

State support needed to recruit, retain top faculty, staff

"It's infinitely harder to rebuild greatness once it's been dismantled." A year ago, The Chronicle of Higher Education attributed those words to Jonathan R. Cole, a professor and former provost at Columbia University.

As the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point heads into a new year, we think about those words in the context of our outstanding academic programs. Since its founding in 1894, the university has been a source of pride for central and northern Wisconsin. An early champion of sustainability and health, a promoter of arts and culture and a driver of economic prosperity, UWSP is one of the nation's top regional universities.

However, greatness cannot be built and then abandoned. Maintaining greatness requires continual care and investment.

In recent remarks to the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents, UW System President Kevin Reilly said the faculty and staff "... are the heart and soul of the university system." He went on to describe how university system employees have been asked to cope with salary freezes, mandated unpaid furloughs and increases in the cost of benefits in the past three years — all contributing to a substantial reduction in take-home pay for faculty and staff.

At UWSP, faculty and staff remain dedicated to providing students the highest quality education for a reasonable cost. However, as a result of these pay cuts, we are starting to experience significant losses of faculty and staff. We also sometimes struggle to replace them. In fact, 43 percent of job offers made by the university are rejected by the first-choice candidate. Why? One answer is found in com-



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paring salaries. For example, out of 338 UWSP faculty members, nearly 90 percent are paid less than the average salary of faculty at 262 public peer institutions nationwide, taking into account discipline and rank.

While some might argue salaries in central Wisconsin can be less because the cost of living here is relatively low, reports from the Council for Community and Economic Research show central Wisconsin has a higher cost of living than cities such as Atlanta, Spokane, Wash., San Antonio, Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Neb.

At UWSP, we are taking steps to improve salaries for employees by using revenues from improving efficiencies, increasing student retention and, where necessary, reducing or eliminating existing programming.

But with a total need that runs into the millions of dollars, we are fighting an uphill battle. By ourselves, it will take us more than a decade to raise university salaries to the average level at comparable institutions, and by then it may be too late to retain the talented faculty and staff that make a UW System education so outstanding.

Only with renewed investment from the state can UWSP recruit and retain the best faculty and staff and provide the best education possible for the people of our state.

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