

International students, staff welcome

Bernie Patterson, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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It's always a treat to attend the international dinner at UW-Stevens Point, a showcase of our international students' talent and food from around the world. This year was especially meaningful in light of some trepidation about whether students from other countries are welcome in the United States.

Let me assure you, international students, faculty and staff are indeed welcome at UW-Stevens Point. In fact, we need them here.

Diversity plays an important role on our campus. The ethnic, racial and religious diversity of our students, faculty and staff members enriches our university and our community. It contributes to learning in and out of the classroom for everyone.

UW-Stevens Point, I'm proud to say, has 165 students from 34 different countries. About 40 percent are from China. Other top countries of origin are South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Colombia.

Most of our international students come from big cities. A comparison done a few years ago showed they came from cities with an average population of 1.3 million – ten times larger than the average hometown of Wisconsin students of 13,000 people.

They are attracted to a college experience at a safe, supportive university. These students make our campus and our community better. They help us see how we are connected globally. We are enriched by their passion, insight, curiosity and knowledge.

We are also enriched when we step beyond what is familiar. Take, for example, Tim and Mindy Borchardt. When they were students at UW-Stevens Point in the 1970s, they became part of the International Friendship Program on campus. They've continued to serve as friends for more than 30 years.

Each year, about 25 of our international students are introduced to community residents through the International Friendship Program. Central Wisconsin families welcome these students to their homes, introduce them to other family and friends and to activities around town. They get together once or twice a month. For students, it takes the edge off being thousands of miles from home.

For community members, it expands cross-cultural understanding. Some maintain language skills from another country. Others, like the Regnier family, have been part of the Friendship program for a second generation. Many maintain friendships long after students graduate. Friendship program participants Steve and Mary Beth Slezak traveled to China, where Dr. Steve officiated at the wedding ceremony for two of our international students. Mary Beth says the program is an amazing experience. "Yizhou and Latrell (Li) have added so much to our lives. We are grateful for the opportunity."



International students also bring economic benefit to the region and state. Based on 2015-16 data from the U.S. Departments of Education and Commerce, international students at UW-Stevens Point contributed \$4.8 million and supported 31 jobs. Nationwide, international students contribute \$32.8 billion to the economy and support more than 400,000 jobs.

UW-Stevens Point was a pioneer in developing an international studies program. Our campus has capacity for students from other countries, as well as all qualified Wisconsin students. We provide international students and visiting scholars with immigration services, intensive English as a second language instruction, advising and campus and community programming.

We prepare all of our students to succeed in a global society. We support actions that advance the learning process and welcome those who contribute in many ways to this institution and our country. UW-Stevens Point is joining the #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign among universities on social media. See a short video at our You Tube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAvTsrK0Dc8>

You can be a bigger part of a welcoming, inclusive community. Consider participating in:

- Portage County Cultural Festival – this daylong event is Saturday, May 6, at SPASH.
- International Friendship Program at UW-Stevens Point. Call 715-346-2226 to be matched with an international student in September.

Both will broaden your cross-cultural understanding and enrich your life.

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

<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/local/2017/04/28/chancellor-international-students-staff-welcome/100997334/>