COVID-19 response requires furloughs at UW-Stevens Point

The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is taking cost-reduction steps to address the impact of coronavirus on operations.

“Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have touched every aspect of what makes our university special,” Chancellor Bernie Patterson said in a message to campuses today. “Our response has been swift and necessary to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff members. The cost of that response is significant, unbudgeted -- and necessary.”

The financial impact from spring through August is estimated at $13.5 million. This includes refunds of student housing, dining and continuing student worker pay, operational costs of response, including shifting classes online and canceling many campus activities and events.

“We are faced with difficult decisions to reduce costs,” Patterson said.

Consulting with faculty and staff governance groups, UW-Stevens Point leaders examined options to minimize the impact on campuses without compromising student learning.

Cost-reduction measures will include employee furloughs, or temporary unpaid time. The first phase primarily involves areas of the university that are not currently providing services or generating revenue. Beginning in early May and continuing through the month, about 200 employees will be placed on consecutive-day furloughs. This represents 15 percent of the workforce. Notifications to these individuals began Monday.

Those furloughed remain employed by the university and retain benefits, including health and life insurance, vacation, sick leave and retirement. Furloughs will vary in length, depending on the unit’s mission. Many consecutive-day furloughs will be through August.

In addition, workforce-wide furloughs will be implemented in the weeks ahead. The goal is to offset financial losses, minimize disruption to services, preserve jobs and balance compensation reductions across the university.

“These are difficult decisions for us all. I am deeply aware of the effect this will have on your lives. I appreciate your dedication and the work you do every day to support our students,” Patterson told faculty and staff members. “These measures aim to spread the impact as equitably as possible, as compassionately as possible, while preserving our educational mission.

“We anticipate returning to campus with some form of face-to-face classes in the fall and will need our valued employees to serve our students,” he said.

Despite these challenges, UW-Stevens Point has positive trends, including promising first-year admissions for fall, he said. “We are confident we will persevere through this difficult time.”