has faced decades of declining state support, and more recently, declining enrollment, we have tried nearly every strategy, except cutting programs to address fiscal challenges. As I have noted in previous columns, open positions were left unfilled, contracts not renewed, administrative roles consolidated. We have implemented cost-savings, increased workloads, raised class sizes, reduced administrative spending, and nearly eliminated budgets for supplies, equipment, technology and facilities. We have restricted travel and professional development, reduced student activities, and declined for years to invest in salaries for our faculty, 95-percent of whom are paid below national averages. We have spent down our reserves, as the state Legislature mandated -- a precarious position no business would willingly employ.

In short, we have cut everywhere else.

These are painful proposals. They affect lives and dreams, our friends and neighbors. Yet, doing nothing is not the answer. As chancellor, it is my responsibility to ensure the university continues to thrive.

No organization cuts its way to greatness. Our proposal also includes ways to begin new and expand high-demand majors to meet our students' interests and the needs of our regional communities. Given our growing dependence on tuition, frozen now for five years, we must explore programs that will enhance enrollment.

These proposals intend to create a responsive, forward-looking, sustainable future for UW-Stevens Point. If you would like to know more about how we got here, or if you want to provide your own input, please visit our website (www.uwsp.edu/forinthefuture). We value constructive feedback from all of our stakeholders, on campus as well as alumni, community members, and business leaders.

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<https://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/education/2018/03/12/chancellor-humanities-continue-under-proposed-changes-uw-stevens-point/417704002/>