

Proposed

POINT FORWARD



University of Wisconsin
Stevens Point

Reimagining Our Curriculum for the Future

Executive Summary

UW-Stevens Point's *Partnership for Thriving Communities* provides a clear statement of purpose for the institution: to help the communities of central and northern Wisconsin become more vibrant, healthy, prosperous, and sustainable. As an educational institution, we accomplish this aim primarily through the facilitation of teaching and learning, leveraging the knowledge of our students, faculty, and staff to improve the region.

Strategic focus is required to fulfill this mission in an era of limited financial resources, demographic challenges, and rising competition. The fact that UW-Stevens Point is presently facing a substantial financial deficit, meaning that our spending annually exceeds our revenue, makes the need for clear priorities even more urgent.

This document discusses Academic Affairs' path forward for addressing our fiscal challenges while advancing our mission and purpose. Sections include the following topics:

- An explanation of [Why We Must Restructure Our Curriculum](#). Efforts to increase enrollment, retention, and other budget cuts are not sufficient to restore balance between revenue and expenditures. In order to give students the education they deserve we must offer fewer, better-resourced programs that can deliver rigorous, high quality educational experiences.
- A review of the [Guiding Principles](#) that impact decision making regarding the curriculum. These include a national move among students towards career pathways, the need for academic programs to be well resourced, and a commitment to strengthening both our academic majors as well as the liberal arts core to ensure students graduate with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they will need to be successful in the future.
- A review of recommendations concerning [Program Eliminations, Program Investments, and Administrative Restructuring](#). While no programs are obviously failing by a standard set of metrics, what we have instead are too many programs that are modestly successful at drawing students to the university. Eliminating some majors while simultaneously investing in other new and expanded majors will strengthen our ability to meet student and regional needs. Because organizational structure follows curriculum, these changes will likely necessitate the reorganization of colleges and departments.
- A call to action regarding [Reimagining the Liberal Arts](#). We must resist the false choice between providing a broad, well-rounded education or narrow professional and vocational pathways. As one strategy, we will reimagine traditional liberal arts majors for students seeking applied learning to improve their career potential. Second, we will strengthen our core liberal arts curriculum. Preparing students for engaged citizenship, ensuring that they graduate as broadly educated and well-rounded lifelong learners, and equipping them with the kinds of professional skills that we know are essential for career success in any field—these are things we owe to all students regardless of major.
- A description of [The Formal Process Ahead](#) to review and finalize recommended changes.

There is no question that this proposed restructuring of UW-Stevens Point's academic curriculum will be difficult, disconcerting, and painful. Change of this magnitude is never easy. Yet curricular innovation can also be exciting, creative, and even exhilarating, especially when we find better ways to identify and meet the needs of the students we serve. If we accept the need for change and we confront and solve the financial issues currently facing the institution, we can create a new identity for the regional public university in the twenty-first century. UW-Stevens Point can move forward with fiscal stability, new opportunities to build programs and grow enrollment, and renewed capacity to improve our service to the students and communities of central and northern Wisconsin.

Why We Must Restructure Our Curriculum

UW-Stevens Point has reached a moment in which the elimination of under-enrolled majors is the only realistic way to repair our budget and simultaneously fund the creation and expansion of programs with higher student demand. Within Academic Affairs over the years, we have tried nearly every other strategy except this approach, from improving the marketing, recruitment, and retention strategies of enrollment management to endlessly searching for cost-savings until efficiency became pervasive austerity. We have increased workloads, raised class sizes, reduced administrative spending, and nearly eliminated budgets for supplies, equipment, technology and facilities. We have restricted travel, sabbaticals, and other professional development, and declined for years to invest in salaries for our faculty and staff members. We have squeezed administrative support functions to a point where we are failing to provide badly needed services, especially in those areas on which we depend regardless of enrollment. In Information Technology alone, nine and a half positions have been lost in the past three years, a number that will likely grow further in the current restructuring—this at a time when the demands on their services and expertise are greater than ever.

In short, we have “lived without” across the entire Division of Academic Affairs, disadvantaging nearly all of our programs and services, and most importantly, undermining the education we provide our students. There is a limit to how long a university can thrive under these kinds of across-the-board austerity measures and remain a vital and thriving institution, and we have reached it. Restructuring our curriculum will not solve all these financial shortcomings by itself. Nevertheless, given our growing dependence on tuition and the current imbalance between expenditures and revenue, our only remaining alternative is to examine our curriculum, an operational area we have modestly adjusted in the past but never fundamentally restructured.

In doing so, we confront this simple but vital question: **Do we continue to offer the current number of majors, all of which will be chronically under-resourced and unable to serve students effectively, or do we reduce our program array so that the majors we offer, though fewer in number, are all adequately resourced and able to deliver the kind of rigorous, high-quality, and valuable education that our students deserve? We must choose the latter path, doing so in a way that maximizes potential enrollment and the service we provide to the region.**

As administrators and faculty members, we should acknowledge a tension inherent in the governance process surrounding budget-driven curricular decisions. Shared governance assigns responsibility for the content of the curriculum to the faculty, where it rightly belongs, while administration manages the financial resources available to serve students. The provost and deans collectively bridge these two functions as academic officers, each with faculty credentials but charged with the task of managing financial resources. In moments such as these, where fiscal realities demand curricular restructuring, the gray area between curriculum and budget becomes especially fraught. Faculty are understandably reluctant to play a role in eliminating the jobs of their colleagues. Administrators are understandably reluctant to define curriculum. At UW-Stevens Point, the resulting impasse has paralyzed the institution for years, preventing us from recognizing our changing circumstances and adapting with the appropriate creative urgency and curricular innovation. To escape this institutional inertia, we need to utilize the governance process as much as possible to advance a constructive dialogue among students, faculty, staff, and administration regarding the institution's future identity.

Engaging in this dialogue requires acknowledging several hard truths about the way our economic circumstances have changed over the years. UW-Stevens Point is not a university in jeopardy of failing. Yet we have failed to adapt to a changing market for higher education. Simply put, we cannot continue to be the same kind of comprehensive university that we became by the 1970s, a smaller version of the larger research institutions like UW-Madison that dominate the landscape of American higher education.

- Public funding then was plentiful, making the relative cost to individual students low. In fact, until the 1970s tuition for most in-state students at UW-Stevens Point was free and fees were modest. Today, public funding has declined dramatically and the relative cost to students is high.
- Demographic trends favored growth in higher education then. Today, in Wisconsin and throughout the Midwest, they no longer do.
- Universities then possessed a near monopoly on credentialing for access to better jobs and salaries in a burgeoning economy. Today, although baccalaureate degrees continue to offer substantial returns on investment, employers have demonstrated a willingness—even a preference—to consider other alternatives. Students have responded well to institutions offering trainings, certificates and degrees at a lower cost, with faster completion, and in ways that let them balance work, family, and school. The [innovations of the information age](#) are making these [alternatives](#) increasingly viable.

In this rapidly changing environment, UW-Stevens Point must adapt by selecting core specializations and striving to offer the best programs possible within these areas. The operative question is this: **If we can no longer function as a broadly comprehensive institution, then how best can we forge a new, more focused identity for the twenty-first century?**

Fortunately, we have already defined this identity in the *Partnership for Thriving Communities*. Our strategic plan was crafted over a period of years through an open, collaborative, and thoughtful process with broad input from campus and community stakeholders. Since its completion, this plan has been further refined and sharpened, again with broad input from students, faculty, staff, and community members. As a result, UW-Stevens Point already has a clear vision and sense of purpose around which to make these resource decisions. What we need to do now is implement this vision, connecting strategic goals to resource allocation by taking seriously the guiding principles outlined below.

Guiding Principles

In deciding how best to restructure our curriculum at UW-Stevens Point, it is clear that we do not have majors that are obviously failing by a standard set of metrics. What we have instead are too many programs that are modestly successful at drawing students to the university, a dynamic that has created our current fiscal deficit. Dramatic improvements to our four-year graduation rates have added to our current predicament, and it is important to remind ourselves that this has been a tremendous achievement for our students that we should continue to advance. Recent state budget reductions and a six-year tuition freeze have also certainly contributed to this situation. But just as certainly, we must acknowledge that our declining state support has stretched over decades, not years, and stems more from long-term structural factors than short-term issues such as partisan politics or fluctuations in the economy. What's more, the resulting shifting of expenses to students and families in the form of rising tuition and fees has made them increasingly wary of the cost of higher education and understandably sensitive to the return they will get on their substantial investments.

Addressing this situation requires attention to three broad variables: the academic mission of the university as defined in the *Partnership for Thriving Communities*, the need to be financially responsible, and the many opportunity costs that are part of every resource decision. It is especially easy to forget these latter opportunity costs, but they are among the most important factors we must consider. With each decision to invest in one program, there is a simultaneous decision not to invest in many others. Making sound resource decisions therefore involves more than weighing the merits of individual programs in isolation. Rather, we should balance the resources consumed by a particular program and the relative benefits it brings to students and the university against the very same variables associated with alternative programs for which those resources might be used.

With these broad considerations in mind, our efforts to move UW-Stevens Point toward a sustainable fiscal balance will involve changes to the academic curriculum shaped by the following guiding principles:

1. The most relevant metrics related to the curriculum are the enrollment trend lines of academic programs in which students are choosing to major. In today's environment, these trends are shaped most directly by the clarity of [career pathways](#) offered in each major and the potential return on investment that students perceive.
2. Because majors are the centerpiece of our educational offerings, we must ensure that every degree we make available to students is well resourced. This includes both curricular offerings and the academic support services on which students depend to succeed.
3. If we cannot resource a program in a manner that ensures the major's rigor, quality, and ultimate value to students, it is unethical to continue offering it.
4. Correcting our present deficit necessarily entails restructuring: reducing the number of programs overall, with a corresponding reduction in personnel, looking especially at those majors with declining enrollment trend lines as well as those functioning as secondary majors; and simultaneously investing in programs with greater potential to draw new students to the institution.
5. In this restructuring, we must strengthen, not just preserve, the liberal arts core of all our baccalaureate degrees to ensure that every student graduates with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives this provides.
6. Moving forward, we must be determined to research, identify, and meet a variety of student needs, both credit and non-credit for traditional and non-traditional students, ensuring that each enrollment opportunity has a clearly defined audience and helps students accomplish clearly defined career outcomes.

Summarizing these principles, we can say the following:

The curricular mission of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is to prepare graduates for successful careers and engaged citizenship, both of which hinge on developing a passion for learning and the skills needed to continue educating themselves over a lifetime. This approach requires graduates to have broad knowledge of the world as well as deep experience and achievement in a specific field of inquiry; intellectual skills such as critical thinking, communication, analysis, and problem-solving; and a strong sense of personal, social, and environmental responsibility. Above all our distinct character as a regional public university emphasizes applied learning—putting knowledge to work in the service of communities that are complex, diverse, and ever changing.

Program Eliminations, Program Investments, and Administrative Restructuring

Based on the parameters outlined above, we make the following recommendations for restructuring UW-Stevens Point's academic curriculum.

First, we must recognize a difficult but unavoidable development that has been apparent for years, particularly among regional public universities like ours: *majors* in the traditional liberal arts disciplines, especially the humanities and social sciences, do not have the same appeal to students nor the same value in opening career pathways as they once did. Consequently, the majors we recommend for elimination are listed below.

MAJORS	DEGREE	NOTES
American Studies	BA, BS	
Art	BA, BFA	Graphic Design will continue as a distinct major
English	BA	English for Teacher Certification will continue
French	BA	
Geography	BS	
Geoscience	BS	
German	BA	
History	BA, BS	Social Science for Teacher Certification will continue
Music Literature	BM	
Philosophy	BA, BS	
Political Science	BA, BS	
Sociology	BA, BS	Social Work will continue
Spanish	BA	

Please Note: It is vital to distinguish between *majors* in the traditional liberal arts, majors in liberal arts with specific professional pathways, and the *broad liberal education* we need to strengthen for all our graduates.

- Although we will discontinue a variety of traditional discipline-specific liberal arts majors, we will absolutely continue to offer coursework in these disciplines. Minors in English, Art, History, Philosophy and other disciplines will continue to be available, as will coursework in the General Education Program and specific majors where required.
- We recommend that the faculty create new offerings in the humanities and social sciences, some with more clearly defined career pathways and others with an interdisciplinary focus in the liberal arts. (See our recommendations further below.)
- **Students currently enrolled in any formally discontinued major will be guaranteed the opportunity to complete their degrees.**

We also intend this restructuring to invest in the expansion of numerous academic programs, both existing and new, with demonstrated value to the region and student demand. The list of potential programs below is only a beginning. It does not include the possibility that some traditional liberal arts majors might take a professional turn, nor does it include the new associate degrees that we will develop for our branch campuses. In some cases, these programs have been on faculty “to-do” lists for years, but we simply lacked the resources to implement them. Thus, regional needs and student demand have gone unmet, and the tuition dollars these opportunities might have generated have been lost to the university.

MAJORS	DEGREE	NOTES
Chemical Engineering	BS	Expanded
Computer Information Systems	BS	Expanded
Conservation Law Enforcement	BS	Current option elevated to a major
Finance	BS	Current option elevated to a major
Fire Science	BS	Current option elevated to a major
Graphic Design	BFA	Current option elevated to a major
Management	BS	Current option elevated to a major
Marketing	BS	Current option elevated to a major
Environmental Engineering	BS	New program
Ecosystem Design and Remediation	BS	New program
Captive Wildlife	BS	New program
Aquaculture/Aquaponics	BS	New program
Geographic Information Science	BS, MS (Flex)	New program
Master of Business Administration	MBA	New program
Master of Natural Resources	MNR	New program
Doctor of Physical Therapy	DPT	New program

In making these difficult recommendations, it is important to note that this is not a judgment on the inherent value of majors in the liberal arts nor the outstanding work and accomplishments of the students, faculty, and staff members who have participated in these programs over the years. Graduates in the traditional liberal arts earn degrees whose value is well demonstrated in [numerous studies](#), and their accomplishments are impressive. But enrollments show that twenty-first century students consider traditional liberal arts majors too distant from the careers available to them in central and northern Wisconsin. Even if that perception could be overcome, it remains true that if UW-Stevens Point continues to offer the wide array of degrees we currently provide, our institution will remain financially unsustainable.

New academic curricula will likely also require new organizational structures. Given that organization should follow curriculum and not the other way around, planning our new structure will require the same input from across campus as our curricular recommendations. Although we do not yet know how these plans will take shape, we intend to explore one especially significant possibility: **reorganizing our academic programs more efficiently by moving from five colleges down to four.**

Eliminating a single dean's position will not save a great deal of money. However, we should create an organizational structure that best facilitates the educational outcomes we strive to achieve for our students. New ways of organizing curriculum can highlight faculty and programmatic strength that has long been present at UW-Stevens Point but prevented from flourishing by our historic structures. For example, the College of Letters and Science has long had an impressive variety of environmental scholars in the humanities and social sciences, yet doing the truly interdisciplinary work of teaching in environmental studies has proven difficult. Much the same could be said for faculty members across campus with expertise in areas connected to design. Bringing such faculty members together in reimagined, cohesive units will help to facilitate new programs and create opportunities for students that we have long struggled to provide.

However we choose to reorganize, the proposed restructuring of UW-Stevens Point's curriculum will affect every college, department, and unit within Academic Affairs. We must all be prepared to consider changes and shoulder the responsibility of improving the education we offer students.

Reimagining the Liberal Arts

Discussions in which stakeholders are forced to weigh the relative value of various degrees are often portrayed as stark and largely false choices: Is a university's primary role to prepare engaged citizens and lifelong learners or good employees? Do we focus on providing a broad, well-rounded education or narrow professional and vocational abilities? **The answer in each case is obviously both.** We cannot prepare students to succeed in the complex world of the twenty-first century without delivering both, and we cannot do that if we confine the discussion to the relative value of different majors.

Equipping students with intellectual skills such as critical thinking, communication, and analysis; the ability to work well in teams across disciplines to solve problems; and a strong sense of personal, social, and environmental responsibility—these are the traits we rightly claim to offer students through the study of the liberal arts. If these skills and values were truly confined only to *majors* in the liberal arts disciplines, then we would be failing the vast majority of the students we graduate with degrees in business, health, natural resources, STEM, and other professional areas. Surely, this cannot be the case. Every degree we offer at UW-Stevens Point should equip our graduates with every one of these attributes.

One way to deliver on this promise is **to seize the opportunity to reimagine traditional liberal arts disciplines for students seeking applied learning to improve their career potential.**

Certainly, we will work to maintain general interdisciplinary degrees in the liberal arts, such as a broad major in the humanities or world languages, and new or expanded programs in fields such as International Studies or Environmental Studies. But we must also consider programs that allow students to study the liberal arts in order to build specific skills and achieve career-oriented outcomes. For example:

- Rather than a general major in English, can we create a more focused program for professional writing and publishing in a digital age?
- Instead of comprehensive majors in French, German, and Spanish, how can we equip graduates in health and business careers with the language and intercultural skills they might need to do their jobs in a diverse global society?
- Instead of a Philosophy major, can we develop offerings in applied ethics for the next generation of professional leaders?
- In place of broad majors in Political Science and Sociology, can we explore the creation of more career-minded programs in Public Affairs, Criminology, or Legal Studies?

As a regional public university, these are the kinds of educational needs that we must be prepared to meet.

A second and equally important strategy will be to **strengthen the role and purpose of the liberal arts disciplines in the university's core curriculum**, our General Education Program (GEP), which every student at UW-Stevens Point is required to complete. The new GEP was launched in 2013 following a nearly six-year process to revise our former General Degree Requirements. The GEP has been remarkably successful in terms of curricular efficiency. Reducing the number of credits required from nearly seventy to roughly forty has produced a dramatic increase in the university's four-year graduation rate, a tremendous outcome for our students. Yet the GEP remains essentially a laundry list of distribution requirements with little connection to one another and few intentional curricular pathways. [We can and must do better for our students](#), something we know with clarity having completed the first five-year cycle of learning assessment in the GEP.

Re-examining our core curriculum will be especially important as we join with UW-Marathon County and UW-Marshfield/Wood County. At these institutions, where the core curriculum is largely *the* curriculum, faculty have long focused on how best to prepare students for a great variety of baccalaureate degrees. Current faculty and staff members at UW-Stevens Point will surely benefit from the experience and expertise of our new colleagues.

The Formal Process Ahead

Finally, it is important to understand that although this document summarizes current administrative judgments, it does not yet comprise a formal proposal under any particular policy. Because it is possible that some of these program eliminations will result in the layoff of tenured faculty members as described by [Regent Policy Document \(RPD\) 20-24](#), Section II, we will submit the formal proposals stipulated in this policy later. As a first step, we will ask the UW-Stevens Point Common Council immediately to create the appropriate governance committee charged with receiving and reviewing these proposals. This committee has been designated as a Consultative Committee in draft campus policy designed to implement RPD 20-24. If at some point during the ensuing process it becomes clear that tenured positions will not be eliminated as the result of a particular program discontinuance, we will shift the proposal in question to the procedures outlined in [UW System Administrative Policy 102, Section 3.4](#).

The judgments we have reached, formally speaking, *are administrative recommendations* subject to review: first by the Consultative Committee, then by the chancellor, and ultimately by the UW System Board of Regents. To facilitate a collaborative dialogue, we will not suspend admissions to the programs we have now proposed for elimination. In addition, we will not submit formal proposals to the Consultative Committee before August 1, 2018. Under RPD 20-24, the Consultative Committee has three months to study the proposals and issue its own recommendations to the chancellor. Our hope is that delaying this process until August will allow the committee to organize and study issues during the summer months, and to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the administration as we fine-tune and formalize these proposals. This timeline also aligns with the proposed restructuring of the UW Colleges, which will make UW-Marathon County and UW-Marshfield/Wood County branch campuses of UW-Stevens Point in July.

We cannot delay, or worse yet avoid, this reimagining of UW-Stevens Point's curriculum. At the same time, however, we must ensure that our decision making process involves broad and meaningful input from the campus community.