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UWSP leader stresses collaboration, relationships

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Facing a year full of financial struggles, Mark Nook urged his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to work together to ensure the problems are solved.

Speaking Wednesday afternoon to an audience of faculty, staff members, students and community members during his first State of the University address, the interim chancellor repeatedly called for cohesion and collaboration, not only in troubled times, but as UWSP moves forward.

"We do have some issues we have to deal with. I can't solve them; the people in the front row can't solve them," Nook said, referring to campus leaders. "But the people in this room can, if we'll work together on them."

The two biggest challenges facing UWSP over the next few years are budget cuts and a statewide decline in high school graduates. For the 2009-10 year, the university must adapt to about a \$7 million unexpected budget reduction, made up of salary revisions, furloughs and cuts to auxiliary funds for projects such as furnishing residence halls.

Statewide over the next five years, the number of high school graduates is expected to decline by about 12 percent. If UWSP takes the same percentage in 2013 as it did last year, that would mean a decrease of about 200 students in the freshman class alone. With tuition and room and board fees an increasingly larger part of the university's budget, that could add to mounting financial problems.

"We will be able to survive this if we're aggressive in admissions," Nook said, "if we're aggressive as faculty and staff helping admissions contact students, helping admissions bring in the best and brightest."

Nook also highlighted ways UWSP is succeeding, all of which came from the university and surrounding community working together.

The new parking lot has LED lights at the request of the Old Main Neighborhood Association. The general education requirements are being rewritten, a daunting and time-intensive task that "hasn't been the sort of conflict-ridden discussion I've seen in other universities," Nook said.

The past year at UWSP was marred with the conflict between the Student Government Association and former Chancellor Linda Bunnell. When discussing shared governance, Nook brought up incoming SGA President Scott Asbach first, saying "we share our ideas and come up with solutions together on this campus."

"Really my biggest goal for student government this year is an attitude change," Asbach said. "Throughout my entire experience here at UWSP as a leader, I've kind of noticed some distance between not only students, but faculty, staff and administration, and student government."

"So I really want to bridge that gap ... and like (Nook) said, work together to get things accomplished this year."

