This is an exciting week at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, when we welcome new students for the fall semester. On- and off-campus during the next week, you will notice more people, more activity and enthusiasm born by the start of something new. We are returning to traditions of yesterday, looking to our past to enrich the future. We will begin the 2013-14 school year with a convocation ceremony. It’s an opportunity for new students to build academic and social connections to UWSP, and an opportunity for faculty and staff members to show they stand ready to support students as they pursue their education.

Think of convocation as a complementary bookend with the commencement ceremony, which celebrates the achievements of our graduates. Faculty, staff members and first-year students will participate in this academic introduction to the university on Friday.

Education is a partnership, a shared responsibility that reaches beyond the campus into the community. We all help prepare students for the future. When you hire students as part-time employees, you help educate them. When you attend a performance on campus, you help students learn. When you greet them at church or volunteer with them at community organizations, you enrich their educational experience.

Education is a lifelong progression of teaching and learning, fueled by a collective willingness to share and discuss ideas in a climate of mutual trust and respect. We have much to teach one another, and we have much to learn. As part of our convocation ceremony, we will ask students, faculty and staff to pledge a covenant. This is a formal, thoughtful, serious promise we make to ourselves and others. The agreement binds us together through a set of mutual responsibilities in the Pointer community.

For faculty and staff members, it is a promise to help support our students during their educational journey. We will pledge our time, our expertise, our generosity and our patience in the service of teaching and learning.

For students, the covenant encourages them to find courage to discover, engage in the learning community and put their education to work to make the world a better place. As Pointers, their mission is to see the world from new perspectives, whether cultural, educational or based on new experiences. Honing new intellectual skills, cultivating an understanding of the past, studying other languages, ethnicities and beliefs, becoming involved in community efforts or studying abroad are among the ways their perspectives will grow.

Pointers will be challenged to engage, to find the connections between themselves and the world around them. This requires both humility and confidence, respect and recognition that respective individual differences strengthen who we are.

This growth prepares Pointers for their careers after graduation, where they can strive for lifelong learning and apply what they’ve learned to serve a larger community. We welcome our new and returning students, and we thank you for partnering with us in the incredible opportunity to help them grow, learn and succeed.

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