

UW-Stevens Point: To offer freshwater science program funded by Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin

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The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point will develop their online programs in freshwater science with \$460,125 in support from the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin.

The funding is part of a statewide initiative, backed by the Wisconsin State Legislature and Gov. Tony Evers, to tackle 10 grand water challenges and support curriculum development, undergraduate research opportunities, career development and field training experiences for students interested in studying water-related fields at the 13 UWs.

UW-Stevens Point's program, beginning in the fall of 2022, provides UW System students water resource opportunities, including core required courses and a series of electives. Students may earn a certificate or minor in freshwater science. Select offerings from other UW System schools will be incorporated to develop a collaborative UW-System Freshwater Science credential.

"UW-Stevens Point, one of the largest producers of water-related graduates, is excited to develop a focused curriculum focused on freshwater science and water resources for all UW students to access," said College of Natural Resources (CNR) Dean Brian Sloss.

The classes will provide a fundamental understanding of the physical, chemical and biological aspects of freshwater resources. The curriculum includes an immersive, hands-on experience modeled after the CNR's Summer Field Experience, to be tentatively held in 2023 at the Central Wisconsin Environmental Station, a UW-Stevens Point field station in Amherst Junction.

The future will include expanded immersive field experience opportunities in different regions of the state, including potential opportunities in the Great Lakes, Mississippi River and other water resource areas.

"The culminating field experiences, ultimately comprised of several different individual opportunities, will provide students across Wisconsin and beyond with critical experience and professional skills in Wisconsin's diverse array of freshwater resources," said Sloss.

"We are proud to be part of the initial FWC curricular development and to help lead Wisconsin and our nation in freshwater and water resource management and conservation."

Overall, the collaborative will support 42 grants to further develop UW Systemwide water science programs, internships and research opportunities. High school and undergraduate students will have opportunities to participate in hands-on field and research experiences with faculty throughout the state, allowing them to develop a diverse range of skills.

The collaborative is also partnering with industry, nonprofits and community organizations to increase career development opportunities for students. Grant descriptions are available at freshwater.wisconsin.edu.

"Water is one of the fastest growing sectors of our economy," said Marissa Jablonski, executive director for the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin and a UW-Stevens Point alumna. "With these funds, the 13 UW universities can expand training opportunities for students and prepare them to meet the needs of Wisconsin's workforce and address our state's biggest water challenges."

Wisconsin has abundant water resources; however, factors such as invasive species, pollution and climate change could significantly impact water safety and economic growth. Of the 10 grand water challenges identified in the state, research efforts are focusing on the top two: agricultural water management and water quality safety/emerging contaminants.

Startup funding for the collaborative was provided in 2019 by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and the UW System. In July 2021, the Wisconsin State Legislature and Gov. Evers approved \$5 million in the current biennial budget to expand the collaboration's ability to train water professionals and establish Wisconsin as a leader in water-related science and economic growth.

The Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin is a partnership of Wisconsin's 13 public universities, connecting with industry partners, local communities, policymakers and advocacy groups. Its mission is to establish Wisconsin as a world leader in freshwater science, technology, entrepreneurship and economic growth.