

Gronik campaign: UW-Stevens Point is ground zero, campus plans to cut 13 liberal arts majors

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Education used to be a source of pride for us in Wisconsin, but all that changed when Governor Scott Walker rolled out his “divide and conquer” strategy and used our system of higher education as a wedge to separate us. Now, UW-Stevens Point finds itself at ground zero of the implosion caused by Walker’s extreme cuts to the entire university system combined with the tuition freeze he imposed without a plan to replace the lost revenue. This kind of flawed decision-making fails even the most basic Business 101 course — a course Governor Walker clearly skipped during his time in college.

The signs of stress on our UW-System and its infrastructure are as obvious as the deterioration of Wisconsin roads crumbling beneath the tires of our automobiles. Governor Walker’s fixation on cutting costs without consideration to the revenue side of the equation proves that critical thinking is not one of his strong suits. And now, just as he’s planned all along, we’re seeing the beginning of what will be the devastating long-term effects of his strategy to destroy our system of higher education as we know it.

At UW-Stevens Point, the Chancellor was recently forced to cut 13 Liberal Arts majors – including History, English, Foreign Languages, Philosophy, and Geography. Faced with a \$4.5 million deficit, and no means by which to make up the shortfall, the university succumbed to Walker’s strategic pressure to focus on a Science,

Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum. No doubt these are incredibly important skills needed in a 21st-century economy, but STEM skills do not exist in a vacuum independent from the skills acquired through a liberal arts education. The bottom line here is that, as a state, we need to place a high value on our graduates acquiring the communication skills and understanding of cultural diversity needed to enable Wisconsin to effectively compete in the global marketplace.

While some argue these cuts are meant to direct students into STEM majors that give them a better career path after college, I see it very differently. I spent 35 years as the entrepreneur who grew one of the largest appraisal and consulting businesses of its type in the world. My firm helped struggling companies solve complicated problems and I routinely recruited college graduates for entry-level positions to grow my business nationally and internationally. I needed people with critical thinking and effective communication skills in order to be successful — and so did the thousands of companies I helped during my career. When my company interviewed on campuses, we looked for candidates who demonstrated common-sense and logical thinking skills in both their real and academic lives. These misguided cuts ignore the fact that these skills are developed by a well-rounded education.

I recently spoke to a group of UW-Stevens Point students at the Save Our Majors rally, I asked a simple question, “Do you feel like Governor Walker wants you in this state?” The answer was a clear and resounding, “No!” We have to recruit young people back to our state by giving them a seat at the table and making them the architects of Wisconsin’s future. That’s why I support fully-funding the UW-System, but also, it’s why I’m advancing a plan to recruit college graduates back to our state by allowing them to pay off their student debt with the money they would have paid in state income taxes. This will give every company in Wisconsin a recruiting and retention tool to attract the best talent. And, we’ll enter into public-private partnerships to create the kinds of work and living spaces throughout our state that young people want in today’s 21st-century economy.

It’s time to think about the future of Wisconsin in very different terms from that of the Walker administration. We can build on our strengths of Wisconsin and create family-sustaining jobs in the industries that support life throughout our planet. I’m the candidate with a 35-year track record of being a change agent and getting

things done. Check out our detailed plans at www.andygronik.com for a Wisconsin that works.

Andy Gronik is a Milwaukee-area businessman and a candidate in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. *Today, April 18, Gronik will join UW-Stevens Point students in Madison to deliver handwritten letters from both students and faculty members to the Board of Regents to demand better funding.*

[Read this column on AndyGronik.com](http://www.andygronik.com)