

UW-Stout: Frank's leadership, roles of women throughout university history celebrated at UW-Stout investiture

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Menomonie, Wis. — Almost three years after she became chancellor, Katherine Frank was officially welcomed as the eighth and first female leader in the 131-year history of University of Wisconsin-Stout on Oct. 14 with a special celebration.

In her address at the Great Hall of the Memorial Student Center, Frank highlighted the university's goal of continuous improvement, and the important roles women have played throughout university history and how they continue to do so with the announcement of three major donations.

The investiture was delayed because of the pandemic, and the unexpected challenges heaped upon — and met by — Frank and the university were duly noted by many of the speakers. “Katherine has been a calm and steady leader. It seems she was made for this moment,” said Jay Rothman, UW System president.

Yet, the speakers also looked beyond the immediate demands Frank faced to the core of what makes UW-Stout Wisconsin's Polytechnic University, as did Frank. “Today these speakers celebrated what we do really well at Stout. We are committed to quality and continuous improvement,” she said. Since its founding in 1891 as a hands-on training school, UW-Stout has combined a comprehensive liberal arts education with applied learning, a career focus and collaboration with business and industry. Those

enduring tenets and a new FOCUS2030 strategic plan forged during the pandemic have guided Frank and the university community.

“To do at Stout is in our DNA, from our earliest beginnings, and it resonates loudly today throughout our campus in our programs and through the success of our graduates,” she said.

“Our success not only depends on the commitment and hard work of our university community, but also on the commitment of our surrounding community and our many partners who are so essential to the complete Stout learning experience.”

Accomplishments led by Frank during her challenging first years include a new Enrollment and Strategic Initiatives (ESI) unit and a new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) office to address the shifting landscape in higher education — along with the new strategic plan.

The ESI and EDI initiatives “are tied directly to our new strategic plan and to date have involved an institutional restructuring, hiring of executive level leadership, and dedication of the resources necessary for the university to invest in the work that is essential to support change and progress,” she said.

During her address, Frank announced more university progress. She told the stories of donors making three new gifts in the last month totaling \$3.1 million. The gifts, Frank noted in keeping with a theme of female leadership from her address, are from a female alum, in honor of a female alum and from the wife of an alum.

“It is not lost on me that this year we celebrate 50 years since the enactment of Title IX, and I stand before you as the first female chancellor of UW-Stout about to recognize the role that women have played in the past, present, and future of Stout,” she said.

“More often than not, the history of our institution is masculinized; while, in fact, our foundational programs included early childhood education, domestic science (home economics), and manual training. Women’s education is part of the foundation of this institution, and women leaders have helped to build our present and future,” Frank added.

Frank also unveiled a new university mark that will be phased into branding efforts starting in 2023.

Rothman is impressed with the institutional progress at UW-Stout since 2020 despite the pandemic challenges. “It is extraordinary, actually, what she has accomplished. Katherine, it may have seemed like a trial by fire when you first arrived, but the promise and purpose of UW-Stout are burning brightly for all to see,” Rothman said.

A video of the celebration can be seen [here](#).

With a Ph.D. in English and having started her higher education career as an English professor, Frank addressed how her background is a good fit at a polytechnic university.

“I bring a different perspective, a different lens through which we can examine these shared educational values and pedagogical preferences and work together towards continuous improvement,” she said.

“I have learned much during the past three years at Stout. I have been reminded that you can do anything you want to do with an English major and that being the first female leader of this institution does matter for many reasons, and especially in honor of those women whose stories have helped to shape Stout as well as for the future of this institution, our ongoing commitment to inclusivity, and for all of the graduates who will continue to add to the larger Stout story.”

Other speakers preceding Frank and helping “tell the UW-Stout story” included: Provost Glendali Rodriguez; UW-Superior Chancellor Renee Wachter; Professor Cynthia Bland, School of Art and Design; Wade Lambrigtsen, alum, owner of the Vintage Sign Shop in Menomonie and a lecturer; Lauren Martey, Stout University Foundation board member and alum; recent graduates Nilu Umarova and Emily Laird; Pat Meuers, alum, industry partner and vice president of FindLaw Digital Solutions, a division of Thomson Reuters; and four= shared governance leaders, Cody Gentz, Stout Student Association president; Jamie Bowe, University Staff Senate chair; Nelu Ghenciu, Faculty Senate chair; and Josh Risler, Senate of Academic Staff chair.

Frank thanked them, the influential teachers in her life and the special guests. The latter included dignitaries from Dunn County and City of Menomonie; UW System chancellors and Board of Regents members; state lawmakers; and former colleagues from other universities.

Eight alumni supported the celebration through business connections.

She also acknowledged family, her husband, Joe Dvorsky, and parents, Kris and Randy Frank, all of whom were in attendance. The value of education was instilled throughout her childhood. “From the first public library card to college, education was non-negotiable and along with it the responsibility to apply it wisely,” she said.

Her job has been made easier, she said, because of a dedicated and Stout Proud community of students, faculty, staff, alumni and external partners. “You make the magic happen. Thank you for your belief in and love of Stout.”

The UW-Stout bells rang across campus with a special celebration peal at 1:08 p.m. Friday to mark the official welcome of the eighth leader in UW-Stout’s history.

The investiture, including campus events held throughout the week, was funded through the generous support of the Stout University Foundation. No taxpayer or tuition funds were used for the celebration.

UW-Stout is Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University, with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the FOCUS2030 strategic plan.