

Rep. Shankland: Introduces legislation to create UW system Blue Ribbon Commission

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Contact: Rep. Katrina Shankland Office: [\(608\) 267-9649](tel:6082679649)

MADISON – Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) introduced legislation today to study and facilitate a public agenda for higher education through the formation of a Blue Ribbon Commission.

The 19-member Blue Ribbon Commission, composed of UW System faculty, staff, students, legislators, and higher education and workforce development experts, would be tasked with investigating topics that include: the goals of higher education; the strengths and weaknesses of the UW System; changing demographic trends; access to financial aid; workforce retention programs; and the feasibility of establishing a state program to provide a debt-free college education to Wisconsin residents.

Under the bill, the faculty and staff members of the Commission would be appointed from UW System campuses that are underserved or undergoing significant programmatic changes. Recently, UW-Superior announced a \$4.5 million budget deficit and the suspension of 25 programs, and UW-Stevens Point proposed the elimination of 13 liberal arts majors in response to a \$4.5 million budget deficit.

In response, Rep. Shankland released the following statement:

“Years of budget cuts, unfunded tuition freezes, and politicians meddling with the UW System have created significant challenges for our colleges and universities across Wisconsin. With the restructuring of the two-year UW Colleges and multiple four-year campuses facing significant budget deficits, the sustainability of our state’s economic engine, the UW System, is at risk. It’s time to have an honest conversation about the state of higher education and how we can provide educational and economic opportunities for our next generation of leaders.

“Students deserve to have the same opportunities that their parents and grandparents had. The promise of the American Dream is falling out of reach for too many. We need to restore the promise of affordable higher education in every region of our state, and that starts with a Blue Ribbon Commission to strategically plan for the future and commit to funding our colleges and universities.

“I trust faculty, staff, students, and higher education experts to know what is needed for our state’s future success. While there have been many anecdotal conversations about this issue, a 19-member Blue Ribbon Commission would bring together a cross-section of voices for an evidence-based study of demographic trends, financial aid availability, sustainable funding sources, and the goal of a debt-free college education. A Blue Ribbon Commission on the UW System would work to ensure that anyone in Wisconsin can pursue the American Dream.”