

Surprises about UW-Stevens Point budget cuts

Bernie Patterson, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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Over the past five weeks, I've held fourth briefings with community leaders about the impact of state budget cuts on UW-Stevens Point. Much of the information was previously provided to campus and the community about the \$6.5 million cut in state support to our campus. Yet several attending said they were surprised to learn some of these facts.

To illuminate aspects that surprised some, I summarize a few key points:

- State support of UW-Stevens Point has declined from 50 percent in 1972-73 to 13 percent in 2015-16. If this trend continues, based on standard mathematical formula, we will receive zero state support in nine years.
- To suggest the decline in state support is “only 3 percent” is misleading. While the \$6.5 million cut is 2.97 percent of all our funding sources, most of them – including student financial aid, state and federal grants – can only be used for specific, designated purposes. The cut was a 17 percent decline in state support of general purpose revenue and segregated funds.
- We have spent down fund balances – so-called reserves – by 16 percent between fiscal years 2014 and 2015. It's important to note that many of these one-time dollars are obligated for debt service, software licenses and other areas over which we have no discretion.
- To absorb the cuts, 76 positions were eliminated. We canceled searches, did not renew some contracts and accepted early retirements, resignations and participation in a voluntary separation program. One-third of those were teaching positions, which has had a direct impact on the classroom. Several outstanding faculty members resigned in the past year to take positions in other states for higher salaries. Fewer courses were offered, notably in high demand Life Sciences, Computer Science, Accounting and Business.
- Wisconsin has the lowest expenditures per degree granted among public four-year institutions in the Midwest at \$65,785. In Illinois, the cost per degree is \$89,660; in Minnesota, it is \$78,613, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. While this speaks to efficiency in Wisconsin, if taken too far, a quest for efficiency can be detrimental to any organization's effectiveness.



- A person with a bachelor's degree will earn on average \$1 million more in his or her working years than someone without a four-year degree. The value of a college education goes far beyond earnings power.
- Much attention around the state has focused on faculty salaries. Some context is useful. Nearly 95 percent of UW-Stevens Point faculty members are paid less than the national average by discipline and rank. The gap is widening, with 58 percent paid at least \$10,000 a year below the national average in 2015 compared to 45 percent in 2013.

At UW-Stevens Point, the average assistant professor, who has seven years of experience, earns an annual salary of \$54,687. An associate professor with 14.7 years' experience on average, earns \$59,591 annually. Professors, with an average 25 years of experience, have average salaries of \$72,292 here.

Those salaries are above the average wages in Portage County. Yet more than 70 percent of those county workers over age 25 do not have bachelor's degrees. Faculty who attain Ph.D.'s in their discipline have 20 to 22 years of schooling – more than attorneys, dentists and engineers.

If you are as concerned about these issues as I am, I ask you to consider talking to your neighbors and contacting your legislators. Join me in speaking up about the benefits of public higher education and impact of these losses. If we are to retain quality, accessible education in Wisconsin and help strengthen and shape the state's future, we need adequate funding for our universities.

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

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