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COLUMN: UWSP offers students a home away from home

*By Mark Nook
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On this move-in weekend, we welcome back to campus what will be one of the largest classes of new University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point students since the 1980s. We expect more than 2,300 new faces in a enrollment nearing 9,200. Thousands of lives will be transformed by their time with us, and thousands of individuals will transform our community in so many ways.

UWSP provides a remarkable service to Wisconsin. More than 90 percent of our students are state residents. This is the case on most of the campuses of the UW System's regional universities and a fact that is often overlooked. By contrast, the portion of Wisconsin residents in the UW-Madison student body is about 65 percent.

Although the economy has forced a modest increase in our tuition this year, the cost to attend UWSP remains low when compared to other Midwestern universities. And UWSP is one of four UW regional universities in the top tier of the latest U.S. News ranking of best public universities in the Midwest. Around 90 percent of our graduates report employment in their chosen fields or placement in graduate school within a year of graduation. During the past 10 years, UWSP has led Wisconsin's regional universities in the number of graduates who have gone on to earn doctoral degrees.

Point's faculty is engaged in leading-edge applied research including work in such fields as biofuels, nanotechnology and geographic information systems. Last year our researchers garnered more than \$10 million in outside funding support, placing us in the lead among UW regional universities and strengthening the promise that the efforts of our professors and students will soon create jobs in central Wisconsin.

We welcome another group of international students to our campus and community, including the first European participants in a groundbreaking exchange program in paper science and engineering. Students from UWSP, universities in Finland and Germany, and North Carolina State University earn dual degrees from one each of the American and European partner institutions.

Our International Programs Office marks its 40th anniversary this fall. UWSP continues to lead the entire UW System, including UW-Madison, in the percentage of our graduates who have studied

abroad. Our programs overseas have developed over the years to include internships in settings like the British Parliament, and numerous opportunities for hands-on service learning, particularly in the developing world. During October's homecoming celebration we look forward to welcoming back to campus hundreds of the more than 12,000 alumni whose UWSP years included study abroad.

Here at home, UWSP's impact on our local economy is vital. Our faculty and staff of more than 1,400 combine with our students to put nearly \$400 million into the economy. We have begun several campus improvement projects, including a new residence hall, that provide construction-related work for hundreds of area residents.

Another exciting season of cultural events is in store for central Wisconsin thanks to UWSP. Our partnership with Sentry Insurance -- the Invitation to the Arts series -- will include a presentation by explorer and environmentalist Jean-Michel Cousteau. Our musical theater season will include the Broadway hit "Rent."

While UWSP is large enough to lead in our local economy and in the quality of life we enjoy in central Wisconsin, we are the right size to be an approachable and welcoming place. Just as we encourage our students and faculty to engage in our community, I want to encourage you to engage in your university.

Come take a walk on campus -- it's never looked better. Get a snack in the Dreyfus University Center. Visit our Web site for a schedule of sports and cultural events. And, most importantly, continue the great Stevens Point tradition of welcoming back our students and helping them feel at home away from home.

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