

Rep. Shankland: Statement on program cuts at UW-Stevens Point

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STEVENS POINT – This morning, UW-Stevens Point announced a reorganization of campus academic programs, which includes the creation of 14 new majors and the elimination of 13 liberal arts majors on campus. Majors that have been slated for elimination include popular programs like Geography, History, English, and Political Science.

UW System campuses, including UW-Stevens Point, have struggled under massive state funding cuts in recent years. Under Governor Walker, the UW System endured a \$250 million cut in the 2011-13 budget, a funding freeze and unfunded tuition freeze in the 2013-15 budget, and a \$250 million cut and unfunded tuition freeze in the 2015-17 budget. The 2017-19 budget provided a small funding increase that doesn't even cover the latest tuition freeze when accounting for inflation. Republicans have also forced UW-Stevens Point to spend down its emergency funding reserves in recent years.

In response, Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) released the following statement:

“State funding for the UW System is the lowest it has been in state history when adjusted for inflation. Half a billion dollars of Republican budget cuts have had devastating impacts on UW-Stevens Point, especially with regard to faculty retention, course availability, and time to degree. Now, we are witnessing a more permanent impact through the loss of over a dozen liberal arts degrees on campus.

“It appears that UW-Stevens Point is shifting away from the humanities and toward STEM, perhaps because they view these skills as more marketable in the current economy. A liberal arts education provides valuable critical thinking skills, exposure to differing beliefs, and an understanding of the world around you. One of the things I’ve heard the most from employers is that they need people with soft skills - ‘people who can think for themselves.’ That’s why tech company giants are increasingly emphasizing the importance of STEAM over STEM grads - they value the liberal arts. Eliminating liberal arts degrees is counterproductive to both the Wisconsin Idea and the workforce pipeline.

“I’m saddened to see that the humanities are on the chopping block at UW-Stevens Point when they have contributed to so many people’s successes - including mine. I have a degree in Political Science and I use the skills I learned in the classroom - debate, inquiry, persuasive writing, and research - every day. My heart goes out to the faculty, staff, and students who will be impacted by these cuts. I’m very sorry this is happening. It’s time for public higher education to be made a state priority again.”