

To the Regents of the University of Wisconsin System:

We, as members of the UWSP community, write to oppose Chancellor Patterson's restructuring plan and to express our lack of confidence in his administration. Rather than a forward-thinking strategy, Patterson's proposal arbitrarily singles out low-cost programs to cut. It fails to address our dire financial emergency, which results from years of mismanagement by Patterson's own administration. We fear our current leadership cannot steer us effectively through our current crisis, or the challenging years ahead.

In the early 2010s, when Chancellor Patterson and Provost Summers took up their current positions, we had ample reason to anticipate the budgetary problems we now face. Curricular reforms, demographic projections, and long-term reductions in state funding together pointed toward improving graduation rates, declining numbers of high school graduates, and an ongoing imperative to cut spending. At the time, Provost Summers himself predicted many aspects of our current crisis. Nonetheless, he and other university leaders disregarded these challenges for years. Instead of preparing for a leaner future, they pursued a misguided policy of expansion at odds with demographic and economic reality.

For years, Chancellor Patterson championed growth. At first enrollment did rise, largely because a terrible recession offered prospective students few job prospects. Patterson treated this bubble as if it were a sustainable trend, predicting we would reach 10,000 students. Provost Summers's decisions echoed the Chancellor's optimism. Instead of reducing our instructional staff incrementally, through retirements and attrition, the Provost kept hiring. By 2017, UWSP employed nearly as many faculty and academic staff as we had in 2010. By Fall 2017, the economy had improved and enrollment dropped to 8200, mirroring the decline in high school graduates that demographic projections had predicted a decade earlier. The administration's current plans call for laying off junior faculty from most departments in the College of Letters and Science. Those junior faculty, many of whom moved their families across the country to work at UWSP, were all hired by Provost Summers, some just months before he announced our staggering structural deficit.

While Provost Summers was hiring more faculty than he now thinks we can afford, UWSP undertook a lengthy strategic planning process. The resulting plan, expressed in an image of four silo-like columns, called for promoting healthy, prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant communities. In the years since, university leaders have repeatedly urged us to organize our work in healthy, prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant ways. But excellent adjectives, no matter how elegantly arrayed, do not constitute a strategic plan. Instead of being guided by a consistent vision, UWSP's leadership has instead been erratic, misguided, and in some cases even incompetent.

Until recently, for example, UWSP suffered from chronic financial mismanagement. In 2018, a UW System review showed that under the leadership of former Vice Chancellor Greg Diemer, the Division of Business Affairs failed to follow many basic accounting safeguards, such as regularly balancing accounts and allowing signature authorities to reconcile their own accounts. Diemer's replacement, Kristin Hendrickson, has acted quickly to put our accounts in order. Nonetheless, these problems underscore Patterson's failure to effectively supervise a crucial area of university administration.

The Division of Student Affairs has endured similarly irresponsible leadership. In 2018, we learned that for years, the Assistant Dean charged with Title IX enforcement, including the investigation of sexual harassment, was himself a serial sexual harasser. Not surprisingly, those who endured his harassment were reluctant to report his behavior. After an internal investigation vindicated complaints against him, his superiors – Dean of Students Troy Seppelt and Vice Chancellor Al Thompson – allowed him to remain on the job for several more months, during which time he harassed at least one other co-worker. They then helped him secure comparable jobs at two other institutions. Tellingly, while his behavior at UWSP continued for years, a student he subsequently harassed at UW Eau Claire came forward immediately and UWEC leaders responded promptly and appropriately. With appropriate initiative, university leaders can effectively support students and employees and protect them from harassers. Under the leadership of Bernie Patterson and Al Thompson, that has not happened at UWSP.

Lack of oversight of UWSP's non-academic divisions could help explain the disproportionate share of UWSP's payroll spent on non-instructional staff. An internal analysis shows that at peer UW campuses, the categories of administrators,

university staff, and non-instructional academic staff together average 15 students per employee. At UWSP, the same categories average 11.21 students per employee. If UWSP were to reduce its non-instructional staffing to the levels of peer institutions, it would eliminate 185 positions, or about 25% of the total. Some of these non-instructional positions are funded through grants or other sources, but many are not. In the 2018-19 budget, general revenue (102) funds account for about \$10 million of the non-academic division expenditures. Cutting these non-instructional expenses by 25% would dramatically reduce UWSP's structural deficit without limiting opportunities for students. Instead, Patterson has allowed non-instructional bloat to persist, even as he proposes laying off faculty.

In March 2018, Provost Summers publicly proposed cutting faculty associated with thirteen existing degree programs, all in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The plan, entitled Point Forward, depended on using a new and untested policy (Regents Policy Document 20-24) that permits layoff of tenured faculty in cases of program discontinuance. Summers's proposal triggered a nationwide backlash that did lasting damage to UWSP's reputation. Students protested in public, in committee meetings, and with their feet: Fall semester enrollment dropped well under 8000. Summers has since called this outcry a "collective freakout" and admitted that the university cannot afford any additional such embarrassment.

UWSP leaders responded to the protests by soliciting input from a series of hastily organized committees. During the month of April, UWSP's Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) reviewed the Point Forward proposal and issued a report criticizing key aspects. Over the summer, an ad hoc "Program and Unit Discontinuance Consultative Committee" (PUDCC) gathered and discussed a range of alternative proposals. In September, the Provost convened an "Academic Budget Alternatives Working Group" (ABAWG) to consult further. Few participants continued from one group to the next, which made it difficult to build on one another's work. But AAC, PUDCC, and ABAWG had several things in common: a compressed timeframe; a daunting workload; an embarrassing shortage of relevant data; and negligible influence on the Chancellor's eventual proposal. On Nov. 9, at the final ABAWG meeting, Summers and Patterson claimed their proposal was not yet ready for discussion. In fact, they had already sent the final document to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Rather than serious consideration of strategic alternatives, these groups' months of labor amounted to an empty charade. Only a handful of administrators contributed meaningfully to the recent proposal.

Throughout, these discussions failed to meaningfully collaborate with parallel groups working on restructuring the university's core curriculum. Our Provost describes our current General Education Program, which he himself helped devise, as "a swing and a miss." It reduced time to graduation, largely by reducing the required credits, but has failed to improve UWSP's abysmal retention rate: typically, about three out of every ten first-year students do not return for their second year. This failure stems partly from treating General Education as a source of tuition revenue to subsidize more specialized academic programs. Rather than investing in methods of instruction known to help new college students succeed, such as applied learning, discussion-based classes, and student-centered classrooms, UWSP's leaders have repeatedly chosen to herd first-year students into large lecture halls and instead direct resources to specialized upper-level coursework. General Education faculty have worked for years to overcome these obstacles and strengthen our first-year teaching. Rather than supporting their efforts, Chancellor Patterson now proposes to kick many of them to the curb.

While the Chancellor pretends that his plan will cut only 6-10 jobs, the interim Dean of the College of Letters and Science has made clear to faculty that about two dozen positions must be cut in FY21 alone. Due to seniority, those laid off will be among the University's best and brightest young General Education faculty. The Chancellor proposes dispersing the remaining liberal arts faculty across three pre-professional colleges, even though the Provost has said repeatedly that such a restructuring will save little money. The Chancellor and the Provost have repeated ad nauseum that they aim to preserve the liberal arts at UWSP, but they have failed to meaningfully consult with the faculty and administrators responsible for teaching and overseeing our current liberal arts curriculum. That failure, together with their stated intention to dismantle the College of Letters and Science – the institutional home of UWSP's liberal arts faculty – gives us little confidence that they will follow through.

Most alarmingly, both the original and more recent Point Forward proposals would account for only a fraction of UWSP's multimillion dollar structural deficit. After releasing his initial plan to cut thirteen major programs, the Provost conceded that it would close only about one-third of what he then projected as a \$4 million budget hole. In September,

he called for multiyear cuts totaling \$6-8 million, and warned that we would have to eliminate up to 70 positions. Two months later, Chancellor Patterson proposes cutting only six programs and assures us that doing so will cost us only 6-10 positions. Judging by the public pronouncements of Patterson and Summers, in just a few months UWSP's structural deficit has expanded and contracted by millions. In any case, their proposed solutions have repeatedly failed to address the severity of our budgetary crisis.

During Chancellor Patterson's administration, he and his Vice Chancellors have diligently courted the goodwill of legislators, Regents, donors, and the press. However, they have largely failed to attend to either the needs of UWSP students or the long-term viability of our university. There are no easy ways to reduce our structural deficit, but Chancellor Patterson's leadership has only worsened our plight. We love this institution, our students, and this community. We appeal to you, the custodians of the University of Wisconsin System, to give us the leadership we need to keep UWSP strong for years to come.

Thank you,

Members of the UWSP Community

NB: Many UWSP faculty and staff fear that they may suffer retribution for publicly criticizing the policies of our current campus administration. In consequence they have chosen to voice their agreement with this letter anonymously. Andy Felt, President of the UWSP Academic Representation Council, is maintaining and authenticating the list of signatories. They are listed here by position title and College/unit/Division.