

UW-Stevens Point evolves to meet changing needs of students

Bernie Patterson, for USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

[Stevens Point Journal](#) – October 7, 2017

UW-Stevens Point has a 123-year history of change. Evolution has been a constant since we opened our doors in 1894 as a State Normal School.

Back then, 200 students were enrolled in teacher training courses. We became Central State Teachers College, a degree-granting institution, in 1926. In 1951, students seeking degrees in fields other than teaching could enroll in Wisconsin State College. Today, UW-Stevens Point offers 58 majors and more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs.

Fields of study changed over the years to meet the interests and demands of our students and the communities we serve. The home economics major, for example, evolved to family and consumer sciences, focusing on topics as complex as child development, consumer economics and family relationships. In 1951, no one could have imagined that computer information systems, web and digital media development or data analytics would become some of the hottest career paths in the 21st century.

That evolution continues as UW-Stevens Point responds to a changing environment. One of the hallmarks of a strong institution is the ability to graduate students in four years, and we've done that increasingly well of late. In fact, it is one of the factors measured by U.S. News and World Report, which again has UW-Stevens Point in its top 10 list of public regional universities in the 12-state Midwest area.

However, improved graduation rates coupled with a demographic dip that has put fewer students in the pipeline to graduate from high school has resulted in our enrollment declining by 15 percent in the last five years. Lower enrollment means less revenue.

With state support for UW-Stevens Point declining 25 percent in the past four years, we must increasingly rely on tuition. Tuition has been frozen for five years, yet our costs to operate the university continue to rise.

With those factors fueling our strategy, we are looking at new program possibilities that address the needs of tomorrow. Exciting growth opportunities exist for UW-Stevens Point that would maintain or increase enrollment. Our budget realities mean resources need to be strategically reallocated to fund new programs, so we are examining all of our academic and nonacademic programs. Since January, faculty and staff have provided input on priorities, goals and criteria to be used to add or, in some cases, discontinue programs.

We will reallocate resources to support enrollment growth. Investments will be made in high-demand areas, recruitment, retention and student success. Just as businesses make adjustments to remain



relevant and families adjust spending to meet changes in income or expenses, UW-Stevens Point will adjust to ensure our revenues and expenditures align. We are committed to evolving in a way that best serves our students in the future.

No final decisions have been made. Discussion are occurring across campus, and some existing units and offerings will look different. We will have preliminary decisions in time for the next UW System budget cycle, which begins in March 2018. Regardless of how this evolves, all students will be able to complete their current degree programs.

The possibility of change can be unsettling. But it can also be positive, as those completing degrees in fields besides teacher training in the past 65 years can attest. The future is ours to create.

Bernie Patterson is the chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/local/2017/10/05/chancellor-uw-stevens-point-evolves-meet-changing-needs-students/729116001/>