

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN RIVER FALLS STUDENT VOICE

September 30, 2024

www.uwrfvoice.com

Former Chancellor talks the future of UW-River Falls

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Maria Gallo, the 20th Chancellor of UW-River Falls, retired on Sept. 6, 2024, after more than three years in office. Gallo announced her retirement in August, calling it a “difficult decision.”

During her tenure, which began in July 2021 amidst the COVID pandemic, Gallo garnered praise from UW System leadership including UW System President Jay Rothman. “Chancellor Gallo has kept UW-River Falls focused on future growth and sustainability even while navigating challenging financial times,” he said.

Martin V. Michael has assumed the position of Interim Chancellor of UWRF and a search for a permanent replacement is underway.

Former Chancellor Maria Gallo was born in Westchester County, New York. A first-generation college student, she studied agronomy at Cornell University and crop science and genetics at North Carolina State University.

“I was always taught the value of getting an education as a way to make a better living,” she said. “My dad worked in construction, and he said, ‘I have a job, but you need to have a career where you get up every day and you love what you do.’”

Since then, Gallo has worked as an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, a professor and department chair at the University of Florida, a director and dean at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and president of Delaware Valley University.

Significant achievements during Gallo’s time at UWRF include the ongoing Science and Technology Innovation Center, or SciTech project, the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence, and the changes that were made to the Wisconsin/Minnesota tuition funding process in favor of UWRF. She also implemented the “Strategic, academic and enrollment management plans.”

She also led the university’s rebranding in 2022, the production of a College Tour episode found on Amazon, the establishment of e-sports, and much more.

When interviewed, Gallo said that she believes her most significant accomplishment to be “trying to set the vision for the future post-COVID,” and her other accomplishments were “a means to an end.” Gallo described the SciTech project as the “most significant,” and called it the “future of UWRF.”

She also highlighted its role in connecting students with local businesses. “Students can have more internships and training, and we can also benefit from those industries contributing to scholarships and other initiatives,” Gallo said.

She said that the lack of state support for public universities, including UW-River Falls, remains a critical challenge. Since a tuition freeze ended in 2021, the UW System has raised tuition twice, citing insufficient state funding to cover educational costs. The most recent increase was in April 2024 for the 2024-2025 school year.

“I don’t want the burden of getting an education in a public setting to fall upon the students,” she said, adding “The state did not come through with giving the kind of



Maria Gallo, the 20th Chancellor of UW-River Falls. (Photo courtesy of UW-River Falls)

money that [is] needed to keep up with inflation and the cost of delivering [an education].” She also emphasized the need to pay employees a fair wage.

“We have to look for other ways to gain support,” she continued, adding “Partnering [with] and collaborating with the community and with business partners, that’s where it’s going to be if we want to continue to thrive in the future.”

Despite this concern, Gallo said she is optimistic about the future of the university. “We’ve had an amazing 150 years, and the next 150 are going to be even better. I think we have a strong foundation. A school like ours serves as a ladder for people, increasing [their] social mobility. So, we’re always serving the community and the needs that the region has, and that’s only going to get stronger with time.”

However, she acknowledged concerns about student retention. At UWRF, student retention from their first year to their second year is in the “lower 70s,” she said. According to UWRF’s 2023 financial review, “[UWRF] retention rates have consistently trailed averages for UW peers (excluding Madison), with a system-wide average of 76.6% for the Fall 2022 cohort.”

“Three out of every ten students that come don’t come back,” Gallo said. “Why don’t they come back?”

Gallo said that UWRF should aim to be around 80% in first year retention. “That’s the fastest way and the best way to be more stable.” She mentioned that athletic programs, as well as the marching band, increase student retention.

Student involvement is also beneficial for retention.

“Involvement in any kind of on-campus activity or club or initiative, that’s really the full experience of being a [student] at a residential college,” she stated.

Under Gallo’s leadership, the strategic plan “*Soaring to New Heights*” was developed to address student success and institutional thriving. Though set to conclude in 2025, Gallo has requested an extension to 2027 to ensure its objectives are met.

She described the strategic plan as involving “general categories” of promoting student success, a “thriving institution,” and student belonging and wellness. “And I don’t think [those general categories] will change all that much even in 2027.” According to her, “The tactical pieces might be different, but I think the overall vision will probably be the same.”

She expressed confidence in Interim Chancellor Michael Martin, whom she knows from their previous collaborations, to advance the university’s initiatives. “I think Mike will help get funding to move some of these initiatives forward,” Gallo said. “We need those infusions of one-time money, as well as continuous money. But one-time money to get projects off the ground, [and] pilot different initiatives to see how well they work.”

Gallo and Martin have worked together previously, first at the University of Minnesota, and again at the University of Florida. She said she is confident in his abilities to serve the university and its students. “He understands how to approach difficult situations.”

Following her retirement, Gallo has relocated to Florida with her partner and two cats. She plans to spend time with family, write, and volunteer, expressing a fondness for UW-River Falls and its community. “It’s bittersweet,” she said.

She said she wants to visit the Wisconsin-Minnesota area in the future, if able.

“I love UWRF,” she said. “I really enjoyed being here.”

“Change in the wind:” An interview with Interim Chancellor Michael Martin

Student Voice (SV): Tell me a little bit about yourself. You’re talking to a student or a faculty member; how do you introduce yourself to them?

Michael Martin (MM): I’m a first-generation college attendee from a very blue-collar family, started out on the Iron Range in Minnesota, the oldest of four and the only one to go to college. I think the other three might have followed had they been able to get the same jumpstart I did. So I started out at the Iron Range. My dad worked in the mines. And then we ended up in St. Louis Park, Minnesota when they moved him down there, and I graduated from St. Louis Park High, and went on to a regional comprehensive in Mankato and fell in love with the prospect of being an academic. I have now devoted 53 years to service in public higher education, and it’s been a wonderful journey. I’ve got two great kids. They’re both adopted from Korea; one’s 46 and one’s 47. Two grandkids, 9 and 12. A wife of 54 years. That’s pretty much who I am.

SV: And is that the main reason you’re here at UWRF, because of Maria Gallo?

MM: I believe in the mission of these places. The regional comprehensives fill the biggest single void or the biggest real need in higher education. About 77% of grads come from places like this. So it’s both a case where I’m captivated by the mission, I knew Maria, and I was intrigued about the prospect. I thought, well, if I have the physical stamina, and hopefully my cognitive skills haven’t declined too much with older age, I can do this for a while.

SV: From an outside perspective, what do you think about the current state of UWRF?

MM: I think there’s a real challenge across higher education in the country, and I think it’s being felt in the Wisconsin System and on this campus. We cast the usefulness of these institutions in the wrong way. In an attempt to appeal to students, we told students, if you get a degree, here’s what your lifelong income is going to be. We made it a private good. When it’s a private good, and then asking the public to pay for it, you’ve got to disconnect, right? If it’s a private good, why do I have to pay for you to make more money, as a taxpayer? So I think there’s been a pushback on that. And I think we need to return not just in Wisconsin, but across public higher education, to the argument that what we have is also a very powerful public good.

So I think we misstated it, and we need to correct the record. I think there’s that tension in the Wisconsin System, because a lot of universities have yet to recover from the COVID decline in enrollment. The state has been more parsimonious toward higher education in Wisconsin than in many other states. It’s not alone; others are feeling the same pressure. So you feel that tension on campus. You feel that among the faculty, staff, the uncertainty.

SV: Do you think there are any unique challenges that you’ve noticed so far?

MM: I think there’s a couple. Clearly, we’ve got to get over the challenge of a pretty tough budget situation. I think there’s good news-but you shouldn’t take it as too much good news yet-in the upturn in enrollment. I think that’s a positive sign. But there’s a long way to go. And that means having to do one of two things., There’s clearly surplus capacity here. If there weren’t, you wouldn’t mothball the residence halls.

There’s surplus capacity because the faculty is as big as it was before the pandemic but there’s many fewer students. So you have two choices, get rid of the surplus capacity or repackage it and sell it in new ways, including things like certificate programs for the community and a variety of

things. First, the challenge is getting people to acknowledge that it’s true because people want to blame someone and say, “oh, it’s the legislature’s fault.” That may well be.

But if the legislature isn’t going to solve it for you, you better damn well solve it for yourself. So doing that doesn’t gain us anything. It’s an interesting way to vent and maybe feel a little bit better for an hour or so. But the bottom line, it comes back to what can this institution do innovatively. The new building is going to make a big difference.

I’ve got a simple-minded view of the world, and the real world is you’ve got too many people right here, given the number of students who are coming on. You got to figure out a way to use those people in a new way. Maybe we do some business certificate programs for technical college grads so you can learn the business side: accounting, personnel management, etc. But one way or another, you have to face the reality that either you would offload some, humanely, some excess capacity, or you repackage it and figure out a way to make it useful in the community. I think you got this challenge of figuring out, and people collectively figuring out, how we modify what we do and how we grow enrollment. The biggest challenge in enrollment here isn’t recruiting. It’s retention. 28% of the freshmen don’t come back in the fall. If you cut that to 17 or 15, it solves a lot of financial problems.

SV: Maria mentioned that she would like to see those numbers at around like 80% [for] second year retention.

MM: I think you can do better. I think you could do 85,. If you’re fairly open admission and accessible, you’re going to admit some students who just aren’t ready. I think there are some things you can do. One is to do summer boot camps in a couple of key areas: math, English and science, for students who may not have been as well prepared coming out of high school, and give them a jumpstart. I think you need a default major like interdisciplinary studies or liberal studies, where you can repackage your credits into a legitimate degree without having to be discipline-specific,. You have to be proactive in advising and interventions.

If a faculty member sees a student that’s kind of falling off the cliff, you’ve got to do something about it and not just let them fall. You’ve got to be able to find a way to give them the best possible start you can. I’m going to see if I can extract a little money from a foundation over in Minnesota that I worked with in another life to beta test a summer boot camp.

SV: And what would that [boot camp] look like?

MM: First of all, you have to get a sense of where they are. Particularly right now, I think math skills are probably one of the biggest bumps in the road, but there are some others. Then you have a three-week, pre-semester boot camp here, and you actually give the students a stipend. It’s a \$400 certificate for a discount on your tuition. And you have some concentrated time in two or three key platform programs so that people come in better-prepared and more confident that they can master it. A lot of places have gone to this model, and I think we can maybe get a little money as a pilot project from a private foundation to try it. So I dipped my toe in the water to see if through some friends who happen to be on the board of this particular foundation, if they’d be my advocate, if I made a pitch for a three-year trial basis.

MM: So you mentioned SciTech earlier, and Maria talked a little bit about SciTech when I interviewed her, and she was talking about the collaborative nature of it.

MM: The universities, particularly ones like this, not only have a role to play beyond the campus in partnership, but



Interim Chancellor Michael Martin. (Photo courtesy of Lehigh Acres Citizen)

[this partnership] enriches the campus itself. I, over a long career, have worked hard to recognize that you’re part of a much larger economic and social ecosystem, and there are ways in which you can both benefit the institution and in turn, benefit those around you,. To me, that’s the new model for these kinds of institutions, to blur the margins between the institution and the community. I think that’s doable here in many ways.

SV: You mentioned the state legislature earlier. There’s not a lot of state support for higher education in Wisconsin, which kind of brings into question like, does the state legislature value it? I wanted to ask you about that.

MM: I think that too often we cast our lot with the legislature based on what we need and want. People are saying, we’re 43rd in the country, in funding from the state. That’s what the mantra is. Well, how do we move up? It isn’t by telling legislators how bad we feel or that we’re 43rd. It’s that if you invest more, the people who vote for you will be better off. Just think about this place in this community. One of the things you look at is what’s called the multiplier effect.

If you spend another buck here, it circulates through this economy. How many more bucks does it create in income? Somewhere between 4 and 7. But whatever it is, it’s not trivial. A university is the cleanest, highest multiplier industry you can have because it’s labor intensive.

SV: What do you think of the university’s efforts that they’ve already made to address the financial concerns?

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 3

MM: I think they've made a lot of progress. I'm impressed. I'm impressed with the discipline people have shown and the willingness, even if it's painful willingness, to face this reality. I mean, I think Maria did a great job. I think others in the administration, the deans and others, have seriously understood the issue. We talked about the strategic plan because it expires, so to speak, next year. And my argument is, extend the strategic plan two years. It's still a good plan. The difference now is the tactical implementation. Let's try some new tactics.

So the plan is okay. You just have to see if you can find some new and clever ways to continue to make progress. It calls for 80% retention rate. We're still at 72 this fall. So we haven't closed that gap much. I actually believe people have worked pretty damn hard to make it work. You know, Oshkosh really took a beating, a self-imposed beating. The problem is that Oshkosh has sort of labeled all the rest of us, who didn't do what Oshkosh did, which is spend all their reserves and make commitments they couldn't keep. But now we're trapped by being sort of stained by that reality. I'm not sure I would have taken on the interim role at Oshkosh. That's a little like a rat swimming toward a sinking ship. But I think they'll come out of it okay. I think this place has handled it as well as it probably could have expected. But there's still more to do.

SV: And you'd say that from an economist perspective

as well?

MM: You never stop thinking like what you were trained to think about. I taught economics for a long time, and it's a little hard to shed my underlying model of the world, which is largely economic. You can see the world any way you want, but you can't deny reality. And I think economics gives you a pretty good sense of a piece of reality.

SV: So your plan then as Interim Chancellors is to continue those strategic efforts and then implement, new things as well?

MM: One of the things I can do that maybe someone long-term would be reluctant to do is to take some risk, because my career is over. The worst they can do is send me home and that's okay with me. I've got a pretty significant job as grandpa, and I've enjoyed that enormously. But as long as I'm here, I'm willing to be the person who, if we take some risks and they don't work, can be blamed for. I don't mind that at all. I'm perfectly prepared to be the person you turn to and say, that was really a stupid idea, and Martin made me do it.

SV: Is there anything you'd like to add to what you've said?

MM: I have the benefit of being newly arrived and [having a] fresh view of the place. And I think during hard times, one doesn't get the opportunity to pause and say, there's some huge, huge, interesting opportunities here. I think the place is better than some people think it is right now. And I think the horizon is much more inviting than some people

[say]. There's a lot of research in the psychological literature on people's personal characteristics and how they choose a profession. That's why you get stereotypes. Academics, according to the literature, are more risk-averse than the normal population. So one of the things you need to do in an environment like this is persuade the people who are here in the trenches that the status quo is riskier than the change you're proposing. So you play to their risk aversion. I think we got that message out there, and I think that gives rise to persuasion and courageous experiments in an effort to continually remake these places. The first university that we think of as a university in Western style was opened in 1088, in Bologna, Italy. It's still there.

Bologna is still there because they continued to adapt to times. I guarantee you, the way they were operating in 1088 is not the way they're operating today. I think right now we're at that inflection point where people understand, even if they don't like to understand, that there's going to be change in the wind. You can be party to it, and you can help invent it, or you can resist it, when it's coming either way. If there's one message, at least from my perspective, [being] very new to this place, but very long-serving in public higher education, there's more good opportunities here than people may realize.

Read the full interview at uwrvoice.com

Freddy's Dairy Bar sees "a lot of excitement"

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UW-River Falls students in search of a sweet treat can now visit Freddy's Dairy Bar to satisfy their cravings. Located on the second floor of the Agricultural Sciences building, the Dairy Bar serves a variety of dairy products, such as ice cream, shakes, malts, sundaes, root beer floats, and orange floats, as well as three varieties of cheese curds.

While the cheese curds are made in UW-River Falls' Dairy Pilot Plant, Freddy's Dairy Bar does not currently make its own ice cream. The ice cream is sourced from a distributor of Kemp's. Lisa Meyer, the manager of the Dairy Bar, said that the Dairy Pilot Plant is working to complete the equipment commissioning process for its ice cream line. "We're up to the packaging point now. It will definitely be this school year," she said. "It should be this fall."

Meyer said the Dairy Bar has seen "a lot of excitement" so far, with 458 customers in September alone, including many repeat visitors.

Over the summer, the Dairy Bar served ice cream and cheese curds to UWRF employees, and expanded its offerings for the fall semester to include shakes, malts, sundaes, and floats. They now serve a flavor of the month as well. For September, it was the S'mores Sundae.

"We're working on our October flavor right now," Meyer said. The Dairy Bar is also working on a new themed flavor for UW-River Falls' 150th anniversary celebration.

Freddy's Dairy Bar plans to expand its product line further. They are in the process of purchasing a soft-serve machine, which will allow them to serve the "equivalent to a Blizzard," Meyer said, "or a thicker ice cream with mix-ins." The mix for the soft-serve machine will be produced in the Dairy Plant. They also aim to add grilled cheese sandwiches and quesadillas to the menu, pending state approval.

"We will be adding some products from the Meat Plant as well," Meyer said, "for sure beef sticks and the potential of some other products from them as well."

Once the Dairy Plant begins to produce its own ice cream, the flavors it offers will change from its current offerings. "We'll obviously have our staples — the vanilla, the chocolate, and strawberry," Meyer said. The Dairy Bar will add new flavors, such as the 150th anniversary flavor, in the months after. Many of these will be similar to its current flavors, noting that popular options like mint chocolate chip are likely to return. "With our equipment, we will have the ability to do flavored ice creams," Meyer said. "We can add what's called inclusions, which are like nuts or fruits or things that [are] added to that ice cream. And we can do things like swirls, but anything that involves a Neapolitan ice cream or the Superman ice cream that we have, where it's multiple colors in the same container, we don't have the equipment to be able to do that."

Students can expect only slight price increases when Freddy's Dairy Bar switches over to Dairy Plant-produced ice cream. While the Dairy Bar will introduce new packaging options, such as half-pints with spoons built into the lid, Meyer stated that overall prices should remain stable. Any adjustments will reflect operational and labor costs, with the Dairy Bar's revenue contributing to the Dairy Plant's general fund. The pricing for these items has not yet been established. The Dairy Bar's revenue will go to the Dairy Plant general fund.

The Dairy Bar plans to serve their products in the UWRF cafeteria and in Freddy's C-Store as well. In addition, an



Abby (left) and Kat (right), student workers at Freddy's Dairy Bar. (Photo by Jack Van Hoof)

online store is also set to launch soon, which will allow them to easily serve their products to the River Falls community. "We have worked on our online store over the course of the summer and it's ready to go live," Meyers said. "We've also purchased two parking spots in the back of the building that will be labeled 'Freddy's Dairy Bar Parking Spot.'"

"Somebody from outside campus can drive up, park, walk up the stairs, come in right here and pick up their order. Or we can even bring it down to them," she stated.

Currently, Freddy's Dairy Bar is open Monday through Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with plans to extend hours for homecoming week, starting September 30.

SciTech construction continues as planned

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UWRF students were quick to take notice the removal of metal fences that have impeded the campus since this summer, signaling progress on the new Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech). Alan Symicek, Chief Facilities Officer explained that the fences were necessary for the construction of the building and its water cooling system, which powers the air conditioning.

The project required temporary disruptions to the campus mall to route underground systems, as the university's Chill Plant is adjacent to the Central Heating Plant. "There were a few hiccups along the way," Symicek said.

During excavation, crews encountered several unidentified utility pipes. According to Symicek, these pipes predated the site's previous building, Hagestad Hall, and caused difficulties with the excavation process.

Symicek also commented on other upcoming projects on campus. The most prominent of these are the improvements to Hathorn Hall, as well as more excavation in the campus mall south of the Chalmer Davee Library, both of which will be happening in the summer of 2025. Hathorn Hall will also be undergoing a replacement of the electrical components on the east side of the building. The campus mall will also have pipes installed to replace the current stormwater drainage system, allowing for less pooling of water after a heavy storm.



On July 30, 2024, UWRF gave key community and business/industry leaders a tour of the first and second floors of the SciTech building. (Photos courtesy of Pat Deninger)

CEBA awards first annual faculty awards

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The College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH) at UW-River Falls presented its first annual faculty excellence awards for the 2024-25 academic year.

"This is a good way for us to recognize exceptional performance...I think we should recognize and celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of our faculty," Dean Muhammad Chishty said in an interview.

Four awards were presented to professors at the college. The awardees were: Dr. Paul Shirilla for excellence in advising, Dr. Hiawatha Smith for excellence in research, Dr. Molly Gerrish for excellence in service, and Dr. Geoff Schuerman for excellence in teaching.

"It is an honor to receive this award, which recognizes my commitment to improving education beyond the walls of my classroom. It acknowledges the caliber of faculty in my department, as several of my scholarly activity projects have been co-authored with other UWRF faculty," Smith stated.

"Growth and development is an infinite and eternal phenomenon, and it is a privilege to be able to spend a lifetime moving forward personally and collectively in a profession like this," Schuerman said.

The awards were presented at the first college meeting of the semester in late August.

"At the end we did this. None of the faculty members knew that they were receiving the awards...we kept it confidential, and it was a surprise to all of them," Chishty stated.

Selection for the awards is conducted through the research and scholarship committee at the college, where potential candidates provide information on specific items

pertaining to the award that they are nominated for.

Some items included in that information are things such as publications, service on committees and proactive teaching methods.

Nominations are done through a variety of ways according to Chishty, with one such avenue being through student nominations.

"For some awards, [the college] sends out emails to all students and asks for nominations and comments," Chishty said.

"Dr. Schuerman has a huge heart for his students and goes to incredible lengths to create authentic learning spaces. It is evident that he is passionate about education and goes out of his way to connect with his students on a personal level," a student nomination read for excellence in teaching awardee Geoff Schuerman.

"Day-to-day interactions with students who come by my office to explore an idea further or who make a unique contribution to a stimulating class and remind me that I am first and foremost a student myself. And since I am now in the 65th grade, I guess I always will be," Schuerman remarked.

These awards marked a first for the college of CEBAH, which merged the college of business and economics along with the college of education and professional studies in July of 2023.

"What we have tried to do is to essentially create a new identity for us," Dean Chishty said. "One thing I have tried to promote is a spirit of collaboration and cooperation."

Recipient of the excellence in research, Dr. Smith co-authored *Beyond the Basics: Children's Literature for the Elementary Teacher*, which serves as a foundational text for undergraduate education majors in language arts and literacy. He is currently set on releasing a new book this fall.

"My inspiration comes from the many mentors in my career who have encouraged me to do the work and be the best I can be. I thank all those both within and outside the university who saw something in me as an academic," he stated.

Recipient of the excellence in teaching award, Dr. Schuerman reminisced on his 32-year career at River Falls.

"I strive to put students at the center of their own learning, and this award came from them, it feels like I am sharing it with them...UWRF has allowed me to work with teacher candidates from the moment they walk onto campus until they enter the classroom as student teachers and take their final walk across the stage at commencement," he said.

With the new merger and a 15% budget cut to the college, CEBAH is looking at different paths to maximize efficiency and productivity for students and faculty alike according to Chishty.

"The budget cuts are having an impact on what we can do and how much we can do," he stated. "We are making changes in course offerings and course schedules. Fewer classes, fewer sections and consolidation of programs. At the same time, we are creating new programs which will bring new students to the university."

Some new programs that CEBAH is introducing are a master's program in special education and a revamped Montessori program which includes collaboration of several different disciplines in the college according to Chishty.

"Ultimately it is the personal relationships which make me look forward to coming to work every day," he said. "We like to recognize, appreciate and celebrate (the faculty), I also hope this serves as a motivator for others to do the same."

Building a bright future at the UW-River Falls men's soccer team

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The UWRF athletic program is making exciting strides with the launch of its inaugural men's soccer team for the 2024-2025 season.

At the helm is Evan Sassano, a coach with a high-level background in playing and coaching. Sassano joined UWRF in December 2023 after a successful period as the assistant coach at the University of St. Thomas. Before that, he was the head coach at Holy Names University in Oakland, California, where he led the team to its most successful season. With a background that spans 13 years, Sassano has demonstrated his ability to lead teams to success.

In discussing his coaching philosophy, Sassano emphasizes the significance of team culture and mentality. He believes fostering a strong sense of community and collaboration among players is essential, especially when coaching a young team.

"My philosophy can be defined more in terms of culture and mentality. I'm more concerned with what kind of people and players we have. Are we team players? Are we hard workers? Do we respond well to adversity?" he explained.

This holistic approach sets the foundation for a program that prioritizes growth and improvement, both on and off the field, according to Sassano.

Despite their youth, many players have stepped up to leadership roles. Graduate student Carson Galla, the team's goalkeeper, has become a stand-out player in both performance and character.

"He has been very solid as a goalkeeper; in our first game as a program, he made one of the best saves I've ever seen as a coach. The way he carries himself is an example for a lot of our players, how he stays humble and modest." Sassano said in regards to Galla.

Freshman Ben Harris is another player that makes a significant impact on the team's growth according to Sassano.

"He's a very good player, he's smart, he is skillful, he's



On Sept. 18, the UWRF men's soccer team defeated Concordia University 1-0. (Photo courtesy of Carly Lynch)

also one of the guys on the team that the players look up to. He has a positive attitude and is very encouraging to his teammates. He's a younger player, and I see a lot of leadership qualities in him," Sassano stated.

Additionally, sophomore players, like Sorel Richardson and Victor Vancauteran, bring experience from their previous college, Northland, and have stepped up as leaders on a very young team.

Looking to the future, Sassano sees a competitive program that aligns with the athletic tradition of UWRF. "This is a place where very good athletes come and very good

teams are. There's expectations, which I embrace fully."

Sassano sums up his faith in the young roster, "I like our team; I think we have a great group of guys; I would describe them as brilliant. We've got guys in data science and physics who are incredible students, and they're playing the game at a high level."

As the UWRF men's soccer team grows under Sassano's leadership, the focus remains on the young players and the culture of the program, and with Sassano at the helm, the Falcons are ready to take flight.

How to register to vote in the presidential election

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With this year's upcoming presidential election on Nov. 5, it can be difficult as a student in college to know when, where, and if you can vote from the comfort of your college residence. It can be discouraging when you don't know how to register, especially amongst the cascade of homework and essay writing. But voting as a student at UW-River Falls can actually be very simple! Below is a guide on how you can register, where you can vote, and further resources that you can utilize as you exercise this crucial civil liberty.

If you are a student at UWRF who is at least 18, and live in a residence hall or an apartment within River Falls, you are already eligible to vote within the city! There are a few ways in which you can register to vote for the upcoming election.

• **In-person:** To register in person, you can make your way down to the City Hall at 222 Lewis St. River Falls, WI 54022. If you live in one of the residence halls on campus you must bring a valid ID, whether it be a drivers license,

student ID or the like, and provide the clerk with your appropriate residence hall and room number. The clerk will already have a provided list of residents provided by UW-River Falls to make the process as easy as possible for you to register. For individuals who live in apartments off-campus, you must provide a valid ID along with proof of residence. Some forms of valid proof of residence include: a residential lease which is effective for a period including election day, a fee receipt from UWRF within the last 90 days before election, and a gas or utility service statement no earlier than 90 prior to the election. If you are an out-of-state resident and student of the university, the Division of Technology Services located in the Chalmer Davee Library will print a valid voter ID free of charge. The deadline to register in person at City Hall concludes at 5 p.m. the Friday prior to election, which would be November 1.

• **Register at polling place on election day:** Registering to vote at your polling place on election day is another simple option as a student. For students living in the residence halls, your polling location for the upcoming election will be at the Falcon Center located off South Main St.

The same rules apply with bringing a valid ID and proof of residence as it does for in person registration. Registration at polling locations open at 7 a.m. and closes at 8 p.m. on election day. If you do not live in the residence halls, refer to the maps posted in this issue or go to the City of River Falls website.

• **Register by mail:** To register by mail, students must complete a voter registration application along with proof of residence and mail it to the City Clerk's Office at 222 Lewis St. River Falls, WI 54022 no later than 20 days prior to the election. For more information refer to The City of River Falls website.

• **Register online:** To register to vote online, students can visit the My Vote Wisconsin website and follow the directions provided. Proof of residence may be required for this registration option as well.

For a further list of valid identification, proof of residence, and polling locations refer to the City of River Falls website. For more information on voting visit vote.gov or myvote.wi.gov.

Continued from page 5

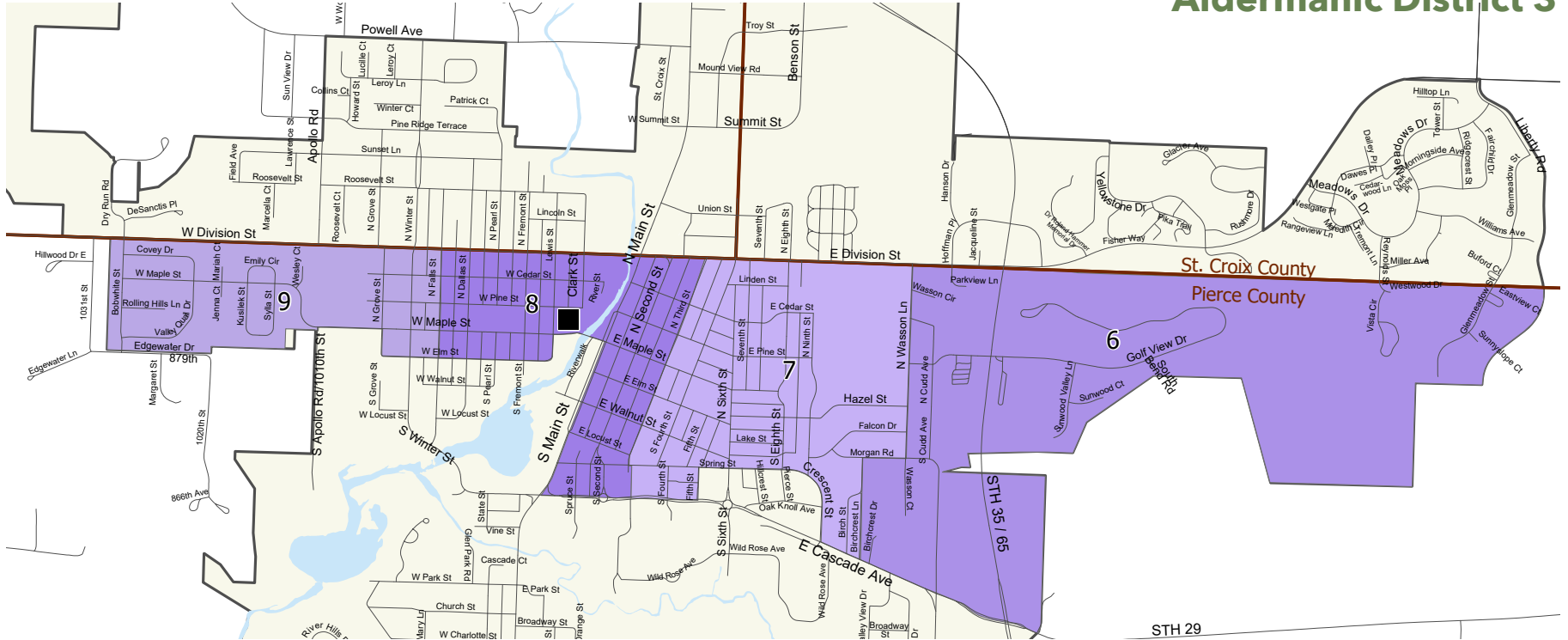


Voting Locations

City Hall
222 Lewis St

Wards 6, 7, 8, 9

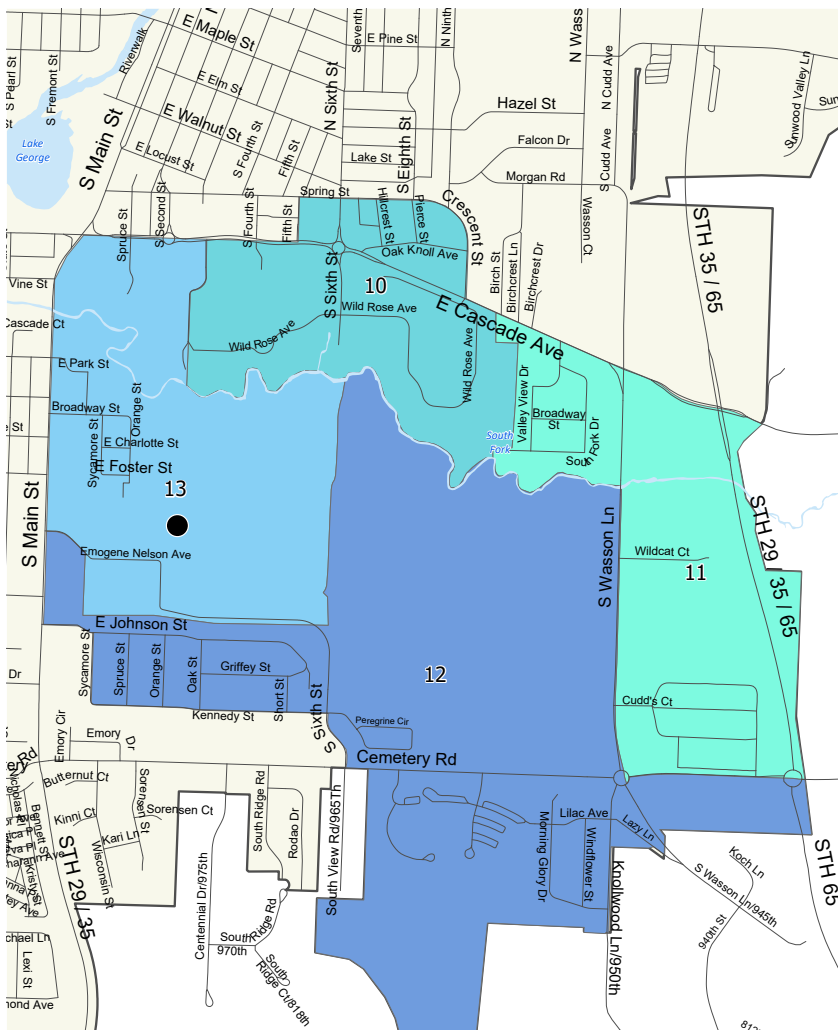
Aldermanic District 3



Voting Locations
UWRF - Falcon Center
185 Emogene Nelson Ave
or 1110 S Main St

Wards 10, 11, 12, 13

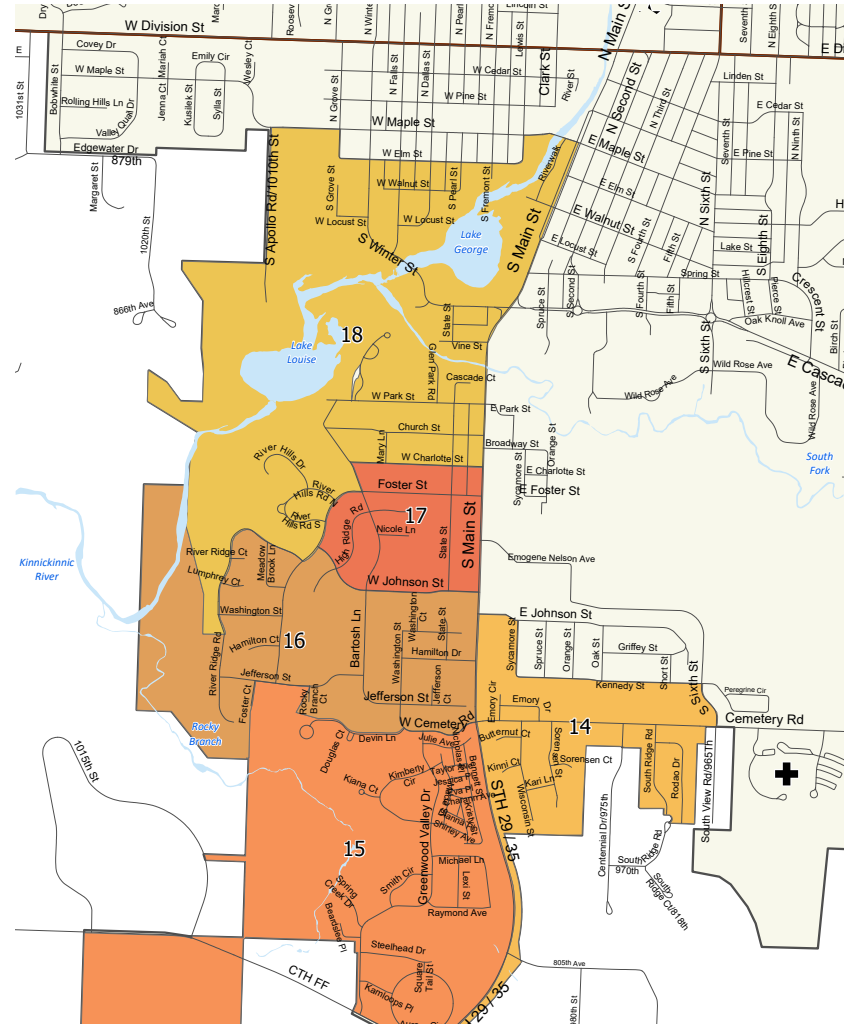
Aldermanic District 2



Voting Locations
River Falls High School
818 Cemetery Rd

Wards 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

Aldermanic District 4



Highlighted sections represent areas of residency; the polling locations for each section is listed at the top of map. (Maps courtesy of City of River Falls)

Photography exhibit highlights environmental contradictions in India's sacred rivers

Student Voice

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A new photography exhibit titled “*On the River*,” featuring the work of journalism faculty member Souzeina Mushtaq and Minneapolis-based artist Andy Richter, opened on September 3 at Gallery 101 in the KFA building. The exhibit addresses the critical pollution crisis affecting India’s sacred rivers, particularly the Yamuna and Ganges, highlighting severe environmental degradation despite their revered status.

Curated by Professor of Photography Brett Kallusky, the exhibit illustrates the stark realities faced by these sacred rivers, particularly the Yamuna, which is often covered in toxic foam from industrial waste and untreated sewage. This visual narrative serves as a haunting reminder of the human activities that compromise the purity of rivers with profound cultural significance. Richter’s photographs, drawn from his book “*Serpent in the Wilderness*,” emphasize the role of nature and yoga traditions in self-realization, complementing Mushtaq’s focus on environmental neglect.

“The images provide a glimpse into daily life along the Yamuna, highlighting the contradictions between deep spirituality and environmental neglect,” Mushtaq said. “Despite efforts such as the Yamuna Action Plan and the legal recognition of rivers as living entities, meaningful change remains elusive.”

The exhibit not only showcases the beauty of the rivers and their surroundings but also critiques the socio-environmental challenges exacerbated by industrial practices. Visitors were invited to reflect on the complex relationship between tradition and modernity, urging consideration of the urgent need for sustainable practices.



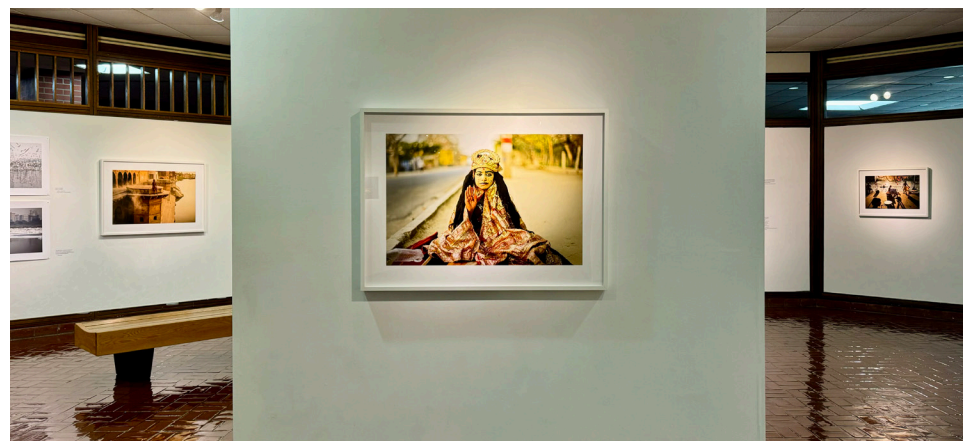
KFA Gallery 101 will display “*On the River*” until Oct. 3. (All three photos by UWRF Department of Art)

Richter emphasized the exhibit’s organic development, and said, “The exhibition has presented an opportunity to reconsider my work in relation to India’s holy rivers and create a dialogue with Souzeina’s work... The relationship Indians have with rivers is fraught and complicated. On one hand, they are worshiped as divine living entities, and on the other, they are dumping grounds and sites of serious health, social, and environmental neglect.”

In addition to raising awareness about the challenges faced by these rivers, the exhibition aims to inspire action-

able solutions for sustainable water management. Faculty and students are encouraged to incorporate the exhibit into their curriculum to foster a multidisciplinary understanding of sustainability and promote critical thinking.

The opening reception on September 20 was well-attended, with participants engaging in discussions about the intersection of culture, spirituality, and environmental stewardship. The exhibition will remain open to the public until October 3, 2024.



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN RIVER FALLS
STUDENT VOICE

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The Student Voice is a student-written and managed newspaper for UW-River Falls, and is published monthly during the regular school year.

All editorial content in the Student Voice is determined by the newspaper’s Editorial Board. The opinions expressed in editorials and columns do not represent those of the newspaper’s advisor, student population, administration, faculty or staff.

Letters to the editor must be 300 words or less, and include a first and last name and phone number. They can be submitted at 304 North Hall, River Falls, WI 54022 or to editor@uwrfvoice.com.

The Student Voice reserves the right to edit any material for content, libel or space. It also reserves the right to withhold letters. All letters, news releases, briefs, display ads and classified ads must be able to be submitted no later than Wednesday at noon during the week of publishing. Information on publishing schedule can be obtained by contacting the editor.

Because of high production costs, UW-River Falls community members are permitted to collect one copy of the Student Voice per issue. A single copy of the Student Voice is valued at \$1, and additional copies may be requested from the editorial staff via email. Newspaper theft is a crime. Those who violate the single copy rule may be subject to civil and criminal prosecution.

Editorial: “Get rid of the surplus:” Michael Martin’s Plan for UW-River Falls

As UW-River Falls celebrates its 150th anniversary, the university is in the midst of what may be its most uncertain time in recent history. That uncertainty can be summarized in one sentence: UWRf is experiencing a \$7.1 million deficit that will, according to 2024 financial review, “worsen over the coming years.”

Former Chancellor Maria Gallo expressed confidence that the university will thrive for another 150 years, but Interim Chancellor Michael V. Martin does not share the same certainty. In our interview with him, Martin said UW-River Falls is at an “inflection point,” and “needs to adapt to the current challenges in higher education.”

Martin’s plan to “adapt” is evident— Cuts. Cuts to what Martin calls ‘surplus’ or ‘excess’ capacity. “You have two choices,” he said. “Get rid of the surplus capacity or sell it in new ways.” What Martin calls “surplus capacity,” is UWRf programs and employees that are on the chopping block.

Martin has stressed that these changes are inevitable. “People understand, even if they don’t like to understand, that there’s going to be change in the wind. You can be party to it, and you can help invent it, or you can resist it, when it’s coming either way.”

The question is: Are further budget cuts the change that we need? Martin said that “the faculty is as big as it was before the pandemic, but there’s many fewer students.”

However, this claim is inaccurate. According to UWRf’s financial review, UWRf had 5,290 full-time enrolled students (FTEs) in 2020, compared to 5,401 FTEs in 2019. As reported by the UWRf Newsroom, there were 5,222 FTEs in September 2024. This reflects a decrease of only 68 students since 2020, before the pandemic-related decrease in enrollment that Martin mentioned. Clearly, the student population has not dropped significantly. Is it really worth cutting programs and employees when the enrollment numbers are so close to what they were in 2020?

Whether this increase is an indirect result of natural shifts in the environment, or the direct outcome of UWRf’s various strategic and strategic enrollment plans, it seems to be working. On April 22, 2024, the Student Voice noted, “UWRf intends to increase enrollment over the next few years, so it would be unwise to remove faculty or staff who will be needed to meet the needs of an increased student body in the near future.”

This is one reason why cutting employees doesn’t seem to make much sense.

In addition, Martin’s statement that “the faculty is as big as it was before the pandemic” is inaccurate. UWRf’s financial review indicates that “total [full-time employees] have fallen in nearly every administrative unit and every college, placing added strain on existing employees.”

Can employees who are under this “added strain” effectively meet the needs of hundreds of additional students, while continuing to provide a quality educational experience?

The UWRf Newsroom also reported that “new first-year students total 1,132,” which is the primary reason for the increase in UWRf’s total FTE numbers. Martin highlighted the first-year to second-year retention rate, noting

that “28% of the freshmen don’t come back in the fall.”

If this 28% retention rate remains consistent, the university can expect to lose around 317 freshmen by fall 2025. This underscores the importance of retention; UWRf cannot afford to lose this many freshman students. Both Martin and Gallo stressed the importance of retention in their interviews. “[Retention] is the fastest way and the best way to be more stable,” Gallo said, while Martin called it “the biggest challenge in enrollment.”

We at the Student Voice agree with both Martin and Gallo. However, we argue that the budget cuts that have already been implemented, along with the future cuts that Martin supports, have been, and will continue to be detrimental to retention efforts. If retention is one of, if not the most important, factors in the university’s success, then these budget cuts could be detrimental to that success as well.

People want to blame someone and say, “oh, it’s the legislature’s fault.” That may well be. But if the legislature isn’t going to solve it for you, you better damn well solve it for yourself.

—Michael Martin

Most students enroll at a university because it offers programs they are interested in pursuing. Eliminating even a few of these programs decreases the incentive for prospective students to enroll.

While some might argue that smaller programs, such as liberal arts, offer less incentives for new students, eliminating these programs would limit options for those who are interested in attending UWRf or switch their majors. If a student wants to switch to a liberal arts program that no longer exists, they may be forced to transfer to another university, contributing to the annual loss of around 300 freshmen students.

Moreover, programs that are currently small or have traditionally been so may not always remain that way. With an increase in incoming freshman students, these programs could see growth in enrollment. While it’s unlikely that Journalism will overtake Agricultural Studies in popularity, it’s difficult to predict which programs might grow and by how much. If the program is eliminated, it also eliminates the possibility of that growth.

The impact of cutting a program may only be felt after the cut has been made. In 2023, UW-Green Bay considered eliminating six majors and minors, which included Environmental Policy, and Theater and Dance, causing an outrage, not just at UW-Green Bay but across the UW System. And it’s difficult to restore a program once it has been done

away with.

Another important aspect, of course, is the emotional impact on students and employees, which is rarely reflected in financial reviews.

We couldn’t find any reason why cutting programs would benefit enrollment, and it seems that the UWRf administration hasn’t found identified one either. Martin admitted that the strategic enrollment plan, which includes the budget cuts implemented thus far, has not had much of an effect on retention: “We haven’t closed the gap much,” he said.

Additionally, cutting programs would harm the campus culture, a vital component of a “thriving institution,” which Maria Gallo advocated for in our interview with her.

While Martin said the increase in enrollment is “a positive sign,” he also acknowledged that “there’s a long way to go.” We agree. One good year of enrollment cannot rectify UWRf’s budget deficit, which has been building for years, if not decades. Is that worth the risk? Maybe to Martin, it is.

“I’m willing to be the person who, if we take some risks and they don’t work, can be blamed for,” he said. “I don’t mind that at all.” This is a disconcerting statement, to say the least.

Martin mentioned a few measures that could be taken. One is the merging of certain administrative and maintenance offices across different UW universities. “Do we need to have a standalone payroll office, a standalone purchasing office [or] standalone vehicle maintenance? The question is, with three institutions 60 miles apart, are there some backroom things we can do that would reduce costs at [all three] places?” he said.

Collaborating with local businesses and institutions represents another promising option. Maria Gallo said, “We had a record breaking fundraising year this past year at 4.1 million. So we have good momentum there. And I think [Martin] will help keep that momentum going because we need those kinds of infusions of one-time money as well as continuous money,” adding “[We need] one-time money to get projects off the ground.”

One of these projects is what Martin called a “summer boot camp” aiming to provide incoming students with a head start in essential areas like math, English and science. “I’m going to see if I can extract a little money from a foundation over in Minnesota that I worked with in another life to beta test a summer boot camp,” Martin said. The boot camp seeks to increase retention by preparing students for their freshman year and preventing them from falling behind.

These are just a few of the ways that the university can address its financial concerns and adapt. If UWRf needs to reinvent itself, it should do so without jeopardizing its foundation. UWRf’s programs and the faculty members are the main reason why all of UWRf’s students, all 5,222 of us, are at this university. Cutting these programs risks not only the institution’s identity but its future.

We urge Michael Martin to not let that happen.

Visit the Student Voice at uwrvoice.com