

Start of school begins journey

Bernie Patterson, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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We are about to begin what is undoubtedly the most exciting week at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. We welcome new students, who will move into the residence halls Sept. 1. They will participate in a variety of Welcome Week activities to familiarize them with campus, their classrooms and the community.

We are committed to ensuring the learning environment is positive, safe, nurturing and mind expanding. UW-Stevens Point faculty and staff members are dedicated to helping students succeed and connecting them to resources if challenges arise. Our Dean of Students office focuses on enhancing the learning experience by creating a culture of care, fostering personal responsibility and encouraging involvement as local and global citizens.

Among the social and informational activities during Welcome Week, first-year students attend a program on sexual assault prevention and reporting and another on diversity. They learn about processes in place to hold students accountable for their actions. They are also required to take an online course that illuminates consent and respect. These are a few of the ways we encourage personal responsibility during college years and through life.

We are committed to ensuring the living environment also is safe, welcoming and fun. Residence hall directors and community advisers on each hall floor plan a variety of activities to help new students get involved and make new friends.

Local businesses and organizations will be on hand during a campus picnic Sept. 2 to explain options for getting involved on and off campus. More than 220 student organizations and 25 intramural sports are available so students can pursue their passions and develop new ones.

Fewer students are attending UW-Stevens Point this fall. Enrollment has declined in recent years for two reasons:

- Changing demographics result in smaller high school graduating classes.
- Students are graduating from UW-Stevens Point sooner, thanks in part to changes in general education requirements. We're proud to say our four-year graduation rate has improved by 11 percentage points since 2007.

These students will be our neighbors for the next several years. To help understand a little more about our new students and neighbors, I often glance at the Beloit College Mindset list. For the incoming class of 2020, many of whom were born in 1998:



- There has always been a digital swap meet called eBay.
- Each year they've been alive, the U.S. population has grown by more than one million Latinos.
- West Nile has always been a virus found in the United States.
- Bluetooth has always been keeping us wireless and synchronized.
- John Elway and Wayne Gretzky have always been retired.

The list gives me some context as I meet students. Equally important is the context UW-Stevens Point provides students for launching successful college experiences and careers. UW-Stevens Point faculty and staff exist to help students prepare to lead meaningful lives.

We do this in the classroom, lab and studio -- and beyond the walls of academic buildings. While coursework is the foundation of a college education, the life learning that occurs transcends skills needed for the workforce.

Pointers learn to develop big ideas, ask big questions, to communicate clearly and with confidence. They are challenged to think critically and across disciplines. They are encouraged to dig deeper. Be curious. Be creative. Make connections. Keep an open mind. In doing so, they learn a vital life lesson: to understand and respect individual differences. They are prepared to advance the common good.

Our students learn to build relationships – with students, mentors, faculty, staff members and the community. These relationships support, guide, challenge and inspire students well beyond their college years, and may provide a network for future employment.

Our students build capacity to solve problems, to adapt to what life dishes out.

Education at UW-Stevens Point helps students identify the life they want to lead, the values and the skills that define success for them personally and professionally. Our new students will grow in ways most cannot fathom their first week on campus.

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

<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/life/2016/08/26/chancellor-start-school-begins-journey/89378168/>