

UW-River Falls: Upward Bound program garners \$1.8 million, five-year grant

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June 28, 2022 – Newspaper became a media to build a chair for some University of Wisconsin-River Falls Upward Bound students from Washington Technology Magnet High School in St. Paul.

In some cases, the paper chair held up a person, in others, the paper crumbled.

Thirty-nine of the 73 Upward Bound students are on campus weekdays through the end of July for the summer program. Upward Bound is a free college preparatory program that generates the necessary skills and motivation to help students complete a college program. Upward Bound prepares high school students for college through tutoring, academic skill building, social and cultural activities and academic and career awareness.

UWRF's Upward Bound program received a \$1.8 million U.S. Department of Education grant in May to continue the program for five years. Students enroll in their first year of high school and continue in Upward Bound their entire high school career.

In addition to mentoring, learning test-taking skills and how to apply for financial aid, during the summer students stay in residence halls and eat in the University Center. They take English composition, read a book and discuss it and take science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related courses.

Katie Caruso, a 2010 UWRF alum, helped teach the chair engineering activity as

part of STEMteach, a graduate teaching licensure program at UWRF.

“Paper is readily available and because it is paper it is not real supportive,” Caruso said, noting this added a challenge to the project. “This was fascinating because we got to engage with students at a level we are going to be teaching. It was such a successful feeling to see them light up as they work on the project. It’s cool to see how you can energize people to think deeper about science.”

Upward Bound Director Bee Vang said UWRF’s Upward Bound program began in 1999.

Having the grant extended for five years means Upward Bound can continue to help first-generation and/or low-income students gain access to higher education.

In addition to pre-college counseling and mentoring, Upward Bound students get to experience classes they may not have been able to otherwise. Some students are participating in a horse camp with animal and food science Associate Professor Casie Bass, Ph.D., to learn about and work with horses this summer.

“A lot of the work they do is interdisciplinary and collaborative and involves critical thinking,” Vang said. “They are using their minds to problem solve. It’s the whole experiential learning. You learn by doing and understanding it and determining what careers call to you.”

Students also learn time management, Vang said.

“We give them structure and some freedom to make personal decisions on their time and to realize there are consequences to some of those decisions,” Vang said.

Upward Bound has proven to be successful, Vang noted. Seventeen of the 18 students that finish the program this year are going on to college, the other student is opting to enter the military.

Cha Moua, who just graduated from Washington Technical Magnet, is in his fourth year with Upward Bound and plans to study business at Augsburg University in St. Paul

“Without Upward Bound I wouldn’t be where I am now,” Moua said. “I wouldn’t know where I want to go to college and what I want to study.”

“I like the group activities with Upward Bound,” he added. “You get to interact with other students and get to know them better. It helps you to know what it is like living in a dorm and going to college.”

Ducci Yang, another recent Washington Technical Magnet graduate, plans to attend the University of Minnesota to possibly study marketing or earn a dental degree. She is also in her fourth year with Upward Bound.

“Upward Bound is a good program because it helps us experience what it is like to be a college student,” Yang said. “Upward Bound is part of my identity. It has helped me to give back to my community. It has made me a better person.”