



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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June 28, 2021

Chancellor Thomas Gibson
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
2100 Main
Stevens Point, WI 54481

Dear Chancellor Gibson:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on 5A: finances, including implementation of the strategic plan, enrollment data, and operational efficiencies. No further reports are required.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2023. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2028 – 2029.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Jeffrey Rosen (jrosen@hlcommission.org).

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: June 28, 2021

STAFF LIAISON: Jeffrey Rosen

REVIEWED BY: Sherilyn W. Poole

INSTITUTION: University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. Thomas Gibson, Chancellor

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 5/1/2020 on 5A: finances, including implementation of the strategic plan, enrollment data, and operational efficiencies.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2019 Comprehensive Evaluation and should include (1) the strategic plan developed out of the Point Forward initiative (2) a progress report on plan implementation and (3) the most current enrollment and financial results of university operations.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The interim report was organized in sections including an introduction, notable events since the reaffirmation visit, the three areas of focus, conclusions and steps ahead. Each section includes descriptions of the activities implemented and planned to address the areas of focus. Hyperlinks in the text send the reader to resources which document and support activities and the outcomes. Tables in the text provide data showing how CW Stevens Point compares to the other institutions in the University of Wisconsin System.

REPORT SUMMARY: Between April 2020 and January 2021, several changes in senior administration personnel occurred. A new position, Chief Marketing and Enrollment Officer, was created to organize and lead a newly combined operation focused on recruiting, marketing, and communications. A new Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer began in June 2020 and a new Chancellor assumed his position in January 2021. These individuals were integral in leading the responses to the areas of focus. The interim report also identified the issues which had to be addressed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which included enrollment, teaching modalities, residential occupancy, expenditures for personal protective equipment, and other operational activities. Each section of the interim report includes comprehensive descriptions of the activities, initiatives, results, and plans to improve finances, enrollment, strategic planning, and operational efficiencies. The interim report included conclusions and future steps.

REPORT ANALYSIS: Areas of focus one and two required the University to provide a description of the development of the strategic plan and describe progress implementing the plan. In August 2019, university representatives and stakeholders participated in a workshop guided by the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP). The Planning Institute 2, Developing and Implementing a Strategic Plan, provided direction for the work which needed to be completed. Following the workshop, Chancellor Patterson “charged the Integrated Planning and Advisory Council (IPAC) to engage in creating a new strategic plan.” Over the next several months, the IPAC collected data and information from faculty, students, and staff at the three campuses through “appreciative inquiry surveys, visioning sessions, and consensus workshops.” The results of this work were the creation of a draft vision statement and high-level strategic plan goals. These were reviewed and approved by the Common Council and Chancellor Patterson in spring 2020. Five strategic themes and high-level goals guide the implementation of the strategic plan. The five themes are:

- Align financial model with institutional vision,
- Offer programs to serve the lifelong learner,
- Enhance the student experience,
- Serve our communities by expanding partnerships and connections, and
- Enhance collaboration.

In January 2021, Chancellor Gibson assumed his new role and “requested modest refinements of the vision and background...the themes and high-level goals...to emphasize three strategic imperatives: enrollment growth, enhancing academic excellence, and promoting equity, diversity, and inclusivity in all we do.” To ensure senior administrative oversight and responsibility for the strategic plan thematic goals, strategies, and tactics, Chancellor Gibson assigned executive sponsorship to each thematic area. Implementation of the strategic plan themes is being organized by IPAC. The work of implementation will proceed over a five-year timeframe.

Area of focus three required the University to describe the “most current enrollment and financial results of university operations.” At the time of the reaffirmation visit in 2019 UW Stevens Point was in the process of incorporating two branch campuses into its structure and facing a significant enrollment decline on all three campuses. A table included in the interim report showed enrollment numbers in various categories for the 2016 through 2020 Fall semesters for the main campus and the two branch campuses. These data confirm significant enrollment declines at all three campuses. Campus leaders reviewed the typical student profile of the university – in-state, undergraduate resident – to identify ways to expand the prospective student pool. The UW System provided support for increasing enrollment by making strategic investments to help UW Stevens Point.

- Changes to the University of Wisconsin System policies regarding cost-recovery programs and tuition increases for existing cost-recovery programs increased the

main campus fiscal bottom line. Tuition increases were implemented in several graduate programs: M.B.A. in Applied Leadership and Decision-Making, M.S. in Athletic Training, and the Ed.D. in Educational Sustainability. In addition to “raising the academic profile of the institution” resulting in an increase in the University’s bottom line, these graduate programs help boost undergraduate enrollment by establishing a “pipeline to these high demand graduate programs.”

- UW System Administration (UWSA) provided one-time funds to UW Stevens Point “to assist with branch campus recruitment, hire an outside firm to develop campus branding and marketing strategies, hire a consultant to develop new student recruitment strategies, increase campus marketing efforts, support the development of a new Doctor of Physical Therapy program, and expand Human Services and Social Work programs on the Wausau branch campus”,
- The UWSA Foundation increased its support through increased student scholarships, and
- UWSA committed to supporting branch campuses through fiscal year 2021. Receiving institutions would become financially responsible for branch campuses in FY 2022.

The University has also focused on expanding its participation in the UW Extended Campus. The same core curriculum for these online degree programs is provided at all UW participating institutions. UW Stevens Point participates in nine of these collaborative programs. To strengthen Activity-Based Academic Budgeting, UW Stevens Point developed an academic budgeting and planning model. The model is designed to incentivize “student credit hour production, the number of academic majors, and the number of graduates.” The model identifies “long term trends where budget support should shift.” This information helps the Provost establish necessary budget reductions in the academic colleges.

UW Stevens Point implemented several operational efficiencies to help improve its fiscal position.

- The academic colleges went through a “massive restructuring” effective in FY21 focused on improving student experience and promoting curricular and scheduling efficiencies. Three of the four curricular colleges modified the existing units into new schools. The restructuring achieved small fiscal savings by grouping similar and interdependent academic departments into larger schools. “Long-term curricular planning at a school level rather than a department level allows for improved operational and financial decision-making.”
- The original plan to renovate Albertson Hall has changed significantly. Albertson Hall houses the UW Stevens Point library and student support services such as the Academic Career Advising Center. Albertson Hall was on the UW System and the state’s renovation list for several years with the goal being to upgrade the fire suppression system and to update the heating and ventilation system. A pre-design evaluation resulted in the conclusion that “...razing the building and replacing with a new structure was economically preferable to an extensive remodel.” Following this conclusion and following discussions, the plan now

includes “movement of our other student support services...into the newly designed building.” The current building will be razed, and student support personnel will move into a single building “for centralized access for students to all services.”

- UW Stevens Point has maintained a self-operating University Store, retail-funded, and a text rental program, funded by student segregated fees. A review in 2018 showed the operation was not generating enough revenue to support operations outside the unit. Consequently, in June 2019, UW Stevens Point entered into a contract with Barnes & Noble College Booksellers LLC to “provide retail store operations and text rental management services.” In Fall 2021, Barnes & Noble will begin managing the text rental program for the two branch campuses. Additionally, the main campus online store will be enhanced to “accommodate branch campus spiritwear and gifts at the same time.”
- Prior to 2019, UW Stevens Point’s distinct custodial and maintenance functions were organized into three units. The large unit was in Facility Services and the two smaller units were Residential Living and University Centers. In 2019, the two smaller units were merged into the larger unit to provide more consistent and streamlined services and maintain similar standards in services. Any financial benefits of the merger will not be realized until the enhanced cleaning, sanitizing, and maintenance of the campus required to respond to COVID-19 can be minimized or completely eliminated.

ANALYSIS CONCLUDING STATEMENT: UW Stevens Point is commended for the comprehensive, well-planned, inclusive attention given to the strategic plan development, financial situation, and enrollment identified as areas of concern during the 2019 Comprehensive Evaluation. UW Stevens Point’s responses to the areas of focus were described in detail in the interim report. Hyperlinks embedded in the report connect the reader to documents which support the activities and initiatives implemented to address the areas of focus. University administrators realized the financial situation is strongly connected to student enrollment which had been declining for several years. A strategic enrollment plan was designed to expand and strengthen recruitment, marketing and branding activities and major organizational changes were implemented. The new structure combines Communications and Marketing, Enrollment Operations, Admissions and Recruitment, and Financial Aid and Scholarships under the leadership of the Chief Marketing and Enrollment Officer. Additional structural and organizational changes were implemented. Initial positive results of these activities and initiatives include UW Stevens Point being one of only three of the thirteen UW System institutions which had an enrollment increase in Fall 2020. Projected Fall 2021 enrollments show continued increases. The interim report demonstrates positive outcomes from the University’s efforts to address the areas of focus. The Year Four Assurance Review in 2023 will give UW Stevens Point the opportunity to provide updated data and information on the progress addressing the three areas of focus.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 5A

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on 5A: finances, including implementation of the strategic plan, enrollment data, and operational efficiencies. No further reports are required.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2023. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2028 – 2029.